

McMaster University Spring Convocation
(Faculty of Humanities and Arts & Science Program)
Valedictory Address

Suzy Flader, B.Arts Sc. (Honours),
Hamilton Place, 14 June 2016

Chancellor Labarge; President Deane; Provost Wilkinson; McMaster faculty; honoured guests, fellow alumni, and members of the McMaster Class of 2016. My name is Suzy Flader, and I am a student in the McMaster Arts & Science Program. I am honoured to be standing here today representing both Humanities and Arts & Science students as 2016 Valedictorian.

At first, I was intimidated by the thought of writing a speech appropriate for both of our communities. After all, we are quite different in a lot of ways. But then I realized that there is a key experience that ties many, if not all of us, together. It takes place in that moment after you have explained to someone that you are an Arts & Science or Humanities student. It is when that person then takes a pause, tilts their head a bit, and says some variant of, “so what are you supposed to do with that degree?” I remember being asked this question for the first time, and not quite knowing how to respond. I have heard the stereotype that arts-based degrees are “useless” and a “waste of time,” but my own academic experiences have taught me that these stereotypes could not be more wrong.

The courses in our Faculties force us to read and write, to reflect and criticize, and to be respectful of positions that we may not have originally considered. We have learned to think critically in a variety of settings and surrounded by a diverse group of people. Whether in the lecture hall, tutorial room, lab, or studio, I believe that most of us have been asked to tackle questions that do not have simple or single answers. While we may have been taught to define our terms, to many it has probably become clear that these definitions can almost always be criticized by someone else. But that is ok, because we know how to take on challenges and adapt to new situations. We have been taught to promote kindness and justice in a world too-often riddled with prejudice, violence, and hate. I hope that in the wake of such events as the mass shooting in Orlando just days ago, we have all been able to refer

to something we learned as students in order to help us be more effective allies and better overall global citizens.

Fellow graduates, I am here today to say that what we have accomplished throughout our undergraduate years is likely much more admirable than what we may have even initially considered. That the tuition fees, caffeine addictions, all-nighters, Solar/Mosaic battle scars, and thesis-related panic attacks were worth today's final outcome. The degrees we will be receiving are much more than expensive pieces of paper with fancy writing on them—they will serve as lasting reminders of our life-shaping university experiences. When you dotted that last period on your first formal essay, or when you sat beside that stranger in lecture who turned out to become your best friend. When you mastered the art of Photoshop, or when you found that perfect study space that may or may not have also been where you watched Netflix and YouTube videos of cute baby animals. Today is the day that we receive our degrees, but our degrees must not only serve as reminders of this moment in time. We have done a lot of growing up in the last few years, and our degrees should remind us of this lengthier part of our stories.

There is so much potential within the group of graduates sitting in this room. Sure, a lot of us may not know exactly where we are going to be in the future. And even if we think that we do, there is a very good chance that our plans will change at some point. What is important to consider is that each of us has developed at least some unique skills in university that we will be able to use throughout our lives. So, before the day comes to an end, make sure to give yourself a pat on the back for all of the hard work you have put in to your undergraduate career. And, also remember to thank all those people in your life who have helped you get to this point. I do not know where I would be without my supportive family, friends, professors, TAs, and various other mentors. Though we may have sometimes thought it, we were never really in this whole university 'thing' alone.

And with that, I conclude my address. Have a wonderful rest of day and enjoy your celebrations.