

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 2014
Presented by: Natalie Asp

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family, and friends. Today marks the culmination of what has been years of hard work, and what better way to spend it than being surrounded by those who helped get us here?

As a student tour guide for the Admission Office, I had to learn many things about Lewis as a freshman. In between finding all my classes, managing life in a residence hall, and figuring out what kind of food I liked best, I also memorized what courses were required of all students and what the average ACT score was for an admitted student. I even had to know how many acres of land make up our beautiful campus! It's 410 in case anyone was wondering. Sometimes when I spoke to potential students and their families, it felt like I was just reciting information, but I quickly learned how to include my own personal stories to all the facts about class size, involvement opportunities, and life on campus. I found myself saying things like "I could talk for hours about how amazing our professors are!" Now, I can probably guess what some of you are thinking: Natalie, that is just a cheesy admission line that every tour guide uses. But, four years later, I am very happy to say I genuinely meant every word, because as early as my freshman year I was able to see that the people at Lewis are truly something special. They live the Lasallian mission value of Association. That is a sense that all faculty and staff at Lewis are committed to our success as students.

One of the most valuable elements of a Lasallian education is the outstanding relationships that professors build with their students. They go above and beyond every single day to give us an exceptional education. This education focuses on expanding our knowledge base, but faculty also push us to live as people of integrity and step outside our comfort zones. They want to see us succeed in many ways, and this dedication shows in their constant hard work. It does not matter where we come from or how much money we have; if we want to learn, our professors will do everything they can to help us achieve our goals.

Take a moment now to think of a professor who made a difference in your experience at Lewis. Most of us have at least one who stands out. Maybe they extended their office hours to accommodate your work schedule. Maybe they miraculously emailed you back right away when you were panicking about a paper. Maybe they took the extra time to explain a difficult equation or simply sat down to have lunch with you in the dining hall. I am very grateful to have had many professors who were willing to give advice and

support me both inside the classroom and beyond. It is all of these small, extra efforts and a steadfast dedication to our learning that sets a Lasallian education apart and makes Lewis so special.

Perhaps the person who has had the biggest impact on your Lewis University experience was someone outside the classroom. Was it a coach? A mentor? Or maybe it was a moderator for a campus activity. I found my passion for social justice through my experiences in University Ministry and the way the staff inspire leadership. As Lasallians we are called to serve others and advocate for justice. In the same way that our Lasallian community has welcomed us, it is important that we let those who struggle know that they are cared about and that they are not alone. My question for us- a challenge, really, is how can we use what we have learned here at Lewis to make our world a better place? What decisions can we make to ensure that those around us are afforded the human life and dignity they deserve? No matter what our field of study may be, we can all find a way to contribute our gifts and talents to serving others. This service is part of the legacy we will leave behind, and also a part of our future.

Our families and friends have been asking us for months, “What are your plans for after graduation?” As nerve-wracking as that sounds, it is finally time for us to face that moment. I feel confident moving forward after being equipped with the invaluable tools that come with a Lasallian education. For me, my social work and theology classes have helped me prepare for my future career, and our general education courses have illuminated those things we have in common. Lewis University has dedicated itself to helping us grow in our studies and in our faith, and now it is our responsibility to dedicate ourselves to carrying on the Lasallian tradition in our life beyond Lewis.

Now that the countdown to graduation has finally reached zero, it is time to celebrate! We earned this day. Everyone knows as well as I that it was not always easy. We struggled through sleepless nights, complicated lab reports, difficult lessons, and what seemed like endless exams. Today is something to be proud of so take pictures with your loved ones. Do a happy dance. Go for that extra treat at the reception later because we did it! Thank you and congratulations.