Hello, Class of 2011, family and friends. It seems like just yesterday that we were moving into our residence halls for the beginning of freshman year. We didn’t know what experiences lay ahead of us, we were nervous and excited with anticipation of the unknown, but at the same time we were prepared to embrace the challenges that lied before us. Today we find ourselves at the other end of that journey, but in a position that is eerily similar. Instead of fretting over the future, let’s use this opportunity to see what lessons we’ve learned from the community that’s given us so much over the last few years.

I’m not sure how many of my classmates have taken the time to read over he Virginia Tech Principles of Community, but this set of values that you can see posted all over campus stresses the importance of diversity and inclusion of different cultures and people into the collective experience of Virginia Tech. It has shaped our experiences here more than any of us have thought about.

My favorite of these principles is, “We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We
acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.” Throughout my time here in Blacksburg I’ve seen this principle played out daily. Few would be able to say that they have managed to go through all of college without becoming friends with somebody from a completely different background than their own.

That was the part of freshman year that really excited me, and taught me the most about myself. If you look back it was probably the most educational thing about your freshman year too. Now take those freshman year experiences and add another three years to it. How many more friends have you made, how many more cultures have you encountered, how much have you learned from all of these different minds around you? If you really delve into who you were before meeting these people, and who you’ve become because of them being in your life, you’ll find that the value of human diversity is priceless. As we throw ourselves head first into the world, keep the value of diversity as high in your mind as it is right now, and be ready to keep learning from those around you.