

Honors at Iowa Commendation Ceremony | Student Remarks

2012 Student Speaker | **Suzanne Carter, Physics & Mathematics**



Hello Class of 2012!

All I can say to you right now is the stereotypical “we made it” because that is what’s running through my head as I face you. I know we all had those countdowns going, “one more paper, one more final, one last hoop we have to jump through then we graduate and are out of here.” But let’s slow down for a second... the real world can wait just a bit longer.

You may be here more for your parents than for yourself. But it’s a small price to pay for all of their support, so let’s take this opportunity to thank our friends and family who are here today with a round of applause

So why are we here? Why are you here? What did you do that is honor worthy? It may be challenging yourself through honors coursework in Chemistry, graduating with honors in English, or earning a commendation for studying abroad in Chile. All I know is that you are here because you are passionate. There is something that you really care about and that you have

gone above and beyond to reach for in your studies, your research, or in the community at large. This is the beauty of college. We have the freedom to chase that idea, that one concept that we can’t stop thinking about. Sometimes it is squashed between Chem II and Rhetoric, but the fact that we get to chase it is amazing.

How did we get here? I know it involves late nights of studying, sneaking into a building at 10pm through that one side door you know is always open, only to find yourself watching the sunrise through the windows, trying to figure out how you’ll get through the day’s classes on 2 hours of sleep, and calculating exactly when you can fit in a nap.

And sometimes, it comes from just a little bit of luck, that chance meeting with your perfect mentor, or a last-minute invitation to attend a conference. Whatever it was that got you involved and excited, remember it, share it with others, maybe they’ll hear their story in yours.

In my years here, I’ve been lucky enough to hear many of your stories, and I want to share a bit of my own. I came to Iowa 4 years ago, not knowing what I would find. Who would be in my classes? How hard would it be? Who would I eat dinner with? But I had no need to be afraid. Beginning even at orientation and my first day in Daum, I met a great group of people, and it is the memories I’ve made with them that will stay with me beyond my time at Iowa.

I came to know faculty in my chosen departments of math and physics. They reached out to me and got me involved in research, where I found my own passion lay. I’m not one of those researchers who works in a lab; I, instead, work in my mind and on paper.

If you give me a thought or a concept to play with, I’ll write it down and start to work it through to its conclusions. To me, symbols, whether words or mathematical expressions, take ideas out of our heads and place them on the page in their purest form, allowing for their examination and manipulation. This action defines my relationship to mathematics and physics and I’ve found that it informs my approach to solving any problem. And isn’t that what education is?

As the years pass, our minds will let go of the structure of glucose, and the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet. But our years here have not been wasted, we’ve learned how to learn.

When I was first asked to give this speech, after I got over the initial terror, I wracked my brain with thoughts of what I could share with such an extraordinary group of people. What do I have to say that could possibly add anything to your graduation experience? I realized that I don’t have much, but thankfully there are people in the universe who have said it much better than me. I want to share with you a quote from John Green:

“Nerds like us- are allowed to be unironically enthusiastic about stuff. Nerds are allowed to *love* stuff, like, jump-up-and-down-in-your-chair-can’t-control-yourself *love* it. When people call people nerds, mostly what they are saying is ‘You like stuff.’ Which is not a good insult at all. Like ‘you are too enthusiastic about the miracle of human consciousness”

Now I don't know if you consider yourself a nerd, but I do. And it's our nerdiness that we should carry with us and give to the world as we go forward. Whether we're entering the working world of 9-5, going on to graduate or professional school, taking a year off to work in the peace corps, or just aren't sure yet, it doesn't matter. We are the ones who will stand out. It's no longer about a resume of standard accomplishments, it who you are and how you can contribute. And I have full faith that we are the ones who will stand out, maybe not right away, but we are the ones who can make it.

As we move forward, I wish you all the best of luck, knowing that you won't need it, but also knowing that it can't hurt. I'm going to revise my opening statement, "class of 2012, we made it"...through this step at least. We have a whole lot more coming at us, but we're prepared to handle it.