

Valedictorian Speech, U of T Law Class of 2015

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Good afternoon everyone. Congratulations class of 2015, you just graduated from law school. Doesn't it feel good?

I was going to suggest that we all call ourselves 'esquires' now but Dean Iacobucci informed me that the term was no longer 'hip'. He suggested we use the term 'rainmakers' instead. So yes, that's actually what you'll find is written on our diplomas.

You all look stunningly beautiful. Of course, the last time some of us saw one another was at the haggard end of the exam period so it might just be a relative thing. Regardless, you all clean up tremendously well.

A warm welcome goes out to our families and friends, it means so much to have you here to share in this day. As tokens of our gratitude, please find under your seats vouchers for 1 hour of free legal advice from your respective graduate. To be clear, anything above that is a billable hour.

Welcome also to the faculty and staff in attendance, thank you for coming as well. Now underneath your seats you will find a stack of IOUs for \$90,000 from each member of the graduating class. Go ahead and add it up. Every cent is accounted for. You're welcome.

It is really so wonderful to be all together today. Thank you to everyone for attending, and particularly to our classmates and our guests who made it from out of town. This day is really about a shared triumph – a triumph over the tyranny of Netflix. We stopped streaming at least long enough to get law degrees, and that is no small feat, ladies and gentlemen.

A double congratulations to our dual degree people. As someone who is receiving a juris doctor simpliciter, I am very impressed by all of you.

Fellow classmates, we started from the bottom, and now we're here. Sometimes I think we take for granted the learning and the growing we've done since September of first year.

It was at that time that I wrote down a list of law school goals I wished to achieve. I have to admit, some of the goals went unfulfilled, such as publishing a paper, or learning to drink scotch, which I still sadly hate.

But, as I'm sure like most of you, there were other achievements that I couldn't have possibly anticipated. We had a very vague idea of what was in store for us or what we ourselves had the ability to accomplish.

Do you remember what it was like being a 1L? A simpler time - back when a tort was just a quasi delicious dessert and business organizations didn't sound like an oxymoron. I remember in 1L being absolutely scandalized when we learned in criminal law that provocation is a partial defense to murder. Like, murder murder. However, after three years of dealing with our exam software, I can see it.

We're a very unique class. We were the last to start our legal education in the old Flavelle building before construction began, as well as the last cohort to endure a staggering 7 classes in our first year. Well we succeeded, defeating the odds and crushing the dreaded administrative law in the process. After this resounding triumph, they evicted us and changed the curriculum.

But that didn't stop us - oh no. Our little community continued to thrive across the street on the Victoria College campus.

We had an unbelievable Students' Law Society that worked tirelessly for us. We were very lucky to have had such dynamic and selfless people running the show. Thanks team.

We have a lot of things to be proud of. Our mooted results this past year were some of the best in this faculty's history. With 10 first place wins it is safe to say that U of T swept the competition, at home and abroad. Sure, other schools complain about us winning everything...I wasn't really going anywhere with that. That's just a fact.

Our pub nights were legendary. We essentially closed down two popular Toronto bars with our vigorous dancing. This was another one of those law school achievements that I could have never anticipated in September of first year. Wreck Room and Andy pool hall - This diploma is for you!

We created clubs together. We went on trips together. We fundraised together for causes as diverse as the marks listed on my transcript.

We raised the profile of UV, our local paper, making it the nation's most respected news source.

We were peer mentors to other classes, to aspiring law students, to high schoolers, and to one another. The propensity of our classmates to help others out is something that always stood out to me and made me very proud to be a U of Ter. We have an incredibly strong sense of community as well as an unspoken commitment to help each other out that made every day at school easier and more enjoyable.

Our class also strived to promote access to legal services in a time where legal advice is exceedingly becoming prohibitively expensive.

We worked and volunteered at Advocates for Injured Workers, Aboriginal Legal Services, the Schlifer Clinic, Downtown Legal Services, the LAWS program, and with Pro Bono Students Canada, among other organizations.

Our classmates worked to better people's lives around the world through the International Human Rights program and supported the enforcement of our own Canadian constitutional rights through work at the Asper Centre.

Not only has our class worked hard to make legal services accessible, we have also advocated for accessible legal education. It is important to recognize the double barreled effect of climbing tuition. We simultaneously shut the door to excellent and deserving candidates while narrowing the career options for those who make it through law school, thereby reducing the accessibility of legal services to the Canadian public. Hopefully we all continue to fight to increase accessibility to our field as we move forward in our lives.

The class of 2015 has had quite the journey. But some of the people who were with us at the beginning are not here with us at the end. Schreiber Pereira was a dear classmate of ours and a wonderful person. Intelligent, kind and funny, he is missed today and always. We all wish that we were celebrating with him today.

Now, we've all received our degree, but we didn't get here on our own. We are indebted to everyone who supported us along the way.

Thank you to the faculty for preparing us to go out into the world and opening our minds. You have made us more knowledgeable, thoughtful and opinionated. And while our parents might say that we are the same level of argumentative as we have been all our lives, our argument win percentage has surely gone up.

The U of T staff was consistently ready to go the extra mile for us. The career development office and other administrators dealt with our meltdowns and crises with aplomb.

Thank you also to our friendly librarians for your patience and for enduring our incessant mcgill guide questions. Also, I think one of the most magical moments in my life was tim hortons being delivered to the reading room at 4:30 am mere hours before final paper deadlines.

Thank you to our extended family and friends, and to the children out there whose parents are graduating today. You brought happiness to our lives, making the rough patches easier and the good times a real celebration.

We are also forever grateful to our significant others for their love and support. Thank you for sticking by us and being there for us. You gave us strength when we most needed it and we relied on you more than you could possibly know.

Last but certainly not least, we have to thank the parents in the crowd. Moms and dads, we couldn't have done it without you and we love you very much. Thank you for everything.

Fellow classmates, it is a great privilege to be speaking today but the greater privilege has been being a part of such a wonderful group of people. One of my goals from September of first year was, and I quote, “Get to know lots of new and awesome people and become friends with them”. Sure, this bullet point had a smiley face beside it and sounds like it was written in crayon.

However, I couldn’t have guessed the extent to which this hope would come true. We’re a group of individuals with wide ranging interests and backgrounds. Everyone here brought something unique and remarkable to our years together. Class of 2015, it has been a pleasure and an honour. Thank you.