

“All the evils that people cause in the name of desire, or opinion, or religious principle, are rooted in ignorance.”

Maimonides, the medieval Sephardic philosopher who wrote these words, attributed all the problems of the world to a lack of knowledge. This knowledge includes the knowledge of God, but also self-knowledge and empathy, an understanding of our own motivations and desires and those of the people who surround us. It is both the knowledge of those who are like us, who agree with us, who live the way we do, and of those who are different from us, who disagree with us, those who live differently than we do.

Maimonides's worldview was shaped by his upbringing in the city of Cordoba, a flourishing center of thought and learning where Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived together. That peaceful co-existence ended as the Almohad Dynasty, and then the Kingdom of Castille successively sought to dominate Spain, and to banish from it anyone whose views were different than their own.

Like Maimonides, you have been shaped in a diverse community of learning and exchange. You have spent the past four (or in some cases five) years immersing yourself in the accumulated knowledge of the world, and in the collective experiences of SMU's multifaceted population. You have shared with and learned from your professors and your classmates. You have studied sciences, professions, cultures, and languages, and you have spent time abroad immersed in other ways of thinking and being.

Maimonides had to flee Cordoba, travelling to Morocco, and finally to Egypt. He never stopped thinking, writing philosophical and religious works continuously until his death.

Like Maimonides, you are about to leave your intellectual community of origin. On behalf of the faculty, who have had the privilege to teach you and learn with you, I congratulate you on what you have accomplished. I hope that, like Maimonides, you take with you and transmit the knowledge and experiences you have gained at SMU. Perhaps more importantly, I hope that you continue to learn as you travel, both from the world and from those you encounter. As Maimonides wrote, the evils of the world are rooted in ignorance. I hope that as you fulfill your destiny as Mustangs, you continue to combat ignorance, to cultivate knowledge, and to change the world!