

Good morning, American University School of Communication Class of 2028. My name is Emma Daffner, and I am honored to serve as your commencement speaker today.

When I think about graduation, I don't think about having everything figured out. I think about the quiet moments — refreshing my email, checking LinkedIn, wondering if I'm the only one without a perfect plan. Because this moment, the one we've been working toward for years, is exciting. It's meaningful. But it's also ... a little terrifying.

We've spent our time here at American University learning how to communicate, tell stories, build brands and shape narratives. But no one tells you how to write the next chapter. In moments like this, I find myself thinking about something my favorite fictional character, Aelin Ashryver Galathynius, once said: "Let's go rattle the stars."

It feels bold, confident and fearless. But the more I reflect, the more I realize that rattling the stars doesn't mean you're not afraid. It simply means you choose to take the next step anyway.

The truth is, not all of us are walking across this stage with the same plans. Some of us have jobs waiting. Others have internships that could grow into something more. Some are headed back home, starting fresh and figuring things out one day at a time. That kind of uncertainty can feel overwhelming — I know it is for me.

There have been moments when I've felt behind — like everyone else has a clearer path, a better plan and a more certain future. There have been moments when I've questioned whether I was doing enough or already falling short before I even started. But somewhere along the way, I realized the people who look like they have it all figured out are still guessing, too. The difference is that they're choosing to take the next step anyway.

Maybe that's what this moment is really about: not having a perfect plan or every answer, but having the courage to move forward without them. As students in the School of Communication, we've spent years learning how powerful stories can be. But now, we're stepping into a different role. We're not just telling stories anymore — we're living them. Our stories might not look the way we expected. They might be messy, slow and uncertain. But that doesn't make them any less meaningful.

So, to the Class of 2028 — whether you feel ready or not, whether your path is clear or completely unknown — I want you to remember this:

You don't have to have everything figured out to do something incredible. You just have to be willing to begin. Willing to take the opportunity. Willing to send that job application. Willing to try, even when it would be easier not to. That's what it means to rattle the stars. Not perfection. Not certainty. But courage.

As we leave this place and step into whatever comes next, let's not wait until we feel completely ready — because we may be waiting forever. Let's trust what we've learned, trust who we've become and, most importantly, trust that we are capable of more than we think.

So, here's to the unknown. Here's to the risks we'll take and the paths we'll forge. Finally, here's to us — ready or not.

Let's go rattle the stars.