Congratulations to all GSLIS students who are graduating today, and to the parents, partners and friends who have sustained you through this program.

The world will be a better place for your efforts, because you will bring better information to bear on the problems around you, and you will help others to find and use the information that they need in order to accomplish their goals, as well.

We are all deeply impressed with the passion and the commitment that you bring to this profession, and we prize the intellectual commitment and the life experience that you contribute to our program. We are honored to be associated with you.

Congratulations to all of you, both here in the auditorium and online. So, please give yourselves and your parents, partners and friends a round of applause.

Last year at this podium Dean Unsworth observed that after a graduation ceremony, no one has ever wished for longer remarks from the Dean. I’ve been taking John’s advice to heart this spring and I’m going to follow his example in this regard as well.

Nevertheless…

I do want to briefly pause to recall just what it is that we are now all part of.

The University of Illinois has had a library school since 1897 – 115 years. Our School was the first of its kind in the Midwest and one of only four units on campus that survive intact from the 19th century. We began granting graduate degrees in 1926 and our Ph.D. program, established in 1948, is one of the oldest of its kind in the country. Today, as you know, GSLIS is ranked #1 nationally, and is the only #1-ranked School or College on the three campuses of the University of Illinois.

Along the way we have had many firsts:

For instance, we taught the first course on information retrieval on this campus, in 1962 – seven years before the University even had a Computer Science department.

And LEEP, started in 1996, was the University of Illinois’s very first online program – and today the University looks to us for leadership and advice as it begins to explore other online programs.
The excellence of GSLIS and your experience here is the work of a community, and the product of a culture, that has the highest standards of service, the most intense interest in ideas, and the very best people on this campus. The staff at GSLIS, from the front office to the helpdesk, to the wonderful assistant and associate deans that keep the School on its course during various storms, all deserve our thanks; they make GSLIS the most student-friendly place in this University.

And, of course, the faculty; Adjunct, emeritus, affiliated, and tenure-system faculty have taught you topics as varied as database design and storytelling, children’s literature and telecommunications policy, music librarianship and science librarianship, library buildings and computer games, data curation and the history of the book, cataloging and computer networking, and on and on… so much to learn, and so little time in which to learn it – and no, you can’t stay another semester, we love you, but you have new and different things to do.

I now invite you to applaud all the staff and faculty who helped you learn what it means to provide service to others and to be part of the information profession.

This is a great degree that you will be taking out to the job market, but an ongoing responsibility for the faculty and administrators up here on stage. The needs and expectations of both students and employers are constantly evolving: our program needs to meet them. In this last eight years, under John Unsworth’s leadership, we’ve added a specialization in data curation, a certificate in community informatics, a certificate in special collections, a CAS concentration in digital libraries and enhanced offerings in K-12 and public library youth services, and a certified public library administrator program offered in cooperation with the American Library Association.

All of these programs connect the interests of the students to the needs of employers, and that’s important to the continued success of GSLIS graduates. However, in order for GSLIS to survive in the changing landscape of public higher education, and in order for us to produce the information professionals who will be required by and increasingly diverse and global society, we know that GSLIS must continue to grow and change. And how we change, and in what direction, will depend in part on what you tell us about your experiences in the workplace. We need to hear from you. You need to stay close to us.

So, while you have compiled the credits, completed the requirements, and finished the degree, you are only at the beginning of a lifelong association with GSLIS and your fellow alumni – and
there are over 7500 of you now. You should never underestimate the reach, the power, or the significance of that affiliation. And please talk to us about how to find a network of GSLIS alumni in that new city you’re moving to, or how to connect with alumni that may be hiring, or how to do a little continuing education, a few years down the line.

For our part, we will never underestimate the importance of the work you do in the career you carve out, and all that you add to the reputation of this program – and we will never underestimate what we can learn, through you, about how to evolve a 21st century education in Library and Information Science.

So go on out there now, do great things, and make us proud. But please, stay in tough, and help us continue to shape the School.

Thank you, and I look forward to hearing great things about you in the months and years to come.