

Hi everyone.

Wow. Here we are. It's really strange to be here right now.

I'd be surprised if any one of us over the last few days hasn't taken time to reminisce over the years spent at Harvey Mudd. Each of us brought something unique to our incoming class, but as first-years we had some distinct, self-selected traits: a streak of unbridled optimism and a fierce desire to make a difference. And we imagined, using everything we came ready to learn, that this day would be the day we would stake our claim in changing the world with the power of science and technology.

Nothing is ever quite that simple, and going through my first year at Mudd introduced me to some difficult truths. I learned that really smart people react to intense pressure in bizarre and often unpleasant ways. I learned that the community I found nurturing as a young mixed-race man with a middle-class background and a robust high school science education was seen as less of a godsend by many people with different backgrounds, particularly women and people of color. And I struggled with the notion that spending every day looking at equations, in the absence of activism or substantive discussion of social issues, was really compatible with the college mission statement of training to become a responsible and conscientious scientist.

But our class has had the distinct honor of stewarding unprecedented institutional growth. And in some sense Mudd is like a constantly evolving organism. Its small size gives it a speed advantage in adapting to shifts in its demographics and environment, and the school from which I am graduating has been fundamentally transformed from the one to which I applied.

During our time we lost a variety of widely-loved cultural entities: pre-orientation, Trick or Drink, breaking things at West. But since I have been here Mudd has made strides towards becoming *the* top-tier STEM school unmatched in its commitment to diversity and representation. We have vastly increased enrollment among students of color. Last year we graduated majority-female CS majors. And much of the infrastructural change required to move the needle on the campus climate has been accomplished with the help of an amazing Office of Institutional Diversity with increased visibility and authority, reinforced by the hiring of several passionate and committed new deans.

Of course given my own race and gender, it's easy for me to be the first to pop the champagne, but closer to home I've seen a complete refactoring of the mental health discussion at Harvey Mudd. I first came to terms with my own neuroatypicality early on in my college career, due in no small part to the increasing openness and discussion around mental health, among both my peer group and our administrators. Since I've been here, I've also seen huge chunks of our curriculum reimaged to deemphasize meritocratic competition and strict training, in favor of collaboration, hands-on learning, and more compassionate relationships between students and faculty. This makes Mudd far more palatable for people that learn, process, and react to, information in different ways.

We aren't done yet. There's no doubt that Mudd, simply by virtue of the society that birthed it and the one which it now occupies, still suffers from a linear combination of social ills that current and future Mudders will need to work together to deconstruct. But I assert that indisputable and extraordinary progress has been made in the past four years, due in no small part to the long-standing efforts, and the indomitable voices, of members of our very own class of 2017. And we should be damn proud of that. All of us have taken time to qualify how Mudd has changed us. Not many of us have thought about how we may have changed Mudd.

This college, of course, doesn't exist in a vacuum, and the lessons we take from the mission statement and the Honor Code must be held very close as we navigate an American society dramatically different than the one from within which we applied. We came wanting to change the world, at least according to our Common App essays, and we will leave with knowledge and raw talent that will empower us to do so. Now more than ever, this is a weighty responsibility.

Many of us here are artists. In creating or appreciating visual art, music, film, or literature, we find catharsis and personal gratification. If you're here, you've engaged a lot with scientific work, and I hope everyone has had a chance to use it to derive the same joy. I don't need to explain to you all the satisfaction that comes from beautiful code, a clean chemical reaction, a well-designed circuit or an impeccable proof.

But art is also a tool. However you personally define art, it is something that reflects concisely our innermost relationships with our deepest-held values. It can be used to help, or to hurt, the most vulnerable among us, and it is an indispensable tool for the decentralized transfer of dissent and resistance. Your art reflects you as an artist, and anyone who graduates from an elite technical institution will do so with a platform from which to distribute that art. People will start wanting to hear what we have to say.

If you respect science as an art form you owe your society this much: use it in ways that reflect the moral, talented, empathetic, expressive group of people that I know we are. There will be those that, by employing us, will seek to redirect our output, as artists and scientists, to suit their own inhumane ends. I urge you to reject them categorically and out of hand.

Let our collective art output reflect the students that stayed up all night helping their friends finish a problem set, even if maybe their friends should have started earlier.

Let our collective art output reflect the students that don't evaporate into thin air when they've been drinking and someone else gets into trouble.

Let our collective art output reflect the students that listen to one another and work to foster more welcoming environments for individuals of marginalized socioeconomic identities.

And let our collective art output reflect well upon my friend Willie Zuniga, who couldn't make it here to be with us in person today. But who, for those lucky enough to know him, served as a shining beacon of hope for an inclusive, principled, thoughtful, and loving STEM community.

And I don't mean to stand here and lecture you guys with any sort of finality — this isn't where I want to leave it. We've all said enough abrupt goodbyes this year. I want our relationships to persist into the future.

I want my kids to sit with your kids on an Ikea sofa and play Hungry Hungry Holographic Hippos while we drink Coronas in the kitchen and talk about how your sustainable housing initiatives are helping to combat homelessness and hunger, and how in my free time I've been messing around with building better neurological interface APIs for the Blind.

I want us to stop for lab-grown turkey burgers (my metabolism has caught up with me and I'm watching my cholesterol) and chat about the vacation after which I realized that engineering wasn't my thing anyways, and that you found yourself much happier in politics or poetry.

I want us to go on a hike together. We get out of our electric cars, somewhere in the verdant wilderness just outside L.A., and breathe in the clean, cool air. And we reminisce about how you supported me when I was going through a really rough time in junior year.

Look, you get the picture. We're surrounded by a group of spectacularly unique individuals, and they're friends worth holding on to. We're going to go do great things. And I'm so, so sad to say goodbye, but so excited to see what we're going to accomplish.

Thank you.