

Commencement Speech, May 26, 2013
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1,358 days ago, we, the class of 2013, took our first steps onto the St. Andrew's campus as students. So much has changed within the school, our class, and each one of us since that day in September of 2009 and it is incredible to think that we'll be leaving St. Andrew's today, not as students, but as alumni. Think about all that we have accomplished since our time began here: we've won conference titles, earned state orchestra honors, competed in state-wide academic competitions, organized countless school events and fundraisers, and last but certainly not least, survived our senior english exhibitions. Not many of us can confidently say that we came into freshman year knowing that any of this would happen, let alone that we were capable of such feats. I found that the transition between who I was freshman year to who I am now was a seemingly unnoticeable one, so what happened to us over the past four, three, or two years that changed us so dramatically? What happened that made us into the diverse and dynamic people we are today?

After a really great conversation I had with my mom last summer, I began to wrestle with these questions. We were driving through Chapel Hill, NC on day 3 of our southern college roadtrip when she turned to me in the car and said, "Emily, I am so glad you went to St. Andrew's because you used to see the world in such black and white; you rarely saw the shades of gray." After three days in a car with someone, naturally your conversations will progress and deepen, but wow! Where did that come from? This comment caught me completely off guard as I had

never really stopped to notice how my character and approach to thinking and life had changed since freshman year. I guess I had changed, but I did not know the change was that noticeable. In continuing that conversation with my mom and reflecting on it now, I know that my transition would not have been possible without St. Andrew's and the class of 2013. Not only that, but I know that 75 other people went through the same transformation that I did and we did it together.

First and foremost, our transformation is a product of the diversity of our class and the entire St. Andrew's community. For many, including myself, St. Andrew's was the first place where we were introduced to people whose life experiences differed dramatically from our own. Growing up in the bustling, metropolis that is Wilmington, Delaware, my middle school classmates and I lived within a 15 mile radius of each other and had rarely traveled farther than New York or Maryland. Compare that to living at St. Andrew's where your freshman year roommate lives in a state 512 miles away and your neighbor can speak three different languages. It is an extreme culture shock to come to St. Andrew's where the student body is comprised of talented, smart, and interesting kids from every race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic class. While the diversity that was presented to us those 1,358 days ago may have been overwhelming at the time, it is that diversity of culture and spirit that has enabled us to mature and develop as we have. No one could have anticipated how much we would mature here, but this development is inevitable when you admit 70+ kids from very different walks of life to one grade. Every member of the class of 2013 brought very different experiences to campus those 1,358 days ago and these experiences ultimately expanded each of our minds and hearts. As we chatted over breakfast, challenged each other in class, cheered each other on at sports, and rehashed the day on dorm,

the class of 2013 learned to celebrate our differences and appreciate the varying perspectives we brought to campus. We went beyond empathizing with each others experiences to relishing in them. This celebration and appreciation is what united our grade and made us the dynamic force that we are today and none of this would have been possible if we had not moved past our initial, black and white impressions of one another and embraced those nuances.

Throughout our time here, the members of the class of 2013 have not only stretched one another's minds and hearts but we have helped enrich and develop one another's passions and goals. Upon opening the letter I wrote to myself freshman year just two days ago, I was not surprised to see that under a heading titled "Goals," I had written: 1. Be school president and 2. go to an Ivy League university (Princeton to be exact); achieving 50% of that is good enough, right? These are not bad goals to set for oneself, however, my reasons for setting them were trivial. A naive freshman, I fell into the trap of aiming for x to get to y and only focused on the end result of and personal benefit from my actions. I'm confident that I was not the only one to make this mistake and as seniors, I hope we are cultured enough now to realize that going through life this way is not a gratifying way to live; life cannot be that black and white. Not only that, but St. Andrew's does not allow any of us to settle for this superficial way of life. After four, three, or two years at St. Andrew's, we have learned to reach for something not for the personal gain, but for the personal development. This personal development is what betters and enhances our community, something which is much more important than simply bettering ourselves. The class of 2013 did not push one another to start clubs, try new sports, or excel in the classroom to solely enhance one another: we did it to contribute to the excellence that defines this community.

My hope for the class of 2013 is that we will leave St. Andrew's today and dive into the world with the sophisticated and nuanced outlook we have spent the past few years developing. This means that we will continue to question and challenge and therefore understand and celebrate. This means that we will continue to strive to participate within and be conscious members of our new communities. In the final monologue of *Angels in America*, Tony Kushner expresses this call to action: "The time has come. Bye now. You are fabulous creatures each and every one and I bless you. More Life. The Great Work Begins." To the class of 2013, St. Andrew's has given us the tools and preparation to be powerful members of society and we need to take advantage of this readiness. It's our time now. "You are fabulous creatures each and every one and I bless you. More Life. The Great Work Begins."