

Good morning, faculty, staff, administrators, Trustees; good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Fortunato, Matty and Katie; good morning, guests, family, friends; and good morning to my dear Class of 2017.

It is my honor to stand up here to speak to you on this special day.

As your yearbook editor, I had the privilege of looking back to all of our freshman photos to create the throwback page.

In creating this page, one of my favorite in the yearbook, the process of searching and scavenging through old photographs was ever entertaining. Crowded group pictures from the first few weeks, with smiles decorated with our braces, messy morning hair after one night of camping at the freshman retreat, and colorful sleeping bags and pillows dotted our journey. The process was also shocking and touching as the embarrassing, yet cute, photos brought back so many memories, and prompted me to observe, witness, and reflect on the changes every individual in this class has gone through in the past four years.

There are the obvious physical changes:

Lorrissa changed her hairstyle almost 5 times;
Emmilla also cut her hair and became everyone's friend crush;
meanwhile, Kyle's hair grew longer and longer.

However, the inward changes reveal more than the outward hairstyle changes.

Our first performances on the stage, long chats with advisors, unexpectedly intriguing research projects, meditations during vespers, countless athletic victories, the joy of earning friendships and the loss of a dear member of our community ---

All of these moments that seemed fleeting imperceptibly catalyze our inward changes. And we have changed.

My first defining moment was just a song in my first play ever, an adventure that I would never regret. On the closing night half an hour before the start of the show, Marda, the student director, asked me to perform a rendition of "Eye of the Tiger": she thought my interpretation of the song's lyrics would add some humor and originality to the scene where two ambitious five-year-olds run for president. When the time came to sing, I blanked. However, without realizing it, I already had opened up my mouth, singing out of tune like a five-year-old, who indeed my character was. I was mortified by the sound of my out-of-tune singing echoing throughout the theatre, but the moment I saw Mrs. Stone and Yichuan who were sitting right in front of me in the audience laugh, I smiled.

Throughout our four years, we've all experienced moments of confusion and uncertainty. Yet it is indeed with applause and smiles from our "audience" - faculty, advisors, friends - that we received affirmation and continued on our path of exploring and changing.

I cannot represent every single moment of change all of you have experienced in the past four years; however, I do hope that there are a lot of examples coming to mind right now. As the moments replay in your heads, my classmates, ask yourselves, how often have you taken a pause to cherish these changes, to understand them, to reflect on who you have become because of them?

Every time when I returned home to Shanghai, my parents would inevitably say, “You grew! A tiny bit taller! A little more mature! You are no longer that little girl we sent away.”

I always rolled my eyes, “What are you talking about? I just came home three months ago. Nothing can change that much.”

“You don’t see it because you are too familiar with yourself,” my mom replied.

In Chinese, there is a saying, “Dang Ju Zhe Mi, Pang Guan Zhe Qing.” - If one is personally involved in a matter, it is easy to be blinded; on the contrary, if one is not involved, it is possible to see the matter more clearly. Regarding an understanding of ourselves, we are usually blinded because just like my mom said, we assume that we are most familiar with ourselves; however, we might not be.

During my senior seminar dinner, Mrs. Pagotto, my fabulous advisor, talked about what we should learn in our 20s. One piece of advice is “Know what you need.” I quieted down and started to search for that answer in my head. Friendship? Love? Food? Music? Surprisingly, I couldn’t locate a definite answer, but I do know I have to take the time to think about it.

Here, as we stand on the doorstep to our 20s, we often focus on the grand future, on our grand dreams, a focus which is not misplaced. However, we should not ignore reflections on the present, on the past, on the small changes, on the influence people around us have had on us and most importantly on ourselves. We always say “time flies” but never take action to slow it down a bit and spare some time to just spend with ourselves. Everything happens at such a fast pace; meanwhile, changes within ourselves in terms of our worldview, our self-understanding, occur so gradually that they escape our mind every day and every minute, losing their significance.

Horoscopes, BuzzFeed quizzes, MBTI personality tests aren’t the most reliable sources to describe who you are. You are. Slow down and figure out who you truly are, what you truly need, little by little as we step into the next stage of our lives, as no one, neither parents nor advisors, will supervise us 24/7 anymore. We need to learn to keep an eye on our own changes, our own growth, our own needs.

As your speaker, I was endowed the privilege of using this opportunity to take a pause and to reflect on the changes I have witnessed around me.

Chinoso certainly has expanded his sphere of influence from the football field to the Armstrong stage with his phenomenal rapping skills and his emotional final football announcement. Thank you for showing me that others aren’t one-dimensional.

Lucy has certainly become Blair’s celebrity singer as she found her sparkle in Headmasters’ talent shows. Thank you for letting me empathize with your music and for showing me what true talent is.

Jane changed from an elegant dancer friend of mine to a fearless female wrestler. Thank you for showing me that with determination, one can defeat all kinds of stereotypes.

Alyssa, a shy new sophomore, learnt to shine and gained confidence on the pitcher’s mound and on the stage as my drumming partner. Thank you for showing me responsibility and team spirit.

There are so many others that have changed and my list would go on forever.

So, today, as we try to elongate our brief time left on Blair's campus, pause and think.

Today should be *the* day to do some of these things that we always complain that we don't have time to do.

Before marking a period on this grand chapter of our lives and before excitedly moving on to a new stage, I invite my Class of 2017 to take a pause before your departure and think back to your first day here and be ready to be awed by how much you have changed since then.

I also invite faculty, staff and friends to tell us how we have changed in our Blair careers, because maybe, we haven't slowed ourselves down to recognize them yet.

On our car rides out from Blirstown, say farewell to this campus, but don't say farewell to the changes this campus has brought to you; embrace the new journey, and also embrace a new understanding of who you truly are. Because every bit of change is worth celebration, especially today.

Once again, congratulations, Class of 2017! Thank you.