



Lila Vaseva's Winter 2010 Valedictorian Speech

Members of the Board of Trustees, President Dugan, Honored Guests, Members of the Faculty and Administration, Fellow Graduates, Family and Friends, good evening.

Today we have come together to celebrate a turning point in the lives of the remarkable group of people standing before me. We have learned, laughed, loved, gotten into trouble, and most of all matured together. But the moment to venture on our own into the "real world" and truly pursue our passions has finally come. With a greater confidence, knowledge and awareness of the world, we are about to cross the final line of the St. Francis Bridge.

But before we make that final step let me share with you a little story about my journey to that Bridge. I was born and raised in a small country in the Balkans called Bulgaria. I was in my final year of high school, just about to start studying for the university entrance exams, when I realized that if I applied for the Political Science program that everyone was recommending to me I had to spend the next four years of my life going through the same exact streets and seeing the same old faces as I did while in high school. The reason being, the two institutions were just a couple of blocks away from each other. At that moment I felt like I was trapped. I felt like I had no alternative but continue the same old colorless journey.... In my head though, I had a dream of finding a place where new things happen every day, where people smile at each other, where people are hungry for knowledge and are passionately committed to respecting each others' differences... And one day my two cousins, who I am so happy are here with me tonight, told me about a college in New York City called St. Francis – also known as the Small College of Big Dreams. I looked it up online and though I was unimpressed by its website (...everyone who was applying 4 or 5 years ago knows how terrible our website was back then...), I was impressed that the College cared about people's dreams... I did not hesitate. I left the comforts of my home for the unknown and the city where people say, dreams are made.

In thinking about what I wanted to say to you today, I asked several of my friends in the college what was truly special about their experience in St. Francis. There were many answers but it seems that all of us truly appreciated the small class setting in which courses were taught. In St. Francis we rarely had more than 25 students in a classroom. And it was that intimate class size which allowed each freshman, sophomore, junior or even a senior to meet new people instantaneously, right there on the first day of the semester. The intimate class size also helped us come together as a group and gave us a sense of confidence that our dreams are nurtured, and not

neglected by busy professors. This became especially apparent during thesis writing where the connection between students and the professor is so crucial. I have been waiting for that moment for really long time...Let me see, by your applauses, who here wrote a thesis. A lot of hard work, a lot of our blood went into that thesis...congratulations for its completion.

Another amazing thing about our college is how incredibly easy it is to approach a professor (and believe me it wasn't easy back home). Only Dr. Sennick knows how many times I have been in her office on individual meetings while writing my Political Science thesis. St. Francis faculty has helped us feel at home... and most significantly they made our dreams seem important. On behalf of all the graduates I want to thank St. Francis' dedicated faculty team for all the support and nurturing. We are truly grateful!

I also want to thank a couple of professors in particular all of whom played a vital role along my St. Francis journey.

Dr. Sennick, thank you with all my heart for opening my eyes for the world around me. Thank you for your dedicated work with the UN club and for guiding us through the difficult process of thesis writing.

Pr. Quick, attending your classes has been an incredible pleasure. The passion with which you teach has always been contagious. Thank you for translating the sometimes hard to understand language of economics into a language that each of us can easily comprehend and enjoy.

I also want to thank Dr. Dilyard and Dr. Gomori who greatly enhanced my college experience. I want to thank them for going beyond their teaching duties and for always being ready to hear their students' problems and providing them with advice during difficult times.

Thank you!

And finally what everyone most enjoys about the college: the fact that it is a true melting pot. All the graduates tonight know that in St. Francis diversity and team play ruled the game. They were present in the classes we took, the study groups we formed, as well as the clubs and the debates we started. From sunny Trinidad and Jamaica, to icy Finland and Russia, to the faraway lands of India, Albania and Romania, St. Francis has provided us with an invaluable mini United Nations experience that will stay with us long after we leave this building.

Fellow graduates, it has been a pleasure walking with you along the St. Francis Bridge. Though some of you, including me, might be afraid to make that final step... let me assure you that the education and the friendships we have gained here at St. Francis are precious gifts that we will keep forever.

As the ancient proverb tells us, "We are more than the sum of our knowledge; we are the products of our imagination." So imagine your future. It's dazzling. Because above all else, here in St. Francis we have learned how to learn....

In this very moment one dream that was born years ago has come true. This is the first big step towards many new and victorious journeys.

After years of effort, and long nights, and seemingly endless final exams, we are actually, finally, graduating! As we say in Bulgaria: Chestito I na dobur put!!!!

Congratulations, Goodbye and Wish you all Exciting New Bridges to cross!