Reflections Commencement Speech

Catherine Davis
College of Business
“I saw my life branching out before me like a green fruit tree in a story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat ripe fruit, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fruit was a husband and a happy home and children, and another was a famous poet, another was a brilliant professor, and another was an amazing editor. Another fruit was Europe, and Africa, and South America. And another fruit was an Olympic champion, and beyond and above these were many more that I couldn’t quite make out. I saw myself sitting at the base of this tree, starving to death, just because I couldn’t make up my mind which I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest. And, as I sat there, unable to decide...the fruit began to wrinkle and go black...and one by one...they plopped to the ground at my feet,” that was a short analogy from Sylvia Plath’s, The Bell Jar, that I feel represents each of our lives and the options we have.

When I entered college, like many of you, I realized how many choices I had to choose from. Do I go into Art History, English, Business, Computer Science, or Biology? There were too many options, and I was overwhelmed. Even after I had decided, I second guessed myself and switched majors twice. I was convinced that if I became this or that major, I would be giving up all those other choices. It wasn’t until I heard the saying that “Life is about picking a direction, and going with it’ that it sunk in. If we focus on what we’re losing during each choice we make in life, we’ll never get ahead in any of the different directions we have available to us.

Our choices are what defines us and sets up our futures, but we don’t always make the right one first. Sometimes we make decisions that we’ll later regret, but that’s part of being human. That’s part of living. I know I’ve made several mistakes throughout my life, but one thing I’ve learned in the past four years is to let it go. Keep moving. Look forward instead of dwelling on the past and worrying about the ‘what ifs’ in life.
However, we’ve all made good choices as well. Each and every one of us has already reached out and made a choice. We came to college, we picked our field, and today we are graduating. Many of us have jobs ahead of us, or are in the process of deciding where to go, but none of us are without options. It’s really up to you, and how you choose to move forward, starting today.

Each of us still has a long and wonderful future in front of us, and with the tools we learned on this campus, we can reach for them and move up that fruit tree towards a future we may never have even dreamed of. Our aspirations don’t end when we graduate, they grow. We have been taught how to think critically, how to learn quickly, and how to grow our own futures.

Today, I encourage you all to look out at your future and see all the choices you have. Think critically on each path that lies before you, but don’t be afraid to take that leap, reach out and grab the fruit in front of you. Don’t forget your dreams as you leave this University today, carry them with you, and let them push you forward. But most importantly, don’t forget that life is about picking a direction, and going with it.

Thank you and congratulations.