

Good Morning fellow graduates, faculty, staff, and invited guests:

It is a great honor to have been chosen to speak on behalf of the graduates of the 2008 University of Toronto M. Sc. OT class. I must admit that initially I felt overwhelmed with the task! However, in formulating my thoughts, I have come to realize what an amazing two years we have had. In searching for a focus for my address, the obvious theme was the idea put forth by one of our professors - that all of our experiences, socially, academically and professionally - have equipped us with the **tools** to take on any task in our chosen profession.

A wide variety of experiences have imparted in all of us the knowledge that to be successful now and in the future, we must rely on each other as colleagues, friends and professionals. Indeed, during the past two years we have been transformed from a group of individuals to a close knit professional learning community. This peer association will prove to be invaluable in the years to come.

In addition, all of us have “significant” others who have impacted our lives. They have supported us in so many ways including our decision to enter this Masters program.

To our parents, spouses, partners and friends, we extend a sincere thank you!

Our time at U of T has included incredible people, incredible events, and an incredible amount of work. We all had our own reasons for choosing to become Occupational Therapists and I am sure like myself, many of us were a little leery of what exactly OTs did do!! I am sure we all remember the first day stepping into room 235 at 500 University where we quickly found our respective seats. We were a diverse group from different backgrounds and various life experiences all filled with anxiety about what the next two years would hold for each of us.

Thinking back to that first day of classes when we all had our nametags up, I thought, “Wow, I’m never going to remember all of these names” but by the end of a few weeks, we were well on our way to becoming a cohesive unit.

Little did we realize how the many life changing events and experiences would transform us into real professionals and enable us to reach out to each other. In doing so, we became more aware of not only who we were, but how we could use these attributes to assist others and make positive changes in society. Some of us didn't realize the leadership qualities we had and what we were capable of achieving until we used them for the betterment of others. By reaching out to assist vulnerable individuals in society, we also learned much about ourselves. This in turn helped us to grow into professionals who can make a difference in today's world. For as Philip Hamilton said: "In learning to know other things and other minds, we become more intimately acquainted with ourselves, and are to others worth knowing".

A variety of organized social events further provided us with the opportunity to bond. In fact, such events helped to create collaboration, strengthened our communication skills and even served as great motivators.

An ancient Chinese proverb states: "Tell me and I'll forget, show me and I may remember but, involve me and I'll understand." Indeed our academic program at U of T served to do the latter as we were involved in a wide variety of learning opportunities.

Some highlights of our academic years were:

→Our intro placements in October, 2006 which provided us with the first taste of the exciting world of occupational therapy.

→More recently, the Thelma Cardwell Research Day when we presented our research projects

→And finally, our latest achievement, completing the "Exam of Life" or otherwise known as the CAOT exam on November, 1st

Our professors have imparted their knowledge and expertise in each of their areas of practice. They encouraged independent thinking and problem solving, even though some days a "yes or no answer" would have been so much easier. Guest lecturers and others who had the courage to share their personal "life stories" gave us insight into their

experiences and made us better understand the importance of being compassionate. In doing so, they reinforced the idea that “in school, you’re taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you’re given a test that teaches you a lesson”. (Tom Bodett)

Our fieldwork experiences, whether local, national or international in scope, provided us with countless experiences with all age groups and diagnoses ranging from hand injuries to mental health issues. When on placement, we often added a breath of fresh air to the settings- full of energy and enthusiastic to achieve success in our chosen profession. We were also challenged to understand and respect individual differences.

In many of our placement settings, we came to value the importance of using a client-centered approach, of being a team player, respecting our clients and collective problem solving. In short, we learned professionalism -doing what is right, being an advocate for our clients, while also representing our OT program and ourselves.

As we leave our program and go out into the workforce there are many issues that we will face. This will necessitate using our skills, creativity and connections to make a difference in assisting our clients to solve problems, which hinder their independence. As William Ward once said “If you can imagine it, you can achieve it; if you can dream it, you can become it.”

Truly great friends are hard to find, difficult to leave and impossible to forget. The Occupational Therapy program at U of T has left us with not only the incentive to be lifelong learners but has given us the opportunity to create lifelong friendships.

As we venture beyond the U of T campus and enter our chosen profession, remember: “Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be”(George Sheehan)

Inclosing, fellow graduates give the world the best you have and the best will come back to you!

Thank you.