

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
December 16, 2007
Presented by Juliann Szablewski

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family, and friends.

Four and a half years ago, I arrived on this campus with feelings of excitement and anxiety as I am sure many of you did. Even those who came as adults to pursue degrees and further their education probably felt similar emotions. Initially, I was not entirely sure what to expect from my “college experience,” but I knew three things for sure: I wanted to graduate as a nurse, run cross country and track while doing it, and attend weekly Mass as often as I could. At the time it seemed like an easy enough track to follow for a so called “college experience,” yet as I look back today I never realized the impact four years of college could have on a person’s life. In fact, my time at Lewis University has molded me into the person I am today, giving me the confidence to move forward, and the hope to achieve great things.

I chose Lewis because it was large enough to offer the courses I wanted and the activities I enjoyed, but also small enough that I would not feel like a number. I wanted attention in the classroom, the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate

activities, and the ability to practice my faith. Even though I was a scared little freshman, I felt secure knowing that Lewis had a mission to educate while building a community of respect, collegiality, and service. With this mission in mind, my experience has been most influenced by three areas: nursing, athletics, and ministry. Each contributed to building my Lewis community through the value of association.

The idea of community strikes me first when I think of my experiences as a nursing major. From the start of my classes here at Lewis, hard work was not a stranger to me. I am sure most of you can relate to the long classes, the difficult exams, and overwhelming readings that are required of a Lewis student. The ever famous phrase often crossed my thoughts during my early morning clinicals and late night study sessions, “What was I thinking?!” But I did it, and I have so many people to thank for that. My family who had to hear me complain on a daily basis, my teachers who really did know what was best for us, and my friends within the Nursing program without whom I don’t think I could have survived. They became my nursing “community,” that I could study with, relate to, and depend on. From this experience, I gained knowledge, confidence, and empowerment from helping others.

Next, athletics extended this established “community” further, and helped mold me into the person I am today. I do not know how many people questioned whether or not I could successfully complete my Nursing major while competing in athletics. But quite honestly, I doubt I could have done one without the other. To many of you who might enjoy listening to music or hanging out with friends as a means to unwind, running was my outlet. There’s something about an easy run on a crisp afternoon following a very stressful day—it just calmed my nerves. My ability to balance a difficult major with a time-consuming activity taught me leadership and organization. From this experience I learned that, with perseverance and determination, some of the most difficult and trying tasks can be accomplished.

Finally, I felt as though my “community” was complete with ministry as the final piece. Balancing school and athletics did not leave me as much time as I would have liked to participate in the ministry programs that Lewis offered; however, I still wanted to be a part of the faith community. As a result, I volunteered to sing at Lewis’ Sunday night Mass as a member of Tapestry. Even though I did not have much time, this weekly activity brought me closer to God and closer to Lewis. It gave me the opportunity to get to know other students outside of class and practice. It also gave me the opportunity to stay active in the Church despite my busy

schedule. This taught me the importance of service and the idea that there is always time for God.

These three areas that made up my Lewis community are what I believe made my time here as fulfilling as it was. Each activity I participated in led me to a group of people who taught me something different, and each experience within that activity made me appreciate the importance of Lewis' Lasallian heritage and mission.

Even though everyone in this University has different experiences, I believe that we are all similar because we have all benefited from Lewis' spirit of association.

Despite the fact that we all have different backgrounds, we are all part of the community that makes up Lewis University.

With this being said and as a soon-to-be graduate standing before you today, I have one message. Never forget Lewis University and the impact it has had on your life. Remember the friends you have made, the teachers who have inspired you, the fulfilling activities you have participated in, and the knowledge you have acquired. If your college experience was anything like mine, you are empowered, confident, and ready to enter into the next chapter in life. So be proud of your journey. We are graduates of Lewis University and nothing can stop us from reaching our dreams. Thank you, God bless, and congratulations, graduates!