

Valedictory Address by Ms Nakita Noel

Making a Difference

Salutations:

- Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Sir George Alleyne
- Vice Chancellor, Professor Nigel E. Harris
- Campus Principal and Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Clement Sankat
- Honourary Graduate, Mr. Thomas Gatcliffe and other distinguished members of the platform
- Dean of the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, Professor Dyer Narinesingh
- Distinguished Lecturers
- Members of Parliament
- Members of the Diplomatic corps
- Specially invited Guests
- Fellow Graduates

A pleasant Good Morning to you all.

It is indeed a pleasure, and a great honour to have been given the opportunity to deliver the valedictorian's address this morning. My heartfelt congratulations go out to all my fellow graduates on reaching an important milestone in our scholastic journey. Today is truly ours. A day in which we reminisce upon and celebrate our perseverance, sweat, and yes, even tears that went into the hard work that has brought us success. Someone told me that a valedictory speech should be all inspiring, and give some measure of advice which the graduates can take forward with them. However, I stand before you, wearing the same shoes that you wear. I know nothing which you do not know, so instead of trying to impart some sort of wisdom, I can only reflect on our time spent here and share with you my hopes for our future, and indeed, for the future of our beloved university.

At the very beginning of this journey, we entered into these gates, some of us with a very clear picture of our destination and others not so much, but one thing was abundantly

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clear, there were a myriad of different opportunities available to us. Sometime very soon after the fun and relaxation of orientation week was over, we were struck with the harsh reality that this was no longer secondary school. Classes were in full swing, and the everlasting lab sessions began. The days of being spoon-fed in the classroom, seemed so far gone it was almost a figment of our imagination. The library became our close and personal friend and the stress levels began to rise. After all, I suppose they didn't call it 'reading' for a degree, for nothing. Of course, at the end of that first year, we began to learn the merit of 'putting in the hours.' As Aristotle once said, "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet."

On such a day as this, it would be remiss of me if I did not recognize the people who guided and supported us through this journey, the people who often smoothed the bumpy roads. I was more than fortunate to have lecturers who helped me along the way. Somehow, in one way or the other, they always knew how to extract the best from us. Whether it was the welcome incentive of chocolates for the first correct answer to a question, or at times, much to our dismay, telling us, "You know, it's good, but I know you could have done much better." Indeed sometimes, and only for the ones with a feistier temperament, there was always the challenge, "I doubt you can. I dare you to prove me wrong." Somehow, whichever form the motivation took on, it always worked. We can in no way repay you for the invaluable time and effort which you have expended, but be assured though, and encouraged by the knowledge that whatever good we do, and whatever contribution we make to society as we go forth, is the multiplication of your efforts, in each and every one of us. To our families and friends who always supported us, and lent a sympathetic ear to our frustrated rants, you have also played an integral role in bringing us to where we are today and for this we thank you.

First year was the time to make mistakes, second year was the time to learn from them, and final year was full speed ahead with our eyes on the prize. Lecturers always harped

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on the importance of being present for lectures and we listened...most times. Some of us tried more than our very best to make it to all our lectures. Even on a very rainy day, we bravely crossed the “UWI Rivers” in order to make it to class. I will always remember being doubled over in amusement as I watched a friend doing acrobatics in order to save her shoe from being swept down the drain, and save it she did. Now that was survival of the fittest! Of course, at one point or another, all of us have encountered the University pets, the pack of dogs which have made our campus their home. We’ve fed them, sometimes even played with them. I must admit though, that having had to play tug-of-war with one for my slipper on my very first day of school, I have less fond memories of them. I’ve only recently recovered from the episode enough, to pass them by unperturbed. I suppose, in a way that was a little taste of real life, where you can expect the unexpected.

Past graduates of this faculty have gone on to achieve great successes. Some of us can boast of having been taught by such people. A prime example is Professor Lincoln Hall, who recently received the 2010 CARICOM Science Award. Those of us who had the pleasure of sitting in one of his classes will recall the lively sessions full of amusing analogies...and yes...the stalest of stale jokes that could somehow, still gather a chuckle or two. There are of course, also those who have made our journey unforgettable. I am most certain every department was blessed with them and of course, we wasted no time in giving them fond nicknames. There was the ever-lovable ‘Hobbit,’ our favourite ‘Super Grover,’ an ‘Evil Kermit,’ the inseparable duo of ‘Patrick and his sidekick,’ and last, but definitely not least...the friendly neighbourhood Ninja, who sits among us today, for the very first time conspicuously cloaked in red.

After hearing stories from friends in other faculties, I am of the firm belief that the Faculty of Science and Agriculture is the most student oriented faculty in the whole university. If it wasn’t faculty orientations, it was declaration of intent or final declaration of degree meetings! All of this to ensure we knew exactly what to do, how to do it and

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when we needed to get it done. Of course, we all made our declarations and here we are! But what is the next step for us? Especially going out into the world in this uncertain economic climate?

From the very first encounter we had with our dean, Professor Narinesingh, he always said that when we graduated from the University, our focus should be on creating employment rather than being employed. Some of us plan to further our studies; some of us are entering the world of work. Whatever we choose to do next, we can rest assured that having been through our years of training here, we can and will succeed. We have been given the tools with which we can forge any life we so choose. Francis Bacon once said that “A wise man will make more opportunity than he finds.” This sentiment is one which I hope we can take to heart and incorporate into the very core of our beings.

In my time here, I have encountered some of the most promising scholars, two of whom have obtained their doctorates today. We must be proud of who we are, we are graduates of The University of the West Indies, people who are intelligent, resourceful, grounded, and above all, people who can contribute significantly to today’s ever-changing world. We may not yet fully comprehend the value of all the things we have learned here, but recognise that if we do the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves. The world requires a new generation of scholars who will effect a positive change and go beyond the call of duty; we are part of that generation. It is our responsibility to go into the world and do our part in bringing about this change by effectively applying our skill sets, making not only ourselves, but our families and our University proud. In closing, I would like to leave you with one of my favourite quotes from Robert F. Kennedy. “Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.”

I thank you.