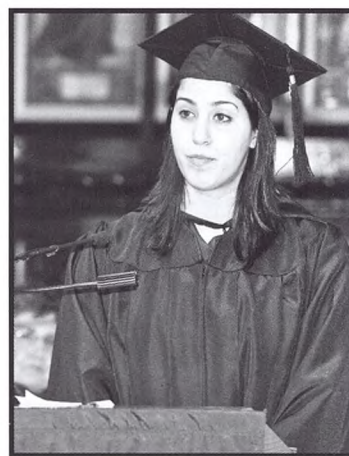


Hadar Burger Valedictorian Speech Winter 2011



Dear Graduates,

Here are a few stories of several remarkable individuals who had a rocky start in life, but came out on top because they chose to succeed. I decided to start with the story of an American president, to show my patriotism, though it might surprise you, I am not really from here. Abe Lincoln was a man who failed in business at the age of 21 – his sweetheart died at the age of 26 – he had a nervous breakdown at age 27 – he was defeated in 8 elections. And yet, he became the 16th president of the United States.

Albert Einstein did not speak until the age of four, he did not read until the age of seven. He was regarded as being “mentally slow, unsociable, and adrift forever in foolish dreams” – against all expectations, in 1921; Einstein won the Nobel Prize in Physics. Before reaching the top of the billboards, the Beatles were turned down by a recording company that said “we do not like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out” – I bet those recording executives are eating their huts right now.

So why am I telling you all of these stories? These days everyone is asking us what are we going to do with our future? As I see it, we have two choices. We can choose to survive only to get by, or we can choose to succeed! So my fellow graduates, future doctors, future educators, future lawyers, future artists - we are the future of this country. Let us choose to flourish and to succeed. Now I know this is not the Oscars, but there are some people here today that we should all thank.

First I would like to thank St. Francis College. I believe everyone will agree with me when I say this is a unique college where no student gets lost in the crowd. This college is about people, equal opportunity, and humanity. There is nothing more important than that.

My journey here was quite remarkable. I came to St. Francis College 18 days after finishing my military service, totally in shock, barely spoke English, and one woman took me under her wing, and went above and beyond to help me adjust. Dean Howell thank you, to me you symbolize the good in people. I then began working at the Student Activities Office under the guidance and support of Ruben Gonzalez. Ruben, first, thank you for opening the door for me. Second, thank you for being like a friend and a parent rather than just a boss. Naomi Kinley and Cheretta Robson from the Career Center, you give your heart and soul to help the students, and I am here today to say we appreciate that.

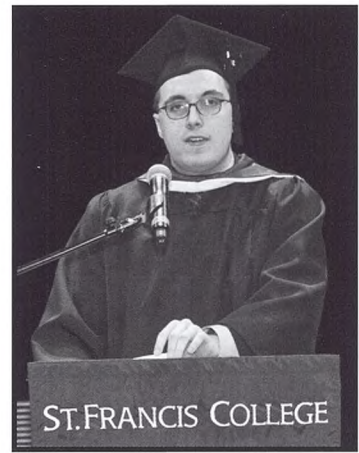
During the past two years I had the pleasure of working as an intern at an extraordinary company called National Grid. I would like to take this opportunity to thank National Grid family and colleagues for being my mentors, and supporting me in each part of my journey. Similarly, I would like to thank the Economic and Management Departments, and all the professors of SFC for sharing with us your knowledge and guiding us throughout the years. I would also like to thank all of my friends for coming to support me on my special day. You are my family here and I love each one of you.

Last but not least, I want to thank my family, and I am sure you can all agree with me that the people who deserve the most gratitude are our families. Mom and dad I am lucky to have you as my parents, thank you for being there every step of the way, you gave me wings and made me fly, and I simply adore you.

I would like to sign off with some words of wisdom, I may not have written them, but I certainly live by them “Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. And dance like no one's watching. Happiness is a journey not a destination” (Unknown Author).

Fellow graduates, I encourage each one of you to pursue your dream, and do it with passion.

John Whelan Valedictorian Speech Spring 2012



Good Afternoon,

Members of the Board of Trustees, President Dugan, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Administration, Faculty and Staff, and Fellow Graduates. I would first like to briefly thank some people very special to me. Dr. Sorrentino, Bro. Owen, Dr. Galgan, and Dr. Berman—each of you gave me guidance and lessons that went beyond the classroom, and for that I am grateful. I will never forget the example that each of you have set for me. Thank you. More importantly, I would like to thank my family, especially my Mother and Grandmother, for their love and support, without which I would not be here today. I love you.

My fellow graduates, we live in a world driven by specialization and opportunity cost. Whether we are going on to graduate school, the workforce, military service, or other endeavors, the skills we learn over the next few years will specifically serve the field that we enter. No longer will there be the small 'l' liberal learning that the College offered. For most, literature, history, and philosophy will have to make room for technical training. One can only do something well if one takes the time to know it well, and the world needs professionals. This is dignified work, which one should be proud of.

We should realize on this Graduation Day, however, that it is liberal arts education that made Saint Francis College special. The strong core curriculum, particularly the nine credit requirement in philosophy, gave us the best of both worlds. Philosophy, such as in Plato's *Phaedo*, teaches us that there is meaning beyond our immediate surroundings and more profound questions which must be asked. As helpful as technology may be, our life is not defined by laptops, iPhones, and Blackberrys. Philosophy liberates us from such things. Even though some of us may not realize it yet, this was the hope for our education at Saint Francis.

This is not to say that Saint Francis has not prepared us for the practical life as well. In fact, by having both, we will have the tools necessary to become ethical accountants, ethical businessmen, ethical doctors, lawyers, and teachers, so that we can go into the world to serve Christ faithfully. What do I mean by ethical? I mean that we cannot judge what is right only by what we want or only by what the profession dictates or demands. How could we base morality on such things, especially since technology allows the world to change at such a rapid pace? What is right can only come from what grounds reality, what is immutable, and beyond the changing world (the Forms, if you will). Access to the immutable can only come from right reason cultivated by liberal education.

Besides the ethical considerations, it must be asked: how practical could an education be that is not rooted in the liberal arts? The skill that you spent years cultivating could tomorrow be replaced by a machine or computer program. Studying that which never changes, the common experience of all men throughout time, is the only thing which could provide the adaptability to thrive in such an economy. We should all be grateful that Saint Francis has done a much better job than other institutions in preserving the liberal arts.

The reason why it has done such a good job is because of what some perceive as the Saint Francis' weaknesses. Our College is not, after all, a prestigious university with a large student body, campus, and dormitories, but a small commuter college. Such qualities, not the least among which is our Catholic identity and mission as humbly safeguarded by the Franciscan Brothers, have prevented St. Francis from falling into temptations as other college and universities, even Catholic ones, have. This temptation is to think of the college or university as just a campus, that the edifice of the campus is what defines the institution. But what should really define a college is whether its students' souls are nourished. While St. Francis' campus may not be the marvel that some other colleges' are, through liberal education, it nourishes the souls of its students; because of this we chose well for coming here. Hopefully, St. Francis will continue to nourish the souls of its students for many years to come.

Congratulations and God Bless!