Aloha mai kākou,

A wise *mana wahine* once told me, *“He auamo kākou, we all carry something. Just because someone carries it well doesn’t mean it isn’t kaumaha.”* And that truth stayed with me. These past few years, life really showed me that…*life is lifing.* I said goodbye to my childhood home, moved to Hawai‘i Island for work, and faced uncertainty. At times, I was trying to keep it all together, balancing *kuleana* that didn’t pause just because I chose to pursue an education.

But through it all, this Hawaiian Studies degree became more than just a goal. It became my reminder. My reason to keep pushing. My way of showing my *keiki* when you start something, you see it through, even if it takes 13 years to complete. When I first started this journey, I didn’t look like the “typical” college student. And I know I’m not alone. Many of us come here carrying responsibilities beyond the classroom. We’re working, raising families, supporting our loved ones, and navigating life as it comes.

Our classrooms weren’t always quiet or perfect. Sometimes they were kitchen tables, break rooms, parked cars, or late nights when everyone else was asleep. And still we showed up.

There were moments when the weight felt *kaumaha*. Moments when we questioned ourselves. Wondered if we belonged, or if we could keep going.

But that’s how this year’s *‘ōlelo no‘eau* grounds us: *Lawe i ka ma‘alea a kū‘ono‘ono.* Take wisdom and make it deep. Because wisdom doesn’t just come all at once. It builds. Slowly. Quietly – in the moments no one sees – celebrating small wins, finishing finals, and lifting each other up.

Over time, that *‘ike* moves from our minds to our *na‘au*. It becomes who we are. As students rooted in *‘ike Hawai‘i*, we understand that education isn’t just something we earn, it’s something we live. *E ulu nō ka lālā i ke kumu.* We grow because of our foundations, our *‘ohana*, our *kūpuna*, and our communities.

To my *makua*, *mahalo* for your sacrifices, for your unconditional love, and for always believing in me, even when I struggled to believe in myself.

To my better half, Tray, your resilience carries me through some of my darkest moments. You remind me what strength looks like. You and our *keiki* are my driving force. Everything I've done, I've done with you in my heart.

And to my *keiki*, Ty and Reif, this is for you. So you can see that even when life gets hard, even when the road is heavy, we don't quit. We keep going.

E nā mau hoapapa, we all came here on different paths, but we stand together. We pushed through. We carried our *auamo*, even when it was heavy, and we made it.

We didn't just gain knowledge, we became stronger and more grounded in who we are and where we come from. As we move forward, we carry that *ʻike* with us, not just as graduates, but as leaders in our families, our communities, and our *lāhui*.

So let us remember:

Lawe i ka maʻalea a kūʻonoʻono.
Take wisdom. Make it deep.
Let it live within us. Let it guide us. Let it continue to grow.

Mahalo a hoʻomaikaʻi i ka papa iwakāluakūmāono iesu pu.