

To our esteemed faculty and staff, to our parents and family members in attendance, and of course, to the IMSA class of 2016, welcome. This is a truly momentous occasion. It is the culmination of four transformative years of our lives and the start of many more transformative years to come. With that being said, let's take a moment to talk about bricks.

I could tell you that bricks are typically made of clay and that their color is dependent on factors including chemical content and firing temperature. I could tell you that bricks are an ancient building material dating back thousands and thousands of years. Or I could tell you that the effective limit on the width of a brick is set by the distance which can be conveniently spanned between the thumb and fingers of one hand, normally about four inches. But as interesting and interdisciplinary as those discussions might be, I'm here to talk about something else, something perhaps a little more relevant. I'm here to talk about the stuff holding all these bricks together.

Let me read you a definition from what is perhaps our favorite source as students—Wikipedia.

“Mortar is a workable paste used to bind building blocks such as stones, bricks, and concrete masonry units together, fill and seal the irregular gaps between them, and sometimes add decorative colors or patterns in masonry walls.”

It's a decidedly unglamorous sort of thing. When people marvel over brick facades, they're probably more concerned with the rich red hues of the bricks themselves than with the grainy, somewhat pasty stuff in between. And yet without the mortar, you don't have a wall or a building. You have a stack of bricks, ready to collapse at a moment's notice.

We come to IMSA unformed, unshaped. We are eager to learn and ready to become *something*, to set ourselves on the road towards a bright future. IMSA gives us the bricks to build the foundation for success. Here, we have received amazing opportunities and new ways of thinking. From the classroom to the residence halls to the pastimes with which we fill our hours, we are given so many ways to grow. Each of us is handed blocks we might never have seen otherwise. Modern physics. Linear algebra. Victorian fiction. LEAD. RSL. StudCo. Hallmate. Wingmate. Roommate. Every brick is a chance to discover, a chance to explore. Each pushes us outside our comfort zones, makes us think critically and learn differently. By the time we leave IMSA, we are different people from the naïve sophomores that entered.

Yes, the opportunities that IMSA gives us teach us the most incredible things. But it is we who have to fill in the gaps ourselves. At IMSA, we have all the tools we need to build something that will last a lifetime. Yet it's up to us to put those parts together, to apply ourselves and to shape our being.

And if I may, I'd say that the class of 2016 has done a pretty stellar job of putting it all together. We began this year with 206 students. And I'm proud to say that there are 206 students here on this stage. The connections that we have formed and the bonds that we have made have brought us to this point. We have cemented our friendship through struggles and triumphs alike, from late-night essays to late-night laughs. These connections are part of the mortar that defines us, just as much as the deep thinking and analytical abilities.

What else makes up that mortar?

Laughter. Tears. Study sessions and procrastination, pressure and worry. Dedication. Drive. Passion. Every one of us comes out of IMSA having gained something different from our neighbor. Our walls are patchworks of this and that, and that's a good thing. It means that in creating our foundation for the future, we have put our own unique spin on—well, us. We build ourselves up, and now, years later, we have created something stunning.

Along the way, we have received support from a vast network that propped us up and strengthened us when we needed it. Our journey was not easy. Without the faculty, staff, parents, families, and friends to glue us together, who knows where we would have ended up? Thank you to every person who has stood behind someone here on stage. It took an army to get us here, and we are forever grateful. From the teachers who put up with us just to give us their gift of knowledge, to the parents who let their kids go three years early, to the residence counselors who were our role models and our mentors and our friends, to every other person along the way, thank you.

Fun fact. This somewhat odd cap that we students are wearing—and which many of us undoubtedly struggled to put on properly this morning—is nicknamed the mortarboard, after the board used by bricklayers to hold mortar. It's a fitting image. We spent years toiling under the weight of high school. We stressed and crammed and stayed up into the fading hours of the night, balancing our responsibilities on what felt like a precariously thin platform. Years of labor have brought us to this day. Now, we can stop and take a breath. We can wipe our brows and look back and marvel at what we have built, what we have achieved. We can take that board with which we carried our struggles and we can replace those efforts with a single tassel, a tassel that by the end of today will be swinging from the other side of our caps. We have conquered the challenge. We have carried the burden, and we are all the better for it.

It's amazing how fast three years passes. And in the end, IMSA is so much more than just a building. Others may never truly understand what it means to be a part of this community, but we will know. Years from now, we'll remember the thrill of Clash or the nostalgic warmth of Carnival. We'll remember late nights spent laughing with best friends, and we'll remember what it felt like to belong here. It's true, IMSA gave us the building blocks for academic and professional success. But it also gave us each other. And as we stand here as a class for the last time, I thank IMSA for bringing us together.

Class of 2016, never stop learning and growing. Never lose that drive or that passion, and never forget what you have gained from IMSA. As we move on to another chapter of our lives, we will continue to expand our brick-and-mortar walls. We will gain countless more chances, and we will learn countless more things. It is my hope that we, as a class, will continue to seek out new opportunities, and I hope that we continue to find better ways of cementing it all together. Yet no matter how far we go, part of us will always belong in a residence hall at 1500 Sullivan Road. And no matter how far apart we may end up, we can find comfort in knowing that we have built something beautiful together.

Thank you.