

Dear Students,

As you saw earlier today, the University just announced that the 2021 Commencement exercises will be held virtually. This is a necessary decision in light of ongoing public health restrictions on large gatherings and travel, and it is in line with Harvard's—and HGSE's—priority to protect health and safety.

I am writing to share with you my commitment and excitement to celebrate those graduating this spring, albeit remotely. Commencement is a highlight for many, as students, faculty, and staff alike look forward to the events as joyful opportunities to recognize the accomplishments of our graduates. This year is no exception. And I am especially overjoyed at the announcement that Dr. Ruth Simmons will give the University address. She is a highly respected and impactful educator who is well-known by the HGSE community, and she will no doubt share an inspiring message in recognition of this important milestone for our graduates.

At HGSE, we are working hard to ensure that Commencement will be the memorable event that the Class of 2021 deserves, inclusive of activities that will both be schoolwide and program specific. I understand that many of us are disappointed that in-person events are not possible this spring, but we also recognize that the remote nature provides us with an opportunity to exploit what technology makes possible, rather than just recreating in-person traditions.

To this end, I want to extend my gratitude to the Commencement Planning Committee, led by Kevin Boehm in the Office of Student Affairs. The committee is prioritizing the inclusion of student voices into conversations surrounding Commencement. In particular, I want to thank the three students who are members of the planning committee for sharing their time and perspectives. Further, to capture as many ideas as possible, we ask students who have thoughts about ways to make the virtual Commencement activities celebratory and engaging to please submit them via [this form](#). While there are already plans underway, we invite your creativity and suggestions to ensure the events reflect the ideas of the community.

This is certainly a unique moment in HGSE's history, and the Class of 2021 will depart HGSE at a time of unprecedented need for students, families, and the schools, organizations, and systems that support them. For this reason, this class will always hold a very special place in the HGSE community. I look forward to a time when it is safe to invite you to campus as members of our alumni community and celebrate your accomplishments in person.

In the meantime, I eagerly anticipate joining together in May to celebrate the many remarkable accomplishments of this year's graduates.

Best,
Bridget

Bridget Long, Ph.D.

Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education
Saris Professor of Education and Economics