

**UT Austin School of Nursing Convocation 2026**

**Words of Wisdom by Tiffany Haney, MSN, APRN, AGACNP-BC, FNP-BC**

My fellow graduates, esteemed faculty, and to our family and friends; allow me to share a few words of wisdom with you as we embark on our commencement. If you will, indulge me with a little backstory about myself. In 2017 when I graduated with my MSN, I celebrated like most people do, by going on vacation. Throughout my trip, the resort I was staying at kept playing the song “Life is a Highway” to where at the end of the trip I could sing that song word for word. It became an annoying earworm. Once you heard it, it stuck in your head all day.

Fast forward to Fall 2024, when I was accepted to the Doctor of Nursing Practice program here at UT. I would end up driving down once a month from Dallas to have my intensives for classes. Even on occasion driving down, this song would play and I would chuckle and tell my family, “guess what song came on?” If we really think about it, this song has strong parallels to nursing and our journeys. We are all traveling on this road and for many of us we are just starting out and trying to reach another destination. Some of us are even lucky enough to be reaching our final educational destination. (Unless you are like me and collect college degrees like infinity stones. I promise mom this is the last one....\*mutters\*for now). Some of you/us may be wondering why I would want to drive all the way from Dallas every month to attend UT. The truth of the matter is; I have always wanted to be a Longhorn. The traditions and academic excellence here at the University of Texas at Austin are renowned. As the motto goes, “What starts here changes the world.” The knowledge and skills we acquired here throughout our programs will have that impact. And who better to change the world than nurses?

For some of us, this is just the first stop in our nursing journey. We may be getting ready to begin caring for patients at the bedside as an RN or as an APRN getting ready to take care and manage our patients’ health conditions. Some of us may be getting ready to start and



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implement your own research or begin taking on a new role as educators. Some of us might even be taking on new roles in leadership. Remember, it is always ok to stop and ask for directions whenever you feel like you might not be going in the right direction or feel lost.

Starting out as a brand-new nurse working in the Emergency Department, I was shy and I even questioned whether or not I should be working there and if I had made a bad/wrong decision. That being said; with time, experience and personal motivation, I found my nursing voice and developed the skills and confidence that my education had provided the foundation for. I went from a shy, inexperienced ER nurse to one day realizing that many of the patients I was seeing needed a primary care provider; and to becoming a family nurse practitioner taking care of and managing my own patients (and subsequently trying to keep them from needing to visit my old job). In addition, to having the confidence to speak up to advocate not only for my patients but also for my profession.

Even Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "It's not the destination, but the journey." However, sometimes our journeys are not a straight and simple path. Often, we run into obstacles on our journey. Nursing was not a first career choice for me, but I'm so glad I found myself on this highway, so to speak. Some of us might have to take unexpected detours, like health issues, family issues, or even just life. While this may seem like a setback or even failure; realize it's not. It is ok. Sometimes, having to take the time to pull over and rest is what is needed in order to better care for ourselves and our patients. (All cars need maintenance and time to recharge/refuel in order to run smoothly). Additionally, it is these life experiences that can have a profound impact on our profession and drive us to be voices for those who cannot speak for themselves or even to help educate our future colleagues.

Nursing, as some of us know, is also a challenging profession. Like the lyrics say "There's no load I can't hold; A road so rough, this I know. I'll be there when the light comes in just tell 'em we're survivors." Sometimes we can get slowed down and stuck in traffic and feel like we aren't going anywhere at all. (You know, kind of like trying to drive somewhere on I-35) We may become frustrated or even question if we are in the right profession. These challenges are not meant to weed us out, but rather to show us that in this profession it is important to remember to always be humble, respectful, and realize that we will always be learning even after we get the degree.

Sometimes we may even have to get off the main highway or take a wrong turn or end up on a scenic backroad route we didn't even think of taking or even knew existed. That is the beauty of this profession. We have so many roads to choose from; so choose the one that brings you peace and fulfillment and know that there is no wrong path; but there is always a purpose in nursing.

Of course, no road trip journey would be complete without fellow passengers to share the journey with, and snacks! Gotta have the snacks! Having the support of our friends and family makes the ride more enjoyable and memorable. It is especially true for our fellow classmates that have been riding with us since the start. Friends and family are like the passenger DJs that provide the music for the trip. Always upbeat and providing us with the motivation to continue our journey even when we feel like there is no end in sight. Our amazing nursing faculty here at

UT have had a major impact on our lives and education. Their support and dedication to this profession have been truly engaging and motivating; like a GPS navigator to help us find our way. Therefore I would like to take this time to acknowledge our family, friends, and our UT faculty; thank you for being a part of this journey with us. We could not have done it without your support!

So graduates, take a moment: close your eyes and realize that we have reached this part of our journey. We really have made it! It is not a dream, it is real! And...wherever you are on the highway of your own journey; be proud to be a nurse and be even more proud to be a Longhorn nurse. Congratulations and as always Hook'em Horns!