
Keynote Address at Galen University Graduation Ceremony

July 13, 2025

Distinguished faculty, proud families and loved ones, honored guests, and most importantly, graduates of the Class of 2025.

Galen University has held a special place in my heart ever since I had the privilege of serving as its founding president, and returning here to celebrate your remarkable achievements fills me with joy and gratitude.

As I reflect on the significance of today, I am reminded of a timeless poem that has always moved me deeply: *Ithaca* by C.P. Cavafy. Its words are inspired by Homer's epic work *Odyssey*, which describes the adventures of King Odysseus, on his quest to return to his island, Ithaca after the Trojan war. The poem of CP Cavafy speaks to the universal experience of life as a journey—full of challenges, growth, discovery, and meaning. In fact, I must confess, I've already given all of you a small "assignment" for today: a copy of *Ithaca* has been shared with each of you. Consider it your final piece of homework from Galen University (don't worry, you won't be graded).

Now, I know what you're all thinking: "Homework? At my graduation?" But I promise, there's a reason for it. This poem holds a message that I hope will resonate with you not just today, but for years to come. It begins:

"As you set out for Ithaca, wish that the road be long, full of adventure, full of knowledge."

This moment—your graduation—is a great milestone. It's a destination you've worked incredibly hard to reach, and it is absolutely worthy of celebration. But while today may feel like an endpoint, what Cavafy's poem teaches us is that it is not the arrival at Ithaca that matters most. It is the richness of the journey that gives meaning to our lives.

Now, let me ask you: how many of you have paused to reflect on the people who made this journey possible for you? No road—no matter how extraordinary—is ever traveled alone.

First, let us recognize your parents, families, and loved ones. They have been your constant supporters, cheering you on through every obstacle and achievement. Their sacrifices and unwavering belief in you have carried you forward. Graduates, let us take a moment to thank them for everything they have done to bring you to this moment.

Let us also acknowledge the friends you've made along the way. These friendships have brought light, support, and joy to your time at Galen. The shared laughter during moments of triumph and the support during times of difficulty will remain some of the highlights of your journey. Treasure these connections—they are lifelong gifts.

And of course, we must express our deep gratitude to Galen University's professors and staff. Your professors were not simply bearers of knowledge; they cultivated your curiosity and challenged you to think critically. They guided you not only to master your disciplines but to grow as individuals. To the faculty who went above and beyond to make your experience at Galen one of discovery and learning, and to all who supported your success here, we thank you.

It is also worth remembering that the power of inspiration doesn't only come from above—sometimes it comes from the people walking right beside us or even those whose names we may not have known when we first met them. Allow me to share a few stories of individuals who remind us that the journey is often just as meaningful as the destination.

Many of you know Mr. Kostas Karanikis, Chairman of Galen University's Board. As a teenager, Kostas left his island home of Cyprus to seek opportunities in England. A brilliant, dyslexic immigrant who faced significant adversity, he went on to build one of Europe's largest scientific equipment companies. Though he didn't have a PhD himself, he developed PCR machines for the amplification of DNA and other technologies that enabled scientists and researchers around the world to push the boundaries of human knowledge. Kostas' story is an inspiring reminder that success is not confined to titles or degrees—it is built on resilience, creativity, and a commitment to making a meaningful impact.

Closer to home, I think of our Provost, Dr. Eve Cynthia Aird. Her story is one of profound determination and compassion, even in the face of personal tragedy and great loss. Despite those challenges, she has remained steadfast in her commitment to her students and to Belize. Through her leadership, she has shown us what it means to push forward with purpose and grace, even through life's darkest moments.

Finally, I want to tell you about Maribel Rendon, whose journey I hold very close to my heart. In 2002, when Galen was still in its infancy, Maribel came into my office at Central Farm seeking a job as a cleaner. She was an immigrant, a single mother, and spoke only Spanish. Yet as we spoke, I recognized in her an extraordinary intelligence, humanity, and determination. We agreed on a plan: She would take English courses, and from there, she pursued studies at Galen. Over time, Maribel rose from being a cleaner to becoming the University's registrar—a transformation that reminds us of what is possible when potential is met with opportunity and hard work.

Why do I share these stories? Because too often, we look for inspiration in distant achievements or grand abstractions. But inspiration is all around you, and sometimes it's sitting right next to you. Graduates, look around this room. There is someone here—a classmate, a professor, a loved one—whose story would humble and inspire you. Seek those stories, and in turn, live your own life as an example for others.

This brings me back to Cavafy's poem. He writes:

“Wish that the road be long. Abounding may the summer mornings be, that with what delight, what joy you shall enter first-seen ports... to many Egyptian cities go, to learn and learn from the wise.”

Here, Cavafy speaks not only of exploration in the external world but also of the profound discoveries within yourself. Life will invite you to stop at many places—to meet new people, to open yourself to new cultures, ideas, and knowledge. Embrace these opportunities. They are not distractions from your goals; they are the essence of the journey.

Of course, the road may not always be easy. There will be moments of uncertainty, disappointment, and adversity. But even there, Cavafy offers us a profound truth. He writes:

“The Laestrygons and the Cyclops, the enraged Poseidon do not fear... such you shall never encounter on your way if your thoughts are set on high.”

No challenge is insurmountable if you do not allow fear and doubt to reside in your heart. The “monsters” we face in life are often born from within—from our own hesitations, insecurities, and self-doubt. Learn to recognize and confront those inner storms. Let your thoughts remain “set on high,” guided by integrity, courage, and resilience. The obstacles will diminish in the light of your own growth.

As you journey forward, keep Ithaca in your heart, but do not rush to arrive. Cavafy advises:

“Better that many years it lasts and reach the island an old man, rich with what you gained on the way, expecting no riches from Ithaca.”

This is perhaps the poem’s most enduring lesson. Ithaca is not about material wealth, accolades, or even the “arrival.” When you finally reach your goals—whether it comes in the form of a career, a personal aspiration, or a lifelong dream—you will realize that Ithaca has already given you its greatest gift: the journey itself.

Looking out at you today—the graduates of 2025—I cannot help but feel hopeful. The world you step into is a world that needs your energy, your creativity, your compassion, and your perseverance. Wherever your personal Ithaca may take you, approach the road ahead with curiosity, patience, and an open heart. Seek adventure, embrace learning, and never underestimate the value of small, meaningful experiences along life’s path.

In the end, even if you find Ithaca “poor,” as Cavafy suggests, it will not matter. The true measure of a meaningful life lies not in the treasures waiting at the destination but in the wisdom, experiences, and connections you have gained while journeying toward it. This is the gift of Ithaca, one that will stay with you long after today’s celebrations.

As a final thought, I invite you to cherish today—not only for its importance as an academic milestone but as a moment in this grander journey of yours. Take pride in how far you’ve come and look forward, with hope, to the adventures yet to come.

Congratulations, Class of 2025! And don't forget to read your copy of *Ithaca*—I hope it becomes the most meaningful piece of homework you've ever received. Your Ithacas await you.

Thank you.
