

I would like to begin by noting how grateful I am to have been selected to be today's undergraduate student speaker. I'm going to briefly and honestly review my undergraduate experience in a speech I titled, "A Series of Fortunate Events."

A Series of Fortunate Events:

Back in March over Spring Break, right before/as COVID was beginning to affect all of us, I re-watched Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events. It doesn't matter if you've seen it, but at the end, one of the characters reads a note, from which I found a quote that I liked:

"At times the world can seem an unfriendly and sinister place. But believe us when we say there is much more good in it than bad. All you have to do is look hard enough. And what might seem to be a series of unfortunate events, may in fact be the first steps of a journey."

And this quote struck me because for the last 2 years of my college career, school felt, at times, like that unfriendly and sinister place. I was extremely overwhelmed as a student, doing Aerospace in four years, taking extra classes for minors, completing daily activities for student groups, and maintaining jobs on and off campus. I was already doing too much, and then I had other responsibilities come up in my personal life. So school wasn't fun anymore. I used nights to catch up on school work. We've all done long nights studying, but I was doing those all the time. I was exhausted and stressed out. It was like taking an Aero final or like getting asked questions you don't know the answer to during a Senior Design presentation, I just wanted it to be over.

Sometimes I blamed the department or professors during particularly frustrating times or for particularly difficult schoolwork. I usually didn't have time to start assignments well enough ahead to go to professors with questions. I wasn't always able to ensure I understood content before going to class. I wasn't always prepared for pop quizzes. I wasn't always *present* for pop quizzes. I wasn't always able to put in that work, for any type of teaching style. At times, it felt like I losing in this battle of me vs. School.

But it wasn't always stressful. In community, school was a lot more fun. Senior year I met more people, learned more names, and made more friends than I had for the previous 3 years combined. That's mainly because Senior Design forced all of the introverted engineers to work with people outside of their comfortable group of friends. And that was fun because our group did things together like breakfasts and road trips to launch rockets. We even stayed up writing and editing hundreds of pages of documents; so much fun! But honestly, through all of that, I made friends who helped de-stress my academic environment. I can't name everyone, but I'd like to thank Gabe Buss, Anton Scholten, Michael Roberts, and the rest of my friends for helping me along the way and contributing to my success.

In some cases, I also received help or leniency from professors. They might not all remember that, or me, but I would like to thank them too. On the other side, I would also like to thank professors who rigidly challenged us. In the past, I may have been jaded or bitter about difficult test questions, frustrating homework assignments, vague projects, and seemingly impossible deadlines. Sometimes, I felt dumb for not understanding small things, like where a negative sign

came from, or the difference between rho and a 'p'. But sometimes, it was bigger stuff that made me feel more like a failure, like not even knowing where to begin with solving a problem or panicking during a test.

I later realized I'm not a failure for not understanding something or just not having the time to figure it out. It was good for me to not be able to get it all. I *needed* to be challenged like that. I *needed* to learn what that felt like. I learned more about myself and about my limits. It loosened me up. I started to care less about missing a part of a test question and more about other things in life.

Upon graduation, you reflect on your time in school. You think about the best and the worst times and the things you did and the things that you never got to do. But over time, as you re-reflect, those things change. I have a couple friends who worked closely with the MAE department, named Hunter Rollins and Adam Mayhue. They were both MAE Ambassadors, as well as officers of ASME and Pi Tau Sigma. I spoke to them recently about their undergraduate experiences, and now I analyze *my* experience differently. Now I wish I would've developed closer relationships with certain faculty members and engaged more with the department. It can be hard to see the good, but I would like to thank Hunter and Adam for helping me find it and for supporting me among the department, even when I didn't know about it.

This year was extremely unique in not only the way the faculty supported students, but also in the way we reflect. Our traditional school experience was taken away from us by COVID, which led to an unprecedented year with unprecedented challenges. It has been *extra* hard this year to find good in the world. But now, we all made it through. Plenty of us have jobs lined up or have already started them. Some of us have recently gotten into grad school or have already started. Some of us have other plans lined up. The MAE department, our friends, and our families are all so proud of us, especially after this year. I hope you decide to either reflect or re-reflect on your undergraduate experience now and appreciate and thank those who supported and challenged you. They all helped you get to this point. And if this last year was your series of unfortunate events, then let those events be the first steps in your new journey.

Thank You!