Convocation 2019
Monday, August 19, 2019
"Convocation Remarks"
Dr. Jose M Torres, President
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

Rose Moore. IMSA's first Latin teacher. Yes, IMSA students learned Latin for the first 13 years from 1986 to 1999. Thank you Doc Nok for helping me with this information.

I thought I would share some lessons in Latin about how to succeed at IMSA with our newest class of students, our sophomores. Of course, these lessons apply also to our juniors and seniors. Well, technically, I am not going to share the lessons in Latin. I'm just going to use some Latin words and phrases to make my points.

Are you ready for your first lesson? Are you ready?

But, first, good morning everyone! And welcome to the new Academic Year 2019-2020 and our Convocation ceremony!

I want to offer a very warm and special welcome to our newest class, the Class of 2022. You are about to embark on a 3-year, life-changing adventure. Are you in the house, class of 2022?

Welcome back home to the class of 2021. With one year behind you and one year ahead of you, are you ready to seize the day now that you have established some rituals at IMSA? Class of 2021, let people know you are present!

And to the Class of 2020, what can we say about you? (Put eclipse glasses on) When you arrived on the IMSA campus in 2017, all of us had to put on these funky glasses because you were so bright. You almost blinded us! Of course, your arrival at IMSA coincided with the first solar eclipse that could be seen in the US in 99 years! Welcome back to your last year at IMSA, Class of 2020--the class with perfect vision! I can't see you with these eclipse glasses on, so let me hear you Class of 2020!

This morning, we have IMSA ambassadors, IMSA Emeriti, our IMSA Founding President, IMSA Fund President and Directors, and so many other VIPs, who in one way or another support IMSA through their generosity, such as donations to our auditorium, that I will not be able to mention them by name. Students and IMSA staff, please give them a warm welcome as they stand.

Students: many faculty members and residence counselors have just returned from their summer break and are now prepared to receive you in their classrooms and to support you in your residence halls. Please give your faculty and residence counselors a standing ovation!

Thank you.

Now back to our Latin--I mean to my Convocation message.

Someone has called Convocation part of the “scholarly circle of life.” I have not yet seen the newest *Lion King* movie, but I imagine that it contains the theme of the “circle of life.” The scholarly circle of life points to the fact that just as you, IMSA’s incoming class, have great potential to learn and grow and expand your sense of belonging and individuality, the outgoing class, the Class of 2019, which we celebrated at Commencement in June just two months ago, left IMSA with the potential to demonstrate to the world what they learned and how they grew while at IMSA. Thus, “the scholarly circle of life”--I’m not going to sing!

In order for you, the Class of 2022 and your fellow students in the class of 2021 and 2020, to succeed, you must learn the following lessons beginning today and throughout your tenure at IMSA and into your future.

The **first** lesson is “Confidere.” Everyone please repeat the Latin word “Confidere” after me. You can use an Italian accent, or Spanish, or French accent, or whatever Romance language accent you want. It doesn’t matter. No one really knows for sure how Latin sounded.

Confidere is a compound word made of “con” meaning intense force with “fidere” meaning trust. Confidere, thus, means intense trust, confidence, intense trust in self.

You belong here! You received a letter from the admissions office congratulating you and inviting you to join IMSA.

When the stress comes, remember, you belong here. You were admitted to IMSA.
When people say to you that you got in because of one thing or another. You live in Naperville, or in Morris. You look a certain way, or you speak in a particular manner. Remember, you belong here. You received the same admissions letter as did the other person. Indeed everyone here received the same admissions letter.

Now all the confidence in the world will do you no good if you want to grow and succeed at IMSA if you do not have:

Glarea. Repeat. Glarea. This word is “grit” in Latin. Other words we could have used are: “animo” which means courage; “propono” which means resolve; or “arbitrium” which means determination.

Glarea (grit) is our **second** lesson. Repeat after me, Glarea.

Many in the room might be familiar with Angela Duckworth's book, Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance. I encourage everyone to see Dr. Angela Duckworth's TED talk and or read her publications, if you haven't done so yet.

The reason I bring up grit after talking about confidence is IMSA will test you. For you to succeed at IMSA, you will need to take risks. To fully lean in to risks, you must accept failure.

To face failure and come out on the other side standing, you will need to have grit or "ferocious determination." There is an old Japanese saying, "Nanakorobi, Yaoki". I know I'm supposed to be focused on Latin, but I can't help but expose you to Japanese, which Sensei Bascombe taught at IMSA for many years. Japanese was another language we taught at IMSA in the past.

"Nanakorobi, Yaoki" means fall seven, rise eight. This saying is in some way the essence of grit. Grit is the superpower that can help you succeed at IMSA.

One of the first experiences you may have at IMSA is that you find out that although you were #1 at your school, top of the class, #1 nerd or geek, here at IMSA, we're all geeks and nerds. Here at IMSA, many students score well on tests, have had many opportunities to learn, and know a lot.

If Angela Duckworth knew IMSA, she would say to you, "If you want to make it through the challenges at IMSA, you will need to cultivate grit."

She wrote, "After decades of working on a theory to explain achievement, I finally came up with two simple equations that explain how you get from talent to achievement."

Here they are:

Talent X Effort = Skill
Skill X Effort = Achievement

Duckworth says, "Individuals in identical circumstances (i.e, here at IMSA) will achieve different things based on two things, talent and effort. Talent is how fast you can improve a skill. Effort factors in the equation twice, not once. Effort builds skills. At the very same time, effort makes skills productive.

Talent X Effort = Skill
Skill X Effort = Achievement

Effort counts twice!

