Full disclosure: I had no concrete idea whatsoever about what I was going to say to you all until about twenty-four hours ago. Unlike your average honors essay that focuses on the simple truths of life (you know, hospitality, flawed characters, modernity, the futility of trying to actually get through the Aeneid), it’s a little harder to come up with a thoughtful, cliche-free exploration of how any of this matters to us in the long run now that the big “G” we’ve been waiting for all this time is just around the corner. More on managing all of the existential dread later, but first: some obligatory ego-stroking.

Esteemed Honors professors, the ghosts of freshman honors past, family, and friends, it’s an honor to speak before you this evening as we celebrate the impending conclusion of our experience here at Loyola. And to the inaugural class of Campion Champions, I promise that this isn’t some wild stress-induced dream that you accidentally slipped into while procrastinating on a 101 essay at 3am the night before — congratulations, we’re really here, we’ve really made it, now for the love of God put down that fifth cup of coffee.

Now, I could quite literally stand up here for hours and gush about how incredible you all are in all of your varied and impressive accomplishments. However, I think we can all agree that one of the best features of the honors program is its ability to take a serious bite out of nearly 22 years of spoon-fed egoism and instead leave us with a deeper sense of admiration for our shared strengths and weaknesses. So, in the interest of time and to spare you all from the equivalent of a misty-eyed group pat-on-the-back that we’ll probably sit through again in some capacity in just a matter of weeks, let us instead take a few moments to do what we Jesuit-educated honors kids do best: one, reflect, and two, probably make a few too many far-fetched connections for our own good.

It was about this time three years ago when Professor Foster read us various excerpts from Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Ever since then, it’s been an end-of-year tradition of mine to reread this play on the last day of class. There is one line in particular that seems to jump out of the page at me every time. Towards the end of the play, Vladimir muses, “Time flows again already. The sun will set, the moon rise, and we away . . . from here.” While this line always gives me pause, up until now I never could put my finger on why. It wasn’t until the inevitability of graduation loomed that the pieces started coming together and it finally hit me: in essence, we as honors students are always seeking to answer two of life’s most important questions: what are we doing in the time we have, and what do we make of it as time goes by?

On a superficial level, the first question seems relatively straightforward. For starters, we’ve challenged ourselves intellectually in our craftsmanship of thoughtful essays — usually
the night before they were due. We’ve lost ourselves in remarkable works of art, philosophy, history, science, and literature — usually the night before said essays were due, or if we were really brazen, the morning of an exam. But if we look a little deeper than our frighteningly impressive ability to put the “pro” in procrastination and still make the grade, we’ll find that we’ve made lasting connections in our academic, personal, and professional lives. We’ve found various ways to go do good, be it through our studies, our faith-based traditions, our activism, our research, or even our ways of balancing work and play. We allowed ourselves to become passionate, to get fired up, to be hungry for answers. We took our knack for overachieving and ran with it, and I think it’s safe to say that for the majority of us, regardless of the success of our efforts, it’s been an exceptionally rewarding experience overall.

But when it comes to that second question, we’re often at a loss for words. Thinkpiece after thinkpiece bemoans our generation’s uncertainty, tutting about how we millennials are constantly whining about not being ready for what’s next or being too afraid to challenge ourselves to explore alternative ideologies. A recent column in *The Atlantic* proclaimed “Stressed Out” by Twenty One Pilots to be the anthem of millennial anxiety, with one commentator questioning how we have become, to paraphrase, consumed by existential dread at so young an age. Yet who can blame us? We face a world filled with injustice that seems to be teetering on the brink at times, a society expecting more from us than reality will at present allow. And with so much of our next chapter emphasizing the “if” in life, it makes sense that we’ve at times forgotten to step back and take each moment for what it’s worth: at its core, a lesson.

Whenever all of these issues get to be too much, my parents will often advise me to take a deep breath, focus on my education, and everything else will figure itself out somehow. For many of us, higher education has been the rock that we’ve been privileged enough to rely upon to keep ourselves going. And although this paradigm will radically shift for many of us in a matter of weeks, I argue that the one thing that will allow us to overcome the mounting insecurity of post-grad life is not just our ability to keep learning, but also our capacity to question, challenge, and at times even embrace the unknown. Many of us stumbled into Galvin Auditorium without a shred of self-awareness, and many of us will trickle out of Gentile Arena not exactly beaming in self-assurance, but one thing we do know (other than the fact we know nothing, for all you Socratics in the room) is that no matter where we go, no matter what we do, we will somehow find a way to appreciate the deeper meaning behind the architecture of our experience while not forgetting to actually live it as well. There is a certain solidarity in going through times of great transition together, be it in the hallowed halls of Campion or at the whirlwind of commencement, and we are so fortunate to have each other's love and support as we take the time to truly appreciate just how much these past four years have allowed us to use that steadfast flow of time to our advantage.

And so, in these last few weeks we have together as honors students, colleagues, and friends, I challenge us to take a leaf out of Vladimir’s book once more in not wasting our time in idle discourse or undue fear of what’s to come. May we instead do whatever we need to remind
ourselves of the beauty in radically accepting this point in our lives, as uncertain as it might seem, for everything it has to offer. Let us do something, for ourselves and for each other, while we have the chance. Thank you so much.