

## **HDFS May 2015 Commencement Speech**

### **Shamika Kayo Robinson**

Good morning! It is truly an honor to be standing before you on behalf of the May 2015 graduating class. I commend each graduate for making it to where you are right now. For many of us, those countless hours of studying and completing assignments in the Jackson Library was well worth it.

It has been a privilege to be a part of such a renowned HDFS Department and university which has made a tremendous impact on our lives. We have gained irreplaceable knowledge here at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, which we will carry with us and continue to build on for the remainder of our lives and careers.

Our various backgrounds, circumstances, and experiences have shaped our lives and led us to where we are and who we are today. As we've learned through the Life Course Perspective, our lives have become linked here—in HDFS at UNCG. Although we each come from unique backgrounds, the crossing of our paths during this moment in time will forever connect us and has the potential to change us in ways that we probably have yet to fully understand. Growing up, I had the privilege of experiencing two unique and rich cultures due to the fact that my father is African American, and my mother is Japanese. I spent most of my childhood living in Okinawa, Japan with my mother. However, when I was 15 years old, I moved to live with my grandparents on my father's side, here in North Carolina.

Adjusting to life without my mother, a different schooling system, and a different culture, was extremely challenging. In addition, like many who are graduating today, I am a first generation college student who comes from a hard working family that is rich in love but has faced many financial setbacks and challenges. Others--including myself--doubted my ability to pursue higher education and earn a degree. Regardless of our backgrounds, each one of us has moments where we underestimate ourselves and our abilities. There were countless times that I wanted to simply walk away or quit. However, through the support and encouragement I received from faculty members, my family, and friends, I stand here having accomplished what I believed was the impossible.

As Human Development scholars, we have learned the importance of human relationships and interaction and we've read the studies that show the benefits of strong social ties. I remember watching a television show in which a cardiovascular surgeon was making sure that his patient had a support network of people in his life, prior to undergoing surgery. Because the surgeon was aware of the impact of supportive close relationships on physical health, he knew that the patient's post-surgery recovery and health would have more than likely declined without social support. Our relationships have the power to heal. We are interdependent; we are linked; we are not meant to be alone.

Therefore, as we continue to build personal and professional relationships with others, remember to value and nurture each connection. Cherish those around you and love your neighbors, as every path crossed is significant and presents an opportunity for connection, growth, and healing.

We must also rise up as committed young leaders in the field of Human Development and Family Studies to find ways to offer support and voice for those in need. We can do this as young professionals who invest in the lives of those around us--with a strong focus on caring for others who have been marginalized with love and integrity. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." We CAN create change by listening, empowering, representing, and serving forgotten communities, making sure they are no longer overlooked or forgotten. I believe that our commitment to do so will be a fulfillment of our dream and mission as future leaders.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase." As you reflect on your journey, I hope you see how your faith has brought you to be where you are right now. My hope is that we all will continue to have faith and to take the next step even when we don't see the whole staircase. As we graduate and embark on our next journey, I am honored to wish each of you the best in your endeavors. Congratulations to you all, and I hope that our paths will cross again in the future. Thank you!