(Did you like how in my Latin lesson, I have included Japanese and now, mathematics--mathematics is a language we still teach at IMSA!)

Duckworth continues, “Our potential is one thing. What we do with it is quite another.”

I’ll conclude this point with a final quote from Angela Duckworth. She said, “Without effort, your talent is nothing more than your unmet potential. Without effort, your skill is nothing more than what you could have done but didn’t. With effort, talent becomes skill and, at the very same time, effort makes skill productive.”

There you have it.

Glarea, or “grit” in Latin. Or, if you prefer: “animo,” courage; “propono,” resolve; or “arbitrium,” determination.

So, we have established to be successful at IMSA, you need to have confidence and grit. You also need to get in the habit of doing things in proven ways so that you can achieve the same positive results each time. You don’t want to reinvent the wheel every time you face a routine challenge or task.

As the great psychologist William James said, “There is no more miserable human being than the one for whom every beginning of every bit of work must be decided anew each day.”

We call these habits. A higher form of a habit, one where we are mindful of it, not just performing it involuntarily is a ritual.

A habit is a pattern of behavior that has become involuntary. You do it without thinking (e.g., brushing your teeth, taking a shower, looking both ways when crossing a street).

A ritual doesn’t have to be religious in nature. A ritual is doing something in a specific way to achieve a specific result. (dictionary.com)

IMSA sophomores, learn from our juniors and seniors who have developed habits and many are developing rituals in which they are taking mindful actions to accomplish specific positive results.

Our **third** lesson, thus, is Ritus. Repeat. Ritus is ritual in Latin.

I urge you sophomores, and everyone present, to establish mindful acts that lead to your physical and emotional health. Develop rituals such as eat, move, and sleep to increase your physical health. And, develop rituals to intentionally recover emotionally after periods of stress to increase your emotional health.

Before moving on to our next lesson, let me pause and remind the IMSA staff in the room something I mentioned to them at Community Day last Wednesday regarding our need to model the behaviors, habits, and rituals of physical and emotional health for our students.

Author and activist James Baldwin once put it this way, “Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.”

Our **next and final** lesson is a made up Latin word from H.A. Dorfman, author of Coaching the Mental Game. He coaches his athletes to focus on the moment, to be present in the very thing you are doing. It’s actually a good way to manage stress and deal with anxiety and worry.

Focusing on the moment in Latin is Carpe Punctum, but HA Dorfman calls it Carpe Momentum to indicate not only to seize the moment, but when you do, you also get “momentum,” progress.

So our final lesson is Carpe Punctum. Repeat. Carpe Punctum and Carpe Momentum. Repeat, Carpe Momentum.

Another way to think about Carpe Punctum and Carpe Momentum is Carpe Diem.

Repeat. Carpe Diem. Seize the day.

Make the most of the day. Actually Carpe Diem doesn’t mean “seize the day.” It literally means to “pluck the moment as it is ripe; that is enjoy / seize the moment.”

Students, take advantage of the opportunities at IMSA. Seize every opportunity. Seize each moment at IMSA.

At IMSA you have resources in your faculty and RCs who can help and support your development. Faculty and staff, including RCs, have skills and expertise that you can take advantage of to develop your own skills, expertise, your unique voice.

At IMSA you have resources in your peers. At Thursday’s meeting with sophomore parents and students, I mentioned that I reviewed every seniors comments in *The Acronym’s* Senior Edition.

I reviewed their **BA** and **BR**. **Biggest Accomplishments** and **Biggest Regrets**.

Invariably, senior after senior talked about their BA, Biggest Accomplishments, as the life-long friends they developed at IMSA; breaking out of their shell sooner, and developing self confidence. A few listed their athletic achievements, while a handful described getting into the college of their choice, and or other achievement as their BA.

What did Seniors of the Class of 2019 list as their **Biggest Regrets**?

They lamented not meeting more of their classmates; not getting to know more peers at IMSA. They regretted that as sophomores they did not meet more juniors and seniors. Their biggest regrets centered around not getting involved in cultural shows, not being more social, worrying too much, etc. I loved one of the Biggest Regrets statement, which said, “I should’ve danced more at IMSA!”

In conclusion, my last and final lesson for our students indeed for everyone hearing my voice; I urge you to seize the day my friends. Seize each moment.

Carpe Diem! All together...Carpe Diem!

Thank you!

Now, I am going to begin a new Convocation ceremony for me at IMSA. Each year at Commencement, I am formally presented the graduating class by the principal and I formally accept the class and proclaim them to be worthy to receive their diplomas and medallions. Class of 2020, we will soon be doing this with you at Commencement on Saturday, May 30, 2020! Believe me, time will fly!

So today, I want to begin a new tradition for me at IMSA, I would like to formally accept the Class of 2022. Sophomores, members of the Class of 2022, please rise and remain standing.

Admissions staff, Kelly Lofgren, Kiantra Loza, Jackie Salinas, JaRod Tobler, and everyone who served on the Admissions Review Committee and the Selection Committee, please stand. Thank you for presenting to me the Class of 2022!

By the authority vested in me as President of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy and on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the State of Illinois, I proclaim that these students, members of the Class of 2022, now that they have been admitted to IMSA, are worthy to be accepted as full members of our community, whose mission is to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition!

Best wishes to all on a successful 2019-2020 Academic Year!

Thank you!

References

Dictionary.com

Grit: The power of Passion and Perseverance. By Angela Duckworth. Scribner. 2016.

Quotes from William James and James Baldwin found in Grit.

Coaching the Mental Game: Leadership philosophies and strategies for peak performance in sports and everyday life. By H. A. Dorfman. Taylor Trade Publishing. 2005.