

Graduation Speech

Good afternoon, dear faculty, staff, family, friends, and graduates. It is an honor to be speaking with you here today. Graduates of the class of 2012, CONGRATULATIONS!!!

While I was very honored to be invited to be the graduate speaker at the 2012 International Studies graduation ceremony, I admit that writing this speech was even harder than writing my thesis. And believe me, I would have never imagined that there would be anything harder than that. The hard part about it is that I was told that my graduation speech had to make you laugh first, then cry, and then inspire you. And it had to be short... So as you can see, that's not a very easy task to accomplish. But I'll try.

As I was thinking about this speech and reflecting on my experiences here at the Department of International Studies as a graduate student, I came up with a perfect analogy for my and my fellow

classmates' graduate school experience. The analogy is that grad school is like studying abroad. Very relevant for our major, isn't it?

Let me tell you more about this analogy. When we were in the process of applying for graduate school, it was like planning to study abroad. Those who have studied abroad will remember feeling very excited about the upcoming adventure and giving little thought to the possibility of culture shock! I could probably guess that quite a few of us in this audience who have studied abroad, prior to our travel were thinking that we knew exactly what we were getting ourselves into... And I could probably guess that we were not necessarily right about that... Well, that was pretty much the same situation with graduate school for me and for some of my classmates. We did experience culture shock!

We all know that language can create extraordinary challenges for those abroad. In graduate school, we also experienced language barriers. I remember our first class with Stephen Wooten when we had to read

several heavy readings, including "Michel Foucault's History of Culture" We had to come to class having written summaries of some of the main points of the reading. After reading this work and other articles over and over, I would want to give up, thinking that it must be so hard for me to understand what the authors are saying because English is my second language. The next day I would go to class and find out that my fellow classmates who have English as their first language also had problems understanding some of those articles.

The language barrier is not the only challenge we are facing when studying abroad. So it is not the only challenge in graduate school either. Going straight from my undergraduate experience into my graduate career proved to be challenging for me in many ways. It was very challenging to balance school, my work as a graduate teaching fellow and my social life, all while trying to get some much needed sleep. I remember I never even had time to attend the Time Management workshops offered through the graduate school.

While graduate school challenged us in so many different ways, it is those challenging moments that help us grow tremendously. As a graduate assistant at the Study Abroad office, I often hear how study abroad changed our students and made them feel empowered, like they can do anything. .. Just like those students who study abroad, those challenges that we had to go through in graduate school are what value most at the end, as they change us completely and we have become more independent, open minded, and self-reliant individuals.

I would like to extend the metaphor in another way. In my mind, getting our diplomas today is like buying a plane ticket to study abroad. It is very exciting, but what we get out of our experience abroad will depend on how we deal with many challenges and with culture shock. Yes, moving from academia to the “real world” will involve some culture shock, for sure! Those who are patient, open minded, and who are willing to work hard to adjust to the new environment will succeed. Buying a ticket to a foreign country does not automatically guarantee a successful experience, so I hope that you will all go forward into your

future recognizing the challenges you may experience and being ready to face them. As many of us who traveled to at least one country can attest, it's very easy to get the travel bug. I hope you will also get the learning bug and even after your graduation today you will pursue different avenues of learning. Congratulations again to you, graduates! And thank you very much dear faculty, staff, family, friends, and fellow classmates for your continued support!