

Lillian “Lilly” Potter

Speech to Class of 2023 Public Policy M.P.P. graduates

Good afternoon, my name is Lilly Potter and I am graduating from the law school and the master’s in public policy program. I have had the privilege of being in the company of this graduating class for two years. Today, our final day together, I would like to tell you what I most admire about them... and that is that this class embodies three important values; expertise, empathy, and service.

The first value, expertise, is why we are here today. Each member of this class chose to continue their education. Through this program we have gained understanding of leadership, ethics, and economics and we have developed capabilities in quantitative methods, legal analysis, and memorandum drafting. In addition to all this newly gained knowledge, we each came into the program with own expertise in disparate areas to share with one another. Cam has a degree in meteorology. (INSERT joke about either how he made the weather so nice for us today OR how he failed to do so, depending on Saturday’s weather). This wealth of knowledge means that I have had the opportunity to learn so much from my classmates. And I know that the family and friends gathered here today know what I’m talking about, because at some point you have been held hostage at the dinner table by one of these students and made to attentively listen to a personalized TedTalk on the finer points of, like, tax policy.

But if you have listened to my classmates talk about the issues they are passionate about, you may have found yourself not only interested, but also beginning to care...even about tax policy. And that brings me to my second value, empathy, because if you have discussed housing policy with Stephanie, you know how much she cares about the issue, not as an interesting academic exercise but because of the material affects it has on real people. Behind each of our policies areas are people, communities. That fact can get lost sometimes, out in the wider world of power and politics, but not with this group. I know that wherever they end up after graduation, their work will be guided by their enduring empathy. It is the thing I value most about them.

Now, as we prepare to graduate this program and disperse across the country and the world, our values of expertise and empathy will be put into action through the third value, service. That is the heart of public policy. That is what we have dedicated ourselves to. Whether you are Jes, saving the ocean with the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean, or Julia, guiding healthcare policy with McDermott Plus, we will each be entering a career of service to the public. We will weigh ethical choices, balance competing interests, and involve affected communities...just as we have been taught to do over the past two years.

Class of 2023, I am so proud of you and I cherish everything we have shared; classrooms, ideas, meals, jokes, stata do-files, and values. Let us go forth, guided by our shared values of expertise, empathy, and service. Let's go to work.