

## **SLS Graduation 2017 (~8 minutes)**

If someone had told me a year ago that over the course of ten months I would have lived enough experiences to fill five years, I would not have believed them. This year has been rich and intense, everything felt accelerated and overwhelming. I haven't yet been able to wrap my mind around everything this year meant. What I do know is that it felt good, it felt right.

Choosing what to talk about today was no easy task. So, in what is perhaps an excessively romantic fashion, I will confirm all the stereotypes on the overdramatic Italian woman and use these next few minutes to present two love letters: one, to Stanford, and one, to my classmates.

Stanford has been the fulfillment of a long-cherished dream. Most of us in the Advanced Degree grew up with the ambition of one day making it to a place like this, where we would find like-minded people, over-achieving nerds from all over the world, a place where we would fit in. This is the most precious thing that Stanford has given me, and a lot of us: a sense of belonging. I have given a lot of thought to what it is that makes Stanford incredible, and I have identified three main components.

Interdisciplinarity, for one. No other place in the world allows you to experiment with so many disciplines. Yes, you are a law student, but in the span of one year you can also be an engineer, a social scientist, a designer. And your playground is the best school in the world. You climb out of your comfort zone, you build on each other's ideas, you struggle to understand and sometimes you don't fully understand. And it is precisely this knowledge that frees you from your inhibitions and allows you to put your thoughts out there.

The second element is diversity. Every day, we work with people from different countries, backgrounds, political opinions, religions, sexual orientations. When you get to have coffee, every day, with an American, a Bulgarian, a South Korean, an Indian, and a Brazilian, you might be talking about the most trivial topic, but you will learn something new. In this past year, the world has been struggling with accepting diversity. We have seen a troubling wave of nationalism and intolerance. Perhaps it stems from fear or frustration, this is not clear to me - what I do know is that it is scary and painful to witness from our point of view, because we know that diversity is an essential ingredient of positive change. We know this because we have been lucky enough to experience it. So, we now have the responsibility, as we leave our Stanford bubble, to show the world that diversity and inclusion are beautiful and generate beauty.

Finally, the third big lesson, and possibly the one that is the most inherently characteristic of Stanford, is the importance of failure. Where I come from, failure is a bad word. If you fail, you feel ashamed, you try to hide it or pretend it never happened. Not at Stanford. Here, failure is synonymous with initiative and ambition – it is at the very foundation of great things. If you have never failed, it means that you have never taken a risk, or that you have never challenged yourself. Stanford encourages us to fail, but it gives us the tools to fail successfully, to see our limitations and mistakes and to address them so that we can fall, yes, but fall forward. Stanford has taught us that if we learn from our failures, then we never really fail, we just learn.

And now let me turn to the love letter to my classmates.

As lawyers, we get teased for being risk averse. I think that we have all defied this stereotype. When we chose to embark in this journey, we left our families, our countries, and our jobs to go back to being students – I would not call that risk averse. But what I have

found out from all of you is that this wasn't really a choice, it was more like you couldn't help it. You had the sensation that life wanted something from you, and you decided to follow that gut feeling. You felt a sense of purpose that goes beyond whatever you were doing before, and you decided to be loyal to it, even if it meant abandoning the certainty and safety of your home.

They say that inspiration comes from being surrounded by people who are smarter than you. Well, for the past ten months, I have felt that way, and it has been a constant source of inspiration. But the wonderful thing is that you are not just smart and accomplished, you are also genuine and kind human beings. It is a combination that is so rare to find.

There is this create-your-own-family thing that happens when everyone is away from home. And this year, between a class and a Munger 5 bash, and of course always with "Despacito" playing in the background, I saw it happen to us. You are all driven and ambitious, but you also crave beauty, romance, and joy. You love to laugh, to dance, to share, to let people into your life. I have found a family in you, lifelong friends around whom I am not afraid to let my guard down and be vulnerable. With you, I have felt comfortable to truly, unapologetically be myself.

I realize that this is becoming a bit too cheesy, so I will wrap up with a couple of final thoughts.

One is a piece of advice, something that you already know, but I feel like this is the right occasion to be reminded of it. You are far too amazing to waste even a single minute doing something you don't want to do, pretending to be someone you are not, or holding back from pursuing your passions. So, my advice to you is: pick a place where you can be yourselves, be audacious, be ferocious. Don't be scared, don't be adults.

And the final reflection. A few people will change your life forever. You are those people for me, and I am so grateful to have you in my life.