

Senior White House adviser encourages law grads to be responsible leaders

By ERICA HOBBS (/USERS/PROFILE/?UID=153)

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Passion, resilience, character and courage.

Those were the four traits Senior Presidential Adviser **Valerie Jarrett** told University of Michigan Law School (<http://www.law.umich.edu/Pages/default.aspx>) graduates they need to be responsible leaders during their commencement Saturday.

Coming exactly one week after **President Barack Obama** spoke (http://www.annarbor.com/cgi-bin/mt/mt-search.cgi?blog_id=1&tag=ObamaA2&limit=20) at the general U-M spring commencement, Jarrett shared her own journey to the White House as the ceremony's keynote speaker.

"If you're wondering why the University of Michigan has gotten so much attention, it's because we have alums throughout our administration," she said. "Go Blue."

Jarrett, who graduated from U-M's law school in 1981, said her path to success wasn't easy and wasn't always what she had planned.

After spending six years at a Chicago law firm where she thought she'd end up long term — six years that included marriage, a baby and a divorce — Jarrett said she found herself looking out her window and crying.

"What I was doing is what I thought I should do," she said. "But not what was fulfilling."

Soon after, Jarrett decided to go into public service, working as an administrator in the mayor's office — a move, she said, that required a huge leap of faith.

"For the very first moment, I felt like that was where I belonged," she said.

Jarrett encouraged graduates to seek out work they loved but to stay flexible and embrace change. She said it was important to resist complacency in the law and to always keep a strong moral compass, no matter how strong the opposition is.

She said the higher up in leadership you go, the more adversaries you will face. But, she said, that is when a strong sense of character, resiliency and courage are most important.

"Government roles are not for the faint of heart," she said. "Transformative change is very hard, but please don't settle for anything else."



Friends and family take photos as University of Michigan



Valerie Jarrett speaks at Hill Auditorium on Saturday.

Melanie Maxwell | AnnArbor.com

Many of the new law grads left commencement feeling inspired, they said.

"It's nice to see someone who has accomplished so much take time to come back and speak with us," Rodney Tolentino said. "Just to see two members of the executive branch speak with us, it was great."

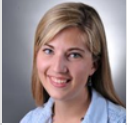
Raphaelle Monty also enjoyed the keynote speech and said she liked Jarrett's advice to pursue what you love. She said she liked how the speech was focused on the law grads, while Obama's speech had been geared toward a more general civic duty.

"It's always great to hear what alums have to say," she said. "And it's always

law graduates march down the aisle at Hill Auditorium on
Saturday afternoon

great to see alums in high places.”

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