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Valedictorian Address

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CÉSAR MUÑOZ ACEBES

Valedictorian Address

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Class of 95,

Let me tell you something. We are graduating. For real. In some ways it doesn't seem so, does it?

It's scary to finish school. Think for a moment: no more dormitories, no more late papers, no more sleepless nights. . . . For an instant, life seems to overwhelm us, to jump over us higher and faster than we ever wished. We may feel something like a void. We are tempted to ask: ``What's up now?" ``What should I do?" But nobody answers. From today's standpoint college life is no more than flashes of images and gusts of voices.

We can all probably remember our first day here. But why did we come to Sacred Heart, anyway? Many of us looked for a small university which was caring and offered an individualized instruction, for a family atmosphere where, at the same time, we would be encouraged to spread our wings. We came to form a peculiar community: the class of 95. We were the first ones to have a real football team, and the first significantly sized residential class. We were ``pioneers." All right, we are all pioneers at Sacred Heart, but we reflected the transition in the school from commuting oriented to mainly residential. Michael Bozzone, dean of our freshman year in 1991, considers that ``we handled it with grace and retained a sense of ourselves."

This particular community of ours is diverse. Graduating today are students who came here four years ago, together with transfer students, and older students. Our skins have all the colors of a rainbow – except for purple. Many of us come from faraway lands and learned English here.

César Muñoz Acebes is a Media Studies major and Valedictorian of the Sacred Heart University Class of 1995.

VALEDICTORIAN ADDRESS

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Now let me say something in my mother tongue, Spanish, and I'll translate it later in this address:

Yo soy hispano y en las tardes de primavera como ésta me gusta acudir al parque de Seaside en Bridgeport a ver gaviotas y escuchar la salsa de las radios de los carros. Hoy reflexiono que apenas una mínima parte de los latinos allá siquiera soñaron con la oportunidad que nosotros culminamos hoy. Somos tan afortunados que ni nos damos cuenta. Por ello sobre nosotros recae una responsabilidad real, absoluta con nuestros hijos, con nuestra comunidad. Armados de páginas y de computadoras hemos de resquebrajar el racismo, la ignorancia y la pobreza que nos atezan.

Our community also expanded to include our friends in El Salvador, in Hacienda, California, in Calle Real, and in the University of El Salvador. And they taught us about service. Last year we accomplished 44,000 hours of service in our surrounding communities. With Phyllis Machledt on board since last fall as coordinator of the new learning/service program, more and more students are discovering life beyond the campus. However, we still have to work to allow the people whom we are helping, to whose community we have entered, to become part of *our* community in spite of Sacred Heart's rising tuition costs.

And we have travelled abroad too. Dr. Katherine Kidd, director of the growing Global Studies Department, hasn't allowed us to stay where we are, waiting for the different cultures to come to us brought by the international students. She is continuously pushing students out, with no bad feelings on her part.

What a wonderful community we have become! We have overcome academic, social, and financial problems. After all, we are here, right? But behind us there are a lot of people who have supported us all these years, from parents to professors, from friends to neighbors. A Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset, once said: "I am I, and my circumstances." We should say, "we are we, and our community."

Now let me translate for you what I said in Spanish before.

I am Hispanic, and on spring evenings like this one, I enjoy going to Seaside Park in Bridgeport and see the sea gulls and listen to the salsa coming from the car radios. Today I realize that hardly a small part of the Latinos there even dreamt of the opportunity that culminates now for us. We are so lucky that we do not even realize of it. Therefore, we have a real, absolute responsibility with our children, with our community. Armed with books and computers we must crack the racism, the ignorance, and the poverty that tie us down.

Look at us. Look at each other. Our lives have changed, oh yes, they have changed! We are women and men now. We have to struggle. We have to love, and we have to give back.

Thank you.