



President's Statement on *the Fourth of July*

Good morning/afternoon/evening, NAGPS, wherever you are in the world today,

I hope that this letter finds everyone safe and well. Each of the last six months, I've sent you a letter, updating you on the status of the Association, keeping you abreast of events, openings for Board positions, updates on finances, and ongoing Association projects. These letters have served the purpose of promoting greater transparency between you, the membership, and the Board of Directors and Regional Boards. These letters, from what I've seen, have been well-received and are an important part of our continued commitment to serving the membership and promoting the cause of graduate and professional student education.

This letter will not be the same.

Today is the Fourth of July. Independence Day. The day that we commemorate the foundation of America and celebrate American ideals. This day is normally a day of celebration, of fond remembrance, of family and friends, of cookouts and fireworks. Today is not normal. This year is not normal.

We are removed from our friends and families, isolated. There are no planned fireworks, although I'm sure many of us have had our fair share of impromptu launches over the last few weeks. Instead of celebrating outside and soaking up the sun, most of us are likely going to be sitting at home.

America right now is going through what we historians call "a moment." COVID-19 has changed our way of life and continues to do so. Renewed spikes in cases have shut down many cities and states, only recently reopened. Social and cultural protests over inequality and racism frame our daily lives as we continue to grapple with our current problems in the shadow of our past failures. The moment we are living in is historic. The problem with living through history, is that we rarely, if ever, know the end of the story.

What then do we celebrate this year?

Like many of you, I've seen the calls on social media that we do not celebrate the Fourth of July this year: The country is in crisis and there's nothing for us to celebrate in America today. While I agree that we are in a moment where it is easy for us to feel distraught, I'd like to suggest an alternative.

I mentioned this in previous letters so I apologize for repeating myself - something those close to me are all-to-familiar with - but this year has presented many challenges, most of them unforeseen and unprecedented. In the parlance of our national pastime, some would say that this year has thrown us a curveball. Personally, it feels more like the pitcher is throwing deliberately at our heads. If you'll allow me to stretch the metaphor a bit further, rather than charge the mound, you've all collectively stood up, dusted yourselves off, and taken your well-deserved base.

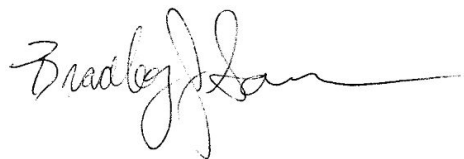
The ability to react well to challenges is admirable. The ability to react to multiple challenges at once demonstrates a grace, intellect, and composure that deserves the highest praise and commendation. All of you have demonstrated these traits, and in abundance no less. While I understand the frustration over the way the world is turning, a frustration that I, too, share, if you are inclined to celebrate anything on this Fourth of July I would suggest that you take the time to celebrate yourselves.

You have all done tremendous things this year, accomplished deeds that few before you would have dared, and they are worth celebrating. The simple act of being has taken on new meaning in this moment, and in this moment you have continued to serve as exemplars in your communities. Your strength, perseverance, and elegance are commendable, deserving of the highest praise, and therefore worth celebrating. You, all of you, each and every one of you and all of you together, deserve celebrating.

Whether you observe the holiday or not is your choice. And neither choice is wrong. But if you are looking for a reason to celebrate, you have given yourself the best one possible. Regardless of your choice, please exercise the proper and appropriate safety procedures. Please wear a mask. Please wash your hands. Please socially distance.

You've done a lot this year worth celebrating. Even if you choose not to, I celebrate you all.

You are the Association. We are NAGPS.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bradley J. Sommer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Bradley J. Sommer

President & CEO

National Association of Graduate-Professional Students (NAGPS)