

**For The Class of 2002
Convocation Address
Kate Farrington
May 9, 2002**

Monsignor Joseph, professors, students, and especially the graduating class of 2002. Welcome. And thank you to the senior class for granting me the opportunity to speak to you and for you--although I must say I can't help but wonder if you didn't vote for me simply as a way of ensuring that none of you had to write and present two speeches. But whatever your motives, I am deeply grateful.

Yes, I'm actually going to speak twice: once today and again at graduation. Now, when I began writing I was quite certain that none of us, including myself, want to hear me give the same basic speech twice. So I tried to think about what each of these two ceremonies mean, what each is accomplishing.

We graduate in less than two weeks. I don't know about you, but I haven't had time to think about it. After all, finals start in two days. Many of us have only just turned in a thesis with the ink still drying on the page or blasted through comprehensive exams trying desperately to remember whether we even attended class freshman year, yet alone learned anything. I would like to mention at this time that the drama majors just finished our comps this week, which may or may not have had a direct effect on the length or quality of this speech. But that's neither here nor there. The point is, as per usual, we're all busy and for reasons I can't begin to fathom everyone expects us to know exactly what we're doing next year... and they expect us to know it **now**. It doesn't seem to leave much time for quiet reflection. None of us has time to sit down and mentally organize the last four years. But I think that Convocation is the first step in that

contemplative process. Before our finals begin, before the anarchy of moving out and moving on, before our families arrive from home, we have this day, this brief respite from the storm, to sit down with this family—with the family we have built here over the last four years. It is a time for us to celebrate each other, our accomplishments and memories together.

I think the difference between graduation and convocation is the difference between writing a family history and looking at a family photo album. In writing the family history, you pay attention to the big picture: where have we been, where are we now, what is to come. You recognize the monumental, and the details are, out of necessity, swallowed in that larger image. That is what graduation does. It focuses all that we have been and uses it to guide us in the right direction for the future. It places us within our larger UD family history. Convocation, on the other hand, is the particular photo album of our four years.

A photo album allows us to recall the many exact moments we carry with us. It freezes one experience. I believe that that is what we are here to do today—to celebrate each other as individuals, and as the individuals who have become our family.

For the class of 2002, the album begins with images of strangers, of teachers and students we didn't know. Freshman year our first priority was class work. Ah, how times change. Many of my earliest memories here are of professors. I remember Dr. Norris' Under the Bible class, in which I learned that almost any description of God in the book of Genesis is better understood when Dr. Norris stands on a table. I am forever indebted to Dr. Doe for making me aware of the key role Lawrence Welk plays in every

reproductive process. I will never forget Dr. Gregory's passionate defense of Achilles as a great hero or how I felt fundamentally changed by *The Iliad*.

I remember the people I met. I can honestly say that I doubt I will ever come across a more intelligent, earnest, opinionated, eccentric, forthright, quirky and wonderful group of people as the members of my class. I have memories of everything from late night conversations about philosophy and religion to the epic battle between the Catherine girls and Madonna guys. Alas, I have not the skill to tell that tale.

We will none of us forget the strange feeling of going home at Christmas and reuniting with our high school friends, only to discover to our amazement that none of them had even heard of the allegory of the cave or had any opinions one way or the other on what the color green represented in *Gawain and the Green Knight*. I think that was the same moment we had the odd feeling that none of us would ever have a normal conversation again. Not a bad sensation, mind you, just a realization that we had changed, that the person who had arrived in Irving, Texas in August was gone, and that a new person had taken his place.

I remember the idea of Rome or rather the abstract whispered promise of Rome. How even before the first semester ended the debates began--whether to go fall or spring, whether to go at all, and realizing there were friends we'd made that we wouldn't see again for six months or a year.

We will none of us forget the tragic loss in the spring of our classmate Bronwyn Sherman. We all pulled a little closer to our friends that day. Those of us who did not know her well watched in admiration as her friends, the entire Gregory dorm, pulled together, to comfort each other, forming a deep and lasting bond. We will never forget

the first round of good-byes to the seniors at the end of that year, perhaps secretly glad that it was they and not us who had to go out into the world. We weren't ready yet.

Sophomore year brought the long awaited, dreaded, anticipated separation of our class. We said our good-byes and stepped into a new world. **Rome.** I will never forget walking into Saint Peter's for the first time and having two simultaneous thoughts: first, that I was standing at the center of my faith; second, understanding that the only way to make Baroque architecture appealing was to make it Really Big. I remember standing at the center of the theatre at Epidaurus reciting lines written by Aeschylus 2500 years ago and hearing my voice boom back at me from a hundred feet away. I can't envision a closer connection to the birth of western culture. I also remember that our class serenaded the German tourists with everything from *The Star Spangled Banner* to *Cecilia*. We were charming. Who among us will forget Dr Crider's cliffhanger classes that left us dying to know, as we stood in line for lunch, exactly what the game of chess *had* meant to the Elizabethans. Then finally the last morning, the exhaustion, the homesickness, the pain of leaving, and the faculty waving us good-bye in the pre-dawn grey.

I remember returning to Irving. That was hard. It was hard hearing about the spring Romers and what they were doing. Stories floated back to us about students actually studying, a concept foreign to every fall Romer. Mystifying phrases like Bus 1 and Bus 2 surfaced in the vocabulary. Above all, we remember our concern for Rachel Russo and Christina Contrarez, waiting and praying, and our relief when we knew they would be all right.

Turn the page of our album. Junior year. Subtitle, all right I chose a major, now what? There were innumerable answers. There was Junior Poet for the English majors, the psychology majors' junior project, the drama majors agonizing over choosing a studio--and suddenly all the science and math majors I had come to know and love disappeared, some of them taken by the ever-mysterious Orgo. To be perfectly honest, junior year was a whirlwind of academics, of furtive hours of leisure stolen between exams. The whole thing is rather a blur. At the same time I remember with great clarity watching the forest behind the student apartments slowly disappear, the pyramid over Braniff finally come to completion, and the art village emerge out of the woods. Time was passing.

And here we are. The last leaves of our photo album have been filled this year with dozens of lasts. The last Charity Week. The last good-bye to a set of Romers. The last Mallapalooza. Next Monday will be the last midnight breakfast. I hope to see you all there. But it is the lasts to come that will be harder to bear. Today was our last day of class as undergraduates. Soon will be the last time we stand together as a class. Next week we finish the album, next week we have the opportunity to place it side by side with all the memories, the experiences and the accomplishments of classes past, to see ourselves in that big picture. But for now, at this family gathering, we dwell on what has made us and our time here distinct.

We thank the many benefactors whose ongoing support for this university has made it possible for us to be here today.

We thank the faculty and staff who have given us not just an education, but a way of encountering the world. You have set us on the search for truth, and that is no easy task.

We thank our families, who cared for us, brought us here, and will in only ten days stand by us at graduation to celebrate—and to help us pack.

We thank our fellow UD students, the ones who have gone before us and the ones we leave behind. Your friendship and support has meant more than we can say.

Most of all, I thank my fellow seniors. I celebrate you. I celebrate my fellow English majors who with me learned the power and beauty of the written word. I celebrate the drama majors with whom I learned to change the written word into living breathing art. I celebrate all of you extraordinary people who have become my family. I wish you all the best.

Cherish these last ten days. Use them well. Which, yes, means study for finals, but more importantly, use them to complete your album. Capture that image, have that moment you've been meaning to have. Celebrate. And in ten days, we'll see where we stand. Thank you.