

Speech by Graduate Representative

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Vice-Chancellor, Master, Fellows, Professors, parents, fellow students, ladies and gentlemen:

The past 18 months have proved to be a particular challenge for us graduates, but we made it. Sometimes it is easy to disconnect from our past experience, so I invite you to stop for a while at this point and look over our shoulder: we haven't had access to campus facilities for a long time – I know that I personally miss the sea view from my hostel room and the fragrance of books in the library – and more importantly, we face uncertainty about the future for ourselves and the world we live in. But despite that, we have met our academic and social obligations and are entitled to wear this gown today. I would like to invite all graduates to take a moment to reflect on how we addressed the adversity we went through.

Recalling at this point, one challenge I met during the past academic year is that I feel disconnected, both physically and mentally. I feel that it is difficult to interact with my classmates and instructors – the Internet delay and construction noise across the street make learning different from the usual classroom experience. So what is holding us together at this point, when we do not have the physical boundary of lecture halls?

Back when we were residing at the college hostels, we all had private space, but we would go out and chat with each other at the pantry, or during communal dinners. We would share ideas because we considered them potentially helpful and inspiring to other students, or in other words, because they might be in the interest of the community. I remember that when I was discussing the comments from other students on hostel issues with Professor Ann Huss, she remarked that Morningsiders have the responsibility of negotiating issues about the community independently. Looking back now, that was the start of me realizing my role as a participant in the community, in which I could have confidence in making a commitment and be recognized for the contribution, whether big or small, because I too can benefit from it: I enjoy the accommodation, I learn from the discussions happening in the college, and I feel being supported in general. So this is really a two-way relationship that we have trust in.

Three years have passed since then, and we fresh graduates are facing a world of disengagement, disconnection, and distrust. Recent events have disassociated people from the community they previously belonged to. It is the time when we step out from the two hostel blocks and find that the outside is drastically different from the inside, that consensus may be more challenging to achieve than ever, that we feel anxious, confused and depressed. However, ultimately we need to collaborate on projects, large and small, similar to the course group projects we discussed at the bridge during final season. You look at the mega projects in progress as a response to the pandemic, all of them are coordinated efforts from different minds, so it is the consensus on fighting the virus together for the well-being of all society members that reconnects us across social separation. And I believe that the experience we learned from college life about critical thinking, constructive dialogue and empathy for community members will translate into actionable plans we can follow in the real world, and guide us through the fog of disruption to build something great together.

Thank you for being with us today and throughout our time at Morningside. I wish everyone good health during and beyond the pandemic.