

**Speech delivered at Opening Convocation by Faculty Senate President Thiele  
August 23, 2020**

Dear Class of 2024,

On behalf of the entire faculty of Southern Methodist University, welcome! We are thrilled that you are joining us for this amazing, and also this year very unusual, experience. We know, from observing the classes that came before yours, that you will make long-lasting friendships and take life-changing courses. But the coronavirus also makes this a unique class, hopefully the only class that enters college before a vaccine for COVID-19 is found.

Please know that the faculty's commitment to delivering a superb academic experience to all of you in these complicated times is absolute, whether you are starting college remotely or on campus, whether we faculty teach remotely or on campus.

Neither you nor we would have chosen to live our lives in the middle of a pandemic. Yet I can't help but see a parallel with World War II, when young American soldiers, who most definitely would have preferred peace to war, discovered what they were really capable of because of crucible experiences they wouldn't otherwise have had.

We faculty hope that being in college at SMU during the coronavirus pandemic will make your friendships more vivid, your courses more resonant, and most importantly, will open your eyes to what you are truly capable of in the presence of adversity, such as putting the greater good of the community first even when it is difficult, awkward or inconvenient. We know it is a big ask, but we also know you can do it. You are Mustangs now. Welcome to the family.

--Aurélie Thiele