

Good morning, graduating class of 2012. That has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? President Dahl, administrators, faculty, staff, families and yes, graduates – what an honor it is to stand before you today. It is a day that we believed would never come, at least I didn't. And yet, here we are, all together just as we were on August 28, 2008 in Kuhl gym for Playfair except without the awkward closeness and body heat... kind like an introduction to what the IB would be like and we actually know each other now. Little did we know that starting on that day, we would be starting what is know as "the best four years of our lives." Think back to that move-in day, it was hot, crowded and we were all ready to go out and save the world. We told our parents we were so sad and scared to be without them until they dropped a hundred dollar bill in our hands and then we kicked them out faster than a speeding bullet. We went to dinner in a group of 47 of our closest friends, because that's what freshmen do, travel in groups.

In the months that came we got excited to know that school doesn't have to start at 8:30 a.m. until we discovered that 10 a.m. classes are also too early, especially as a senior on Friday mornings when you are running low on quarters. Those from Long Island, like me, developed calf muscles made of steel after one semester of the hills and walk from Southside. For those not from Long Island, you do not know how big of a switch of terrain that really is. And of course we all came to know and love the beauty that is a Geneseo sunset. A sunset that no matter how many times you watch it, it is always just as beautiful if not more beautiful than the last time.

Geneseo means something different to all of us. Whether we are leaving with memories of the classes, hockey, broomball, downstairs Letch, MTC weekend, Club Milne or the Ke\$ha concert, we are all moving on having a special memory in our hearts. There is something about this campus that makes it come alive. It is something that makes us all feel like we belong, that we're connected because what we've really become is family. I think that's part of why the months leading to this day have been so difficult. We're not completely scared to leave this place, it is just that leaving family is never easy and we don't want this to be goodbye. Don't worry; between Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, LinkedIn, and Pinterest, I think we will all stay very much connected in the years to come.

While writing this speech, I'll admit, I began to get emotional. I cannot tell you any one reason why. There isn't any one memory in particular that sticks out as a moment that defined my college years because there have been so many of them. Go ahead, close your eyes and think of just one memory that sums up all four years so well. I'll wait. I bet most of you couldn't narrow it down to just one and for those who did...show-offs. But there are two memories that stick out that set the foundation for our college years. Both happened in our freshman year. The first happened during a windy night toward the end of late September or early October when the power was knocked out. Some of you thought it was a brilliant idea to come together and follow a tree. Not any tree, but THE tree. Just for clarification, it was a tree branch, not a whole tree. That somehow always gets lost in translation. That moment showed me that we

were willing to come together for just about anything. Again, we were ready to go out and save the world.

Then, the first presidential election of our voting years happened. One of the most historic presidential campaigns to date and we were all part of it. I remember moments running over to 'Daga from Wayne to presidential debates intently. I remember the Election Day so clearly. I remember seeing some of your faces down at the polls, not really sure of how everything was supposed to work, but we knew that what we were doing was important and we had a part in determining the fate of our country. Following the announcement of President Obama's historic win, we all gathered outside and marched. Not necessarily for the candidate who won, but because we felt like we were part of something that was truly amazing. That memory comes to mind as setting the foundation for all of the other memories that followed because it was the first moment where I truly felt empowered by my peers to go out and do something remarkable. Class of 2012, you have made me strong and have gotten me here to this point. The type of support and encouragement that have come from friends at Geneseo is unlike anywhere else. We make each other better and I know we will continue to do so in the years to come.

As you may be able to tell, here's the part where I am supposed to be uplifting and give you all empty clichés. If it makes you feel better, I can do that. I can tell that the last four years was time well spent finding yourself and now you are ready to go out and be anything you want to be. Your family and friends will love you no matter where you decide to go in life as long as you love what you're doing. Here's why I can't give you those generic clichés. Yes, while you are supposed to do what you love, we've been told time and time again there are millions of other people who love it too...so good luck. While that is the very harsh truth of our immediate future, something tells me you already knew that which is why I know you are more determined than ever to make this next step in your lives. When asked to sum up this graduating class in a word, I chose the word resilient. Whether or not it stems from us being defiant when told the answer 'no' when we were five years old and now I can be a sophisticated spin on, it is something our parents can answer. However, in the face of true adversity, we always continued to march on and support what we believe is right. This Geneseo family never hesitated to come together to support issues such as same-sex marriage, funding for our education, cancer research or a better way of registering for classes. We are resilient because we stand up for what is right and we are not afraid to face any challenges that come our way. So, don't be nervous about what lies ahead. We have proven to ourselves that we are able to put in great effort and that we have perfect attitude to go out be successful and bring about positive change. It goes without me saying that yes, while for the most part our future is unknown and many of us may be hesitant to leave what we've known for the past four years behind, just know that you are leaving nothing behind. You are taking everything with you. Geneseo is now part of you, and I know that twenty years from now, saying you are Geneseo graduate will put smile on your face.

I am sure that when you entered college, you had a very specific idea of what college was supposed to be like. As you sit here now, I am sure college is nothing like you thought it would be. Late-night talk show host Conan O'Brien, because we will do or watch anything that procrastinates writing a HUMN paper, mentioned that every graduation somehow fits it in to say, "Follow your dream." And he went on to mention that whatever you think your dream is now it will probably change just like your majors have changed or how your roommates have changed. I want to tell you, that's okay. Just keep on dreaming and setting goals for yourselves. That says that you will not settle for mediocrity and you know that you have a bigger purpose in the world. Which reminds me of a Geneseo meme from that infamous group. I believe it was Sarcastic Willy Wonka that said, "Oh, you think you can destabilize a Ugandan warlord by liking a Facebook status?" We have been given a tremendous opportunity to receive such a quality education from this prestigious institution. While you most certainly cannot change the world by liking Facebook statuses, your college degree that you earned today has made your voice a little louder and influential than others who are still struggling. Don't forget to listen to them and do your part. Be kind, give back and help whenever possible. Continue to do what we do best: stand up for one another.

This is the part where we find courage to do things that we think we're not ready to do, but remember that we had the same thoughts moving in as first year students and I think we have made it just fine. The support given by this college was enough make us destined for greatness. Each graduating class has distinct qualities and Class of 2012, we have attitude, we have determination, and we're fierce and fearless. Steve Blank mentioned, "The world is run by those who show up...not those who wait to be asked." The bonds we formed will shape our future. We will all take different paths on this journey, but will continue to move as one – leaving bits and pieces of everything that's good about Geneseo everywhere. So, keep on showing up, at the very least, showing up has gotten you a college degree. As we will momentarily become alums of this great place, I would say best of luck on having successful futures. I know that we don't need it, but I know it is reassuring to say. Live life never sweating the small stuff and never be afraid to fail. You can be surprised how much more value there can be in failing by taking a risk than by playing it safe. I would like to say my last few words in memory of a man that has truly defined our generation so far, Steve Jobs. In one of his many influential speeches, he noted the importance of staying true to yourself and not to just simply follow your heart, but have the courage to follow your heart. And most importantly, "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish."

So, congratulations Class of 2012. This is all we've worked for. We've earned it. Go ahead and smile. Let's continue to be remarkable. Stay passionate. Stay you. Thank you, Geneseo.