

April 23, 2020

Dear graduates of the College of Life Sciences:

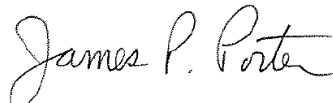
I dated this letter to coincide with the day we would have had our college convocation if it weren't for the cancellation due to the COVID-19 outbreak. At the convocation ceremony we would have happily watched as all 1,000, or so, of you filed into the Marriott Center during the processional. We would have enjoyed together the talks given by two of your peers and listened to the musical number. Then, we would have called your names out, one by one, and watched as you walked across the stand and received your diploma from your department chair. Finally, I would have given a brief message before we watched you file up and out of the building. None of that will happen this year. But, we have assembled a packet to send to you that will include the printed program with your name in it, and a small gift to congratulate you on your accomplishment.

Before I came to Brigham Young University as a faculty member 22 years ago, I worked at the University of Louisville in Kentucky for 13 years. The University of Louisville Dental School accepts a lot of BYU graduates into their program. Many of the dental students who moved into our ward expected to be in Kentucky only for the four years of dental school and then they would go back home. I noticed that the families that were the least happy in Louisville were the ones that were focusing on getting back home. There is a scripture in the Doctrine and Covenants that I found to be very helpful in counseling with these families. In early 1831, many of the saints were gathering to Ohio from the eastern states. Joseph Smith inquired of the Lord for guidance as to where to put these people. In Section 51:16–17, he received instruction for Bishop Edward Partridge about settling them in Ohio. And it included these great words, “And I consecrate unto them this land for a little season, until I, the Lord, shall provide for them otherwise, and command them to go hence; And the hour and the day is not given unto them, wherefore let them act upon this land as for years, and this shall turn unto them for their good.” The saints were counseled to live as if they were going to be in Ohio for years even though their time there might be short. As you leave here today, wherever you go, have the mindset that you will be there long-term. Get to know the area and the people and the culture. Enjoy every day and love your surroundings.

Also, make time to serve others. You may never know the positive impact of your service. We called one dental student to serve as the Young Men's President in Louisville. Though he was busy with school and family responsibilities, he faithfully served in this calling. At the time, we had a sixteen-year-old son who wasn't sure about plans for a mission. Over time, we saw this dental student's efforts affect the testimony and attitude of our son. By the time he was old enough to go on a mission, he wanted to go. This busy dental student who took the time to serve others was able to accomplish something that we, as parents, could not accomplish on our own. His service made such a difference to us and our son. Your service will have a similar impact.

We wish you all the best as you commence the next part of your life. We hope your education and experience at BYU will serve you well. May God bless you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James P. Porter".

James P. Porter, Ph.D.
Professor and Dean