Honors Graduation Celebration

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Class of 2014

When I was trying to write what I would say today, I couldn't help but play that Graduation song. You know, the one by Vitamin C that goes, "As we go on, we remember all the times we had together." For a brief moment, I considered singing that song to you all and wowing you with your peer's singing abilities. Then, I remembered that I actually can't carry a tune. So, I'm sure you and your ears are grateful that I'm not singing right now.

As I look around the room, I can't help but think, "Gosh, I don't recognize about half of the people in here." I'm sure some of you may be wondering, "who is this person?" or "that person?" because they seem interesting and a bit familiar. You're probably scrambling your brains trying to remember them from our first Honors discussion or first week on campus. Honestly, some of us probably did not get the opportunity to spend time with or meet some of the people we're sitting with right now. But, I also think that it's less that and more so that each of us is not the same person we were when we first set foot on this campus, or that Honors Lecture hall in Galvin Auditorium. In the last 3-4 years, we have gained more knowledge and insight about the world and other people, as well as ourselves. We have had experiences both in and out of the classroom, whether it is having meaningful discussions in class, serving in the greater Chicago community or studying abroad in Rome, Vietnam and other places around the world.

Each and every one of us is different; we have been changed in a million, yet great ways.

And part of the reason we have been changed is because of the Honors Program here at Loyola.

Yes, I know, there are probably moments where you might have been less than happy and grateful to be in the Honors Program. What comes to mind is having to stay up all night to write a paper or those moments after the first Honors exam, when all you want to do is lay out on the grass outside of Sullivan Center and sleep for the rest of your life.

Yet, I'm sure that if we stop and look back at our experience here at Loyola—and of course, things usually seem so much better in hindsight—I'm sure that there is at least one moment, one memory, one takeaway from a class, a peer or a professor that has shaped you in some way. Perhaps it was taking one of the many interesting and rigorous Honors classes that helped you decide on your major sophomore year, or helped you to change it later on. Maybe, it was an idea that you took away, that has inspired you to go further than merely writing about it in a paper and instead further research the topic and/or apply it to a real-life situation. Or, maybe it is a deep conversation you had with a professor or a friendship that was born out of many of us living together in Regis Hall.

Personally, I can say that I am walking away from the Honors Program and Loyola with many things. I’ve been introduced to new ideas and challenged to think differently. I cannot begin to count how often I’ve referenced an Honors book, article or discussion I had in another class, my applications for career, service and graduate school opportunities, and even being student leader, as a Resident Assistant or Orientation Leader, as many of you have been, I’ve referenced something I took away from Honors.

I’ve certainly improved my writing abilities thanks to the--sometimes seemingly over-zealous—editing skills of our Honors professors. And, I’ve met amazing people who have done or are on their way to doing great things. Yes, I mean you, the fellow Honors students whom I’m proud to call my peers. I know for a fact that there are several future doctors in here—like Susan Duyar and Hillary Chang—as well as teachers, psychologists, business leaders, writers, actors, and so on. And, we are currently in the presence of a few Excellence Awards and Damen Awards finalists like Hillary Chang (again), Sarah Balas, and Stephanie Morrow—who won a Damen Student Award just last night. And, then, of course, there’s Maddie Johnston, my freshman year roommate and close friend, who’s going to attend divinity school at Princeton this fall, which is fitting since she’s a saint for having lived with me during freshman year.
Even if I could not name a dozen other things I gained, I would say that the one thing that makes me truly grateful for the Honors program is that it brought the most inspiring and simply best people—friends—into my life. So, even if the program, the classes, readings, discussions, papers, and projects, had failed to impact me in some way, I could say that the people I met through the program definitely changed me for good.

I don’t think any of us can say, “I gained nothing—not a single thing—out of the Honors Program.” Again, we have been transformed—changed, even if you don’t realize or can’t think about exactly how so considering the final papers/projects and post-graduation plans that are on many of our minds as graduation day comes closer.

To borrow words from Loyola’s mission, we have been and are prepared—and will lead—“extraordinary lives.”

If that isn’t enough motivation for you to push on through your last few weeks as an undergraduate, I just want you to remember that when graduation comes, we’ll be able to say 3 words from one of my favorite movies, *Legally Blonde*, which are: “We did it!”

Thank you all so much for being here and giving me the opportunity to say more than a few words. And, of course, to everyone involved with the Honors Program, Dr. Katz, Lorri Walsh and all of the faculty who’ve done their best to educate and empower us these past few years: Thank you so much!