



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Olivia Zitarosa '18
President of the Student Government Association Executive Board
GCU Undergraduate Commencement Remarks
May 24, 2018

Good Afternoon.

Welcome, Members of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Marbach, Provost Behre, Members of the Cabinet, Faculty, Staff, Family, Friends, and most importantly . . . the Class of 2018.

My name is Olivia Zitarosa, and I have the honor and privilege of delivering the Commencement Address on behalf of the Class of 2018.

Our journey to get here has not been easy. Our college experience has been filled with late nights, **homework**, early mornings, long days, difficult exams, **homework**, meetings, practices, games, and yes . . . even more homework. Yet here we are, having earned every bit of the diploma that we are about to receive. Didn't it go by fast?

I remember my mom sitting me down the day before my first day of high school and telling me that the four years would go by quick, and before I knew it I would be graduating and going off to college. And then, on my way out the door, "Don't blink, or you'll miss it!"

Like most teenagers, I didn't listen to my mom. I kept looking forward to graduation and never took the moment to enjoy what was going on around me. And, before I knew it, I was putting on my cap and gown, and I realized I had blinked. High school was over.

So, before college, my mom gave me the same speech. And I really tried to take her advice this time. I tried to be present, get involved, and make friends. But no matter what, everything seemed to circle back to the thought of graduation. And as I began to write this speech just a few short months ago, I realized again, that I blinked. And now here we are.

So let me just go on record, in front of 3,000 people and state, PUBLICLY:

Mom . . . you were **right**.

I replayed these past four years in my mind over and over again. I remembered the times that made me laugh, the moments that made me cry, the people, the tests, the classes, the accounting equation (thanks to Dr. McQuillen, I don't think I will **ever** forget that), the speed bumps, and being chased by bees on the sidewalks (which actually happened to me multiple times, believe it or not.)

But when you think about YOUR time at Georgian Court, and all you've experienced, what comes to mind?

The friends you've made? A professor who has changed your life? A mentor who has inspired you? A class? Or maybe just driving through Lakewood every day?

When I reflect on MY time at Georgian Court, there's a lot that comes to mind.

I think of the amazing people who have inspired me along the way. Like Marisa DeVito and her passion for everything she does, Nick Ciccone and his heart of gold, David Hamilton and his dedication, Taylor Dash and her compassion for others, and Casey Tumblety and his unwavering loyalty and friendship . . . just to name a few.

I think about the professors that I've worked with, each of whom has single handedly inspired me in the field of business and taught me what it means to be a leader in today's world.

I think of my mentors.

Erin McCarron, who took me under her wing and helped me grow into the person I am today.

Dean Jennings, who, by his own example, showed me what true servant leadership is.

Provost Behre, who time and time again taught me the importance of having a strong case and the data to back it up.

And, Dr. Marbach, who through his humility, ability to truly listen, and genuine concern for students has made himself a dynamic leader and role model who has inspired me in more ways than I can count.

Georgian Court has given us a lot. My favorites being free t-shirts, breakfast for dinner, those cool hang tags for our cars, more free stuff. . . .

But the most valuable things we have acquired are actually intangible.

Georgian Court has given us the opportunity to chase our dreams and make them reality, by putting in the right amount of hard work, perseverance, and effort. With the knowledge and skills we have acquired, we know that no dream is too big or too small. All of them are obtainable with the right mindset and work ethic.

Millennials get a bad rap. We are often called lazy, entitled, and digitally obsessed . . . but I would actually argue the opposite. Sitting in this room today are some of the hardest-working, intelligent individuals I've come across, who are passionate about change and helping others.

There's a quote by entrepreneur Jim Rohn that I believe describes this class perfectly.

"If you don't like where you are, then move. You're not a tree." In other words, if you don't like something, DO something about it.

For example, Jess Handsaker stopped at nothing to play the sport she loves and pursue her career in exercise science, and for her, that meant uprooting her life in Australia and traveling halfway around the world to do so.

