



2016 CORNELL COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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A Chinese proverb reads, “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Engage me and I learn.”

In the past 4 years on the Hilltop, you have engaged at the highest level and you have learned.

You learned that you could push yourselves to accomplish more in 3 and a half weeks than you ever imagined.

You stayed up all night preparing for performances, practicing lines, revising prose, conducting experiments, analyzing data, and creating art.

You traveled the world, studying the genetic diversification of coral in the Bahamas, the conversation of turtles in Costa Rica, the psychology of the Holocaust in Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, Roman Archeology in Italy, and Costume Design in Chicago.

You completed internships and fellowships, studying Elementary Education in Ireland, Philosophy and Environmental Ethics in the Amazon, Art History in Puerto Rico, and nuclear disarmament advocacy in Washington, DC.

You learned to excel in the classroom while tirelessly training and competing on the field, the court, the track, and the mat.

You learned how to be disciplined, motivated, and committed, teaching yourself to “procrastinate” for only hours instead of weeks or months.

You finely honed precious time management skills and became a master of working under pressure to create high quality products on tight deadlines.

You learned what it means to engage with others whose perspectives, beliefs, and life experiences were different from your own.

You learned how quickly careless words and deeds can damage a community and how compassion, care, thoughtfulness, and a renewed openness to understanding and respecting others can heal it.

You learned others can possess viewpoints diametrically opposed to your own and believe them just as deeply.

You learned to provide and receive support from others.



You gave car rides to friends over breaks, helped struggling classmates study for exams, and selflessly woke your roommate when you worried he or she might sleep through morning class.

You learned to work as a team, relinquishing some control over the group project even when you worried a classmate may not do their part. You allowed them to contribute and take an appropriate role in the project, even if it did make you a bit nervous.

As is true with most of life's most valuable lessons, these lessons were not learned easily. You were challenged in the process. You integrated new ideas and perspectives and challenged your old ones. You felt excited, anxious, hurt, happy, and disappointed, sometimes all within a matter of few moments.

There were great sacrifices. You moved away from home, learned how to be independent, how to establish new friendships, and how to keep strong bonds with your family and old friends even though they were miles (sometimes thousands of miles) away. Your family and friends learned how to let go, and waited eagerly to see the person you would become.

Many of you lost family or friends along way; you learned how to remember and cherish the lessons and memories they left behind and to shoulder the grief of their departures.

There are few certainties in life, but it seems one constant reality is change. Your lives are changing now but the lessons you learned here will continue to shape your lives and the lives of those around you.

As I conclude, I'd like to take a few moments to listen as you reflect on your own memories of the Hilltop. You are, after all, the topic of today's lesson and, as the professors, you have many valuable perspectives to share.

[audio recording]