

**2024 Pi Gamma Mu Centennial International Convention—Celebrating our Past, Present,
and Future!**

President's State of the Organization Address by Katherine Im, Ph.D.

Dr. Katherine Im, President of Pi Gamma Mu, delivered the following speech during the Opening Session of Pi Gamma Mu's Centennial International Convention, on November 1st, 2024 in the Symphony/ Overture Ballroom of the Double Tree Center City, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Esteemed faculty, colleagues, and perhaps most importantly, students! Welcome, Pi Gamma Mu! Welcome to Philadelphia, and welcome to our Centennial Celebration!

My name is Kathy Im and I am the current president of Pi Gamma Mu's Board of Trustees. On behalf of the entire Pi Gamma Mu organization, we are thrilled to have you here joining us at this important moment in the organization's history.

Why important?

Because the social sciences, once pillars of academic inquiry, are increasingly under threat. How many of you have felt that? Budget cuts have led to reduced funding for research and teaching positions, hindering progress and innovation. Additionally, a growing skepticism towards academic expertise and a rise in misinformation have eroded public trust in social science research, undermining the credibility of scholars and their ability to inform policy decisions.

We know that ideological agendas threaten to stifle academic freedom and compromise the integrity of our research efforts. These challenges erode the social sciences' capacity to address pressing societal issues and contribute to a more informed and just world.

And all of this matters. It matters to me as a woman of color growing up in the 60's and 70's, who has personally experienced the systemic inequalities and social injustices that social

science research seeks to understand and address. For many of us, threats to the social sciences feel deeply personal.

It matters to you, our students, as developing scholars, because the future of our field depends on a robust and unfettered pursuit of knowledge. The social sciences have the power to illuminate the complexities of the human condition and inspire meaningful change. And so, we gather here at this convention not just to celebrate the pursuit of knowledge, but to ignite a spark within each of you, a spark that will transform you from curious students into powerful agents of change.

Do not for a moment doubt your ability to be a changemaker. Consider the Pi Gamma Mu members who came before you. People like Jane Addams and Judith Rodin, our 2021 Distinguished Alumna, who have left an indelible mark on the world, demonstrating the power of social science to drive positive change. Addams, a pioneer in social work and the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She founded Hull House, a settlement house that provided essential services to immigrants and the poor. Rodin, a renowned psychologist and the first female president of an Ivy League university, broke barriers and championed public health initiatives that improved countless lives. William T. Coleman, a brilliant legal mind, who played a pivotal role in the landmark Brown v. Board of Education case, which overturned racial segregation in public schools and made it possible for some of you in this very room to be a part of this social science conversation. These remarkable individuals, and countless others like them, exemplify the impact that Pi Gamma Mu members can have on society.

During your time at this Convention, you will meet social scientists who have made a difference in the world. Tomorrow morning during our Centennial Celebration, you'll hear from Trustee Dr. Clara Small, the primary author of a new book documenting Pi Gamma Mu's history

called *With Distinction*. Dr. Small is well known for her expertise in African American history and her humanitarian efforts to preserve and honor the legacies of African Americans who have served, including veterans of WWII, Buffalo Soldiers, and Harriet Tubman. Through her words and actions, Clara is a changemaker.

You will also hear from our keynote speakers and Distinguished Alumni Award winners, Dr. Emily Welty and Dr. Matthew Bolton. As members of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Emily and Matthew played a crucial role in highlighting the devastating humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and perhaps more importantly, they turned their ideas into action, advocating for a treaty-based ban on these destructive arms.

Another Distinguished Alumni that you'll be hearing from tomorrow is Lyndon Baines Johnson. Not in person, of course, but through words and images. LBJ made a difference by enacting widescale reform aimed at eliminating poverty and racial injustice. Through legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Medicare and Medicaid, Johnson sought to create a more equitable society. A Pi Gamma Mu member did this!

As social scientists, we recognize that the work we do is not merely an academic pursuit; it is a tool, a weapon even, in the fight for a more just, equitable, and sustainable future. The world around us is in constant flux, grappling with challenges that demand innovative solutions. From climate change to social inequality, from political polarization to global health crises, these issues are not mere abstractions; they are the very fabric of our lives.

You, as social scientists, and as Pi Gamma Mu members have the power to illuminate these challenges, to dissect them, and to propose solutions that can truly make a difference. Your research, your critical thinking, and your empathy are the keys to unlocking a better world.

But being a changemaker is not just about conducting groundbreaking research or publishing influential papers. It is about taking action, about stepping outside the classroom and into the world, armed with your knowledge and your passion. It is about engaging with communities, advocating for marginalized voices, and inspiring others to join the cause. Some of you in this room may aspire to become policymakers, shaping laws and regulations that will impact millions of lives. Others may choose to work in non-profit organizations, fighting for social justice and human rights. Still others may become educators, inspiring the next generation of changemakers. Whatever path you choose, remember that your social science education has equipped you with the tools to make a lasting impact.

Pi Gamma Mu wants to be a part of your journey. Later tonight, I will introduce an idea that has been brewing in my head for some time now. The Social Justice Project is a sort of experiment, if you will, to unleash the power that Pi Gamma Mu students have to innovate and activate in response to current social issues. I have to say that this is an unusual approach for an honor society to take. We are asking you and your mentors to embark on an international, student-led project to identify a significant social problem and develop innovative solutions. This interdisciplinary, cross-institutional effort will push you to think critically, collaborate effectively, and make a tangible impact on the world. Will it work? Frankly, I don't know, but I think it will be exciting to try.

And so, I ask you to embrace your role as an agent of change. Let's use our knowledge and skills to challenge the status quo, to ask wicked questions, to forego assumptions, and to demand a more just and equitable society. Somewhere in this audience is the next Clara Small, the next Emily Welty or Matthew Bolton, the next Jane Addams, or even the next LBJ.

As Pi Gamma Mu embarks on its second century, I ask you — I challenge you — to see yourselves as changemakers. My good friend and fellow Trustee Mari Plikuhn is fond of saying, ‘If not now, when?’ My fellow Pi Gamma Mu members, now is the time.

Thank you.