

Ajay Banga

President, World Bank Group

Ajay Banga To Graduates: Seize Luck, Chase Curiosity, and Lead with Decency

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Success is not a straight path paved by hard work alone; it's shaped by the unexpected, driven by purpose, and sustained by character.

That is the message Ajaypal Banga, president of the World Bank Group, shared with 975 graduate business students during his commencement address to the Georgetown University McDonough School of Business Class of 2025.

Banga understands the essential ingredients to a successful career. He has championed corporate initiatives to advance financial inclusion at the head of companies such as Mastercard and Citigroup, he has advocated for ethical and responsible business practices in the public and private sectors, and he has implemented strategies to improve economic conditions worldwide. As a result, he's received the highest accolades and recognition within his profession.

But while he acknowledged the hard work that brought him to this moment, he admits that ambition is only half the story.

"The next chapter of your life will be shaped, in large part, by luck," said Banga. "It's about being who you are, where you are, when you are. You can't plan it. You can't control it. But it's real"



Change is Where Luck Lives

Banga shared the personal moments of luck that shaped the trajectory of his career – when he met his wife in business class and the subsequent opportunities that took them across cities and countries, ultimately leading to his current role at the World Bank Group. “I didn’t see any of it coming,” he shared. “But that is the other side of luck: the willingness to pursue it.”

“Strict adherence to a meticulous plan deprives your career – and your life – of the opportunity to seize and pursue luck,” he told the graduates. “Don’t spend your time plotting your career as a series of steps on a ladder. Take the plunge.”

Finding the Courage to Commit – and Be Open to Change

And when the opportunities present themselves, Banga encouraged the Class of 2025 to have the courage to trust themselves and take action, even when the moment carries risk.

“You’ll be pulled in every direction – by expectations, by options, by the temptation to keep those options open,” shared Banga.

Staying open to change is a trait he said he values deeply in leadership. He told the Class of 2025 to approach every situation – and person – as if they have something to teach you.

“[Curiosity] is what makes you want to learn from people who don’t look like you, don’t sound like you, don’t agree with you,” he said. “It’s what pushes you to ask questions when everyone else is nodding along.”

The Decency Quotient

True to the Jesuit character of the graduating class in front of him, Banga’s final message to the graduates was to be curious, but also purposeful, in their professional pursuits.

“Decency brings everything else together,” said Banga. “It’s about being a hand on someone’s back, pushing them forward – not the hand in their face, holding them back.”



“If you do that – if you hold onto these values – I have no doubt you’ll make your mark.”

In addition to delivering the McDonough School of Business commencement address, Georgetown University Interim President Robert Groves awarded him an honorary doctorate at the ceremony.

Honoring the Class of 2025

For the Class of 2025, commencement is the culmination of their time at Georgetown and a celebration of how far they have come. Graduates from the Full-time and Flex MBA, Executive MBA programs in D.C. and Dubai, M.S. in Management, M.S. in Business Analytics, M.S. in Finance, M.S. in Global Real Assets, and M.A. in International Business and Policy programs all came together to reflect on their academic achievements and look ahead to the next chapter of their lives beyond the Hilltop. The M.S. in Environment and Sustainability Management program also celebrated their commencement exercises with the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.



To Askari Rushing (MBA'25), a [Full-time MBA](#) student at Georgetown McDonough, the commencement ceremony served as a joyous, yet bittersweet conclusion to his Georgetown journey. He appreciated Banga's call to be a principled leader, specifically his remarks about the decency quotient.

"It's important to think about leadership from so many different angles," Rushing said. "As we go out into the world, we now are representing the Georgetown name in future jobs we have and future people we interact with."

For the graduates of the [Executive MBA in Dubai](#) program, this is a personal accomplishment as well as a milestone for the program. The inaugural class

traveled across the globe to celebrate the completion of their EMBA degree in Washington, D.C.

“The [Executive MBA in Dubai] program has broadened my thinking and sharpened my ability to lead through complexity and uncertainty,” said Kristina Luck (B’97, EMBA’25). “Most of all, *cura personalis* has stuck with me — it’s a reminder to lead with empathy and stay grounded in what truly matters: people.”

Watch the [video recording](#) of the ceremony.

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