Another example is Rebecca Scharen. She saw there wasn't a place for artistic talent to be showcased on campus. Therefore, she created the Restart the Arts Festival, and gave a platform for individuals to express themselves artistically, which renewed an appreciation for the arts within the GCU community.

So, we couldn't be anything further from stereotypical millennials. The values we have acquired during our time here at Georgian Court allow us to stand out from the crowd. Georgian Court has prepared us and equipped us for life. We now have the tools, resources, and knowledge to go forth and make this world ours.

Georgian Court has also taught us to keep our eyes open to opportunities and to say YES to them, because you never know just how life-changing they may be.

During our 2014 New Student Orientation, there was a panel of alumni that talked to us about taking advantage of opportunities here at Georgian Court.

One young alumna talked about how she came to GCU just wanting to go to her classes and go home—but on a whim, decided to say “yes” to an opportunity that would eventually lead her abroad.

She talked about how imperative it is to say yes to every single opportunity that comes your way. And upon hearing that, I remember thinking “Eh, thanks but no thanks. I'm not really here for that.”

But fast forward a few weeks later. I'm sitting in the Gavan Lounge, by myself, when I was approached by a senior telling me that I should run for the Student Government Association.

I initially could not have been more turned off by the idea. A million thoughts ran through my mind, mostly negative, about how I didn't have the time, it wasn't my thing, I wasn't interested, and it wasn't in my plan.

And you know that “plan” I'm talking about—the one you walked into Georgian Court with. The plan that you mapped out perfectly. The plan that nobody could alter. Well sometimes, our plans don't work out the way we think they will, and that's okay.

My plan was to be a history and education major, graduate in four years, and be involved as little as possible.

But before I could say no to running for the Student Government Association, I remembered what that girl said.

“Always say yes.”

So, I said **yes**. And that **yes** changed my life and began forging a new path, one that I did not plan or expect, but one that I will forever be thankful for.

That day, if you had told me I would go on to serve on the Student Government Association for four years, change my major twice, get involved in everything that I could, become the Executive Board President for the Student Government Association AND be on stage at graduation, speaking in front of 3,000 people, I would **NOT** have believed you. I would have told you that that was **NOT** in the plan.

Robert Frost once wrote, “Two roads diverged in the woods and I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” For me, that could not ring any more true. Sure, it would’ve been easy to sit back and stick to my original plan. But looking back, these four years have been nothing but rewarding.

You never know where opportunities lie and who can offer them to you. You’d be surprised what will come knocking on your door when you open yourself up to the possibility and take the road less traveled.

I encourage each of you, wherever you go, whatever you end up doing, to keep your eyes open for opportunities. Listen to what’s going on around you, and don’t be so quick to say no. You never know where the road will lead.

Georgian Court has also showed how much we have to be grateful for, including our professors, leadership advisors, and administrative leaders who have helped us find ourselves and grow, both professionally and personally.

Who do you have to thank? Maybe you have professors, coaches, or mentors who have helped you along the way. Before you leave today, make sure you thank them for their support, guidance, and patience, because I have no doubt that they are beaming with pride over you right now.

Be sure to thank one another, too. Someone may have impacted your life and they don't even know it. Whether it was talking in the hallway before class, working on projects, cheering each other on from the sidelines, or just a friendly smile in passing, someone has made your journey here unforgettable, and they should know.

Lastly, I would personally like to thank my parents, family, friends, and loved ones who have helped and supported me every step of the way. They calmed me down when I was stressed, held me while I cried, and pushed me to keep going even when I wanted to give up. I am beyond grateful for their love and support.

I encourage each of you to remember your roots. After today, we are GCU alumni. So, always remember to hold your head high, and leave your mark wherever you go.

So, Class of 2018, today we embark on the next part of life's big adventure. One where we will take the road less traveled, chase our dreams, say yes to new opportunities, work hard, and be grateful for it all.

It has been an honor and privilege to work with each and every one of you, and I wish you all a life filled with love, happiness, and success.

Congratulations, and best of luck to the Class of 2018!