

## **Honors at Iowa - Commendation Ceremony - Student Remarks**

### ***2014 Student Speaker - Nicholas Rolston, Physics, Mathematics***

The term to "break bad" is American Southeast slang meaning to turn against one's previously lawful lifestyle for one of criminal acts, usually at the cost of someone else's life or well-being. In college, people usually "break bad" about a week or so before the end of the semester, morphing into irritable, sleep-deprived zombies with dislocated jaws that hang open and bloodshot eyes that search desperately for their next source of caffeine.

This is a dangerous state to be in because it inevitably leads to the most horrifying feeling- the dreaded 3 AM gut rumble. No good decisions about food are ever made after 3 AM. If you were lucky, you ordered Pokey Stix earlier in the night, but alas, you thought better and realized that you want to spend more time that night at your desk than on the toilet. My solution has been the emergency sandwich, always keeping a Subway or Which Wich or a PB&J in the fridge to satisfy any late-night cravings or in case I nap through a meal at Burge. Les Brown once said, "If you take responsibility for yourself you will develop a hunger to accomplish your dreams". It may not sound like much, but the unprecedented responsibility that I have shouldered in the careful planning and execution of the emergency sandwich has made all the difference. (You can tell I'm an only child.) Filling up the cavernous depths of blackness within my stomach gives me the comfort to pursue my dreams of nanotechnology research. It gives me the comfort to dive into the figurative black space—the unknown—in order to find the questions that I want to ask. I try to live by the words of Steve Jobs, to "stay hungry and stay foolish".

We all have a mental hunger for learning- I think that is what differentiates Honors students from the rest. But, in the words of Bertrand Russell, "the whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, and wiser people so full of doubts". Doubt is food poisoning of the mind- a bacteria that breeds complacency. The voice in the back of your mind that convinces you to not raise your hand to answer that question because surely someone else will explain it better, to not apply for that scholarship because surely there are more qualified applicants, to not visit that professor in his office because surely he is too busy to deal with the petty problems of undergraduates. Doubt and uncertainty can leave the mind famished and disconsolate- if you let it. As a physicist, I have been bred to embrace uncertainty. One of the creators of quantum mechanics, Werner Heisenberg, developed his famous uncertainty principle, which provides quantifiable limits on the precision of the measurements that we can perform on subatomic particles. The Honors Program realizes that college students are oftentimes as enigmatic as electrons, providing us with the freedom to forge our own paths and create our own honors experiences, whether through classes, internships, service learning, research, teaching assistantships, or studying abroad.

Over these past four years, the Honors Program has been a community that allowed me to grow and mature. I experienced a transformation much like Heisenberg...but not the physicist. I speak of Walter White, the protagonist of the television series "Breaking Bad", who finds meaning in his life when he finally realizes that he has not lived in the moment, taken risks, or challenged himself. He admits,

"I have spent my whole life scared, frightened of things that could happen, might happen, might not happen, 50-years I spent like that. Finding myself awake at three in the morning. But you know what? Now, I sleep just fine. What I came to realize is that fear, that's the worst of it. That's the real enemy. So, get up, get out in the real world and you kick it as hard you can right in the teeth."

But, just remember, if you notice that the teeth are coffee-stained and the semester is about to end, just leave it alone. That's a student who doesn't need to be kicked. Instead, give them an emergency sandwich. They'll thank you later.