

## Graduate Hooding Ceremony

May 25, 2026

Thank you, Dean Priestley! Good afternoon, everyone! I am delighted to join the celebration of the completion of your graduate studies at Princeton University.

Over the past year, American higher education has faced real and visible challenges—especially in research and scholarship. At moments like this, I find it clarifying to go back to first principles. In this case, to a document written more than 80 years ago: Vannevar Bush's *Science, the Endless Frontier*, published as the United States emerged from the devastation of World War II.

In his report, Bush makes the case for sustained federal investment in academic research. While he focuses on science and technology, the message is far broader, and it applies to the many disciplines represented at universities like Princeton. What strikes me, reading Bush's words today, is how central *graduate education* is to his vision. He describes not a single policy or program, but a system—a virtuous cycle with four reinforcing parts.

- Federal funding enabled open research at universities.
- That open inquiry attracted extraordinary talent from around the world.
- Universities trained that talent—through an apprenticeship model—into independent thinkers who then entered the workforce.
- And their discoveries, in turn, fueled prosperity, national security, and the next generation of research investment.

The strength of the system, Bush understood, depends on every link in that chain.

The graduates who are assembled here today are the living proof of that vision. You represent exceptional global talent—scholars who brought your curiosity, perspectives, and creativity to Princeton from across the country and around the world. (I know that first hand, as today I'll be hooding three fantastic PhD graduates from my research group, hailing as they do from China, India, and the U.S.) And you worked side by side with remarkable faculty, postdocs, and other graduate students—mentors who challenged you, supported you, and helped you grow from students into the independent creators of knowledge we celebrate today.

Through that partnership, you mastered demanding disciplines. You pushed at the boundaries of what we know. You honed your ability to communicate complex ideas, whether to students, to peers, to policymakers, or to the leading researchers in your fields. And you prepared yourselves for the next phase of your professional lives—as researchers, teachers, innovators,

leaders, and citizens. We are immensely proud of what you have accomplished here. And we are excited—not just hopeful, but confident—about what you will contribute next.

Yet, Vannevar Bush also understood something else—something that feels especially relevant today. While the system he described is powerful, it is not self-sustaining. Indeed, it is fragile. It depends on shared commitments: to openness, to rigor, to integrity, and to respect for knowledge and expertise.

When any one link in the system weakens—when support for open inquiry recedes, or when talent is discouraged or even excluded—the system is at risk. That is why graduate education—and the choices made by those who pass through it—matter so much. You are not just beneficiaries of the system. You are its stewards, too.

As you leave Princeton, you will work in many settings: universities, industry, government, nonprofits, here in the U.S. and around the world. Some of you will shape new fields of inquiry; others will apply knowledge in ways that touch millions of lives. Leave here knowing that you carry forward more than your depth of expertise in your field. You carry important norms: how to learn deeply, how to weigh evidence and evaluate ideas, how to have meaningful dialogue across difference, how to pursue truth and understanding—even when it is contested or incomplete.

You also carry stories—authentic, personal stories—about the transformative impact of higher education and pursuing advanced degrees. I hope you share these stories with your families, friends, co-workers, and beyond. Sharing your story can change people's minds, and counter misunderstandings about what Universities do and why it matters.

Vannevar Bush called it an “endless frontier.” Not because progress is automatic, let alone inevitable. Rather, each generation must choose, again and again, to renew the commitments that sustain discovery and to carry the enterprise forward.

Please let me extend my heartfelt congratulations to all of you, and my very best wishes for the journey that lies before you. And do stay in touch, so we can follow with great pride how your stories unfold in the years ahead. Congratulations!!