

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Good morning, IMSA. My name is Yina, and it is an honor to welcome everyone back on campus. As one does, I'll start out by telling you all a little bit about myself.

When I was younger, I had a rock collection. It started out as just a small sack of pebbles and concrete shards— the best I could find in the dry, sandy dirt around my house— but over the course of several years, it grew into something beautiful. I had fragments of striped limestone, chunks of smooth, glassy obsidian, shimmery blue pieces of quartz, and, of course those dusty pebbles that I had loved and cherished so long ago. My rocks were my pride and joy, and I would spread them across my bedroom floor every day, just so that I could admire my collection.

When this phase died down, as many of my phases inevitably did, the rocks ended up in a small cardboard box in the back of my closet and in the back of my memory— until this past summer, that is. As I was cleaning out my room in preparation for move-in, I found those rocks again, and I couldn't help but think of IMSA.

Now, that's not because of our Geology class, or the many, um, abstract concrete structures we have on campus, or even the way that the geese never seem to leave, staying as firmly in place on campus as a boulder. It's because the lessons that I learned as a seasoned rock fanatic are also the ones that I've learned as an IMSA student.

Take, for example, the Mohs hardness test. As the name implies, it is a way to determine the relative strength of a mineral. The premise is simple: if a rock can scratch another rock, it's harder; but if the rock is scratched, it's softer. Easy. But too often do we, at IMSA, do the same, scratching at each other to determine our place on an arbitrary and man-made scale. What math class are you in? What are your extracurriculars? How did you score on the SAT or that AdChem test?

I read a quote the other day on Instagram— you know, those ones in cursive over an aesthetic pastel background— that said that “diamonds are formed under pressure, and bread dough rises when you let it rest.” And the truth is, how we score on this test of strength, where we fall on this spectrum of accomplishment, it doesn't matter. And as we move forward into another year of learning, and grades, and extracurriculars, I encourage you all to take a moment and figure out what matters to you. I encourage you to try new things that seem interesting, regardless of what other people in your life (or your comfort zone) might think. I encourage you to try that sport, join that club, or talk to those people you've seen around campus but don't share classes with. I encourage you to test your strength, but this time relative to yourself.

We are all our own formations. What's motivating to one person may be crippling to another; what others are doing may not be the best for you. Only by choosing the path that is uniquely and privately right for us can we truly make the most of what IMSA has to offer. Diamonds are formed under pressure, yes, but graphite has the lowest score on the Mohs hardness test yet is the cornerstone of the IMSA student

experience. Both are allotropes of the same element, but they are beautiful and useful in two distinguishable, incomparable ways that extend beyond one hybridized carbon atom.

(Pause).

As I mentioned earlier, my rock collection started out as a small– and frankly, rather sad– pile of pebbles. Soon after, though, my friends and I started a thriving rock trade; we’d pass rocks under our desks at school when our teacher wasn’t looking, naming prices and haggling like experienced street vendors. It was through this circle that my collection grew– both in size and in vibrancy.

This magic of trading something familiar for something new found me again at IMSA. IMSA is diverse in a way that many of us have never experienced before– and I’m not just talking about geographically. IMSA is a pool of varied experiences from which we can all benefit; my fondest memories were made after 10 check just talking to the people in my wing, learning more about how they think and how their thought processes differ from mine. In a sense, I was, again, trading pebbles for jewels– the familiar for the new.

So, to the class of 2023, don’t be attached to your **pebbles, and be willing to exchange the old for the new**. This is our last year at IMSA, which is terrifying, I know, but there is still a full year to meet new people and talk to someone you never would’ve thought you would be friends with in sophomore year. We are the last class at IMSA to have experienced IMSA online, we are the tail end of a transition back to normalcy, but let our tribulations not hinder our ability to be good upperclassmen, and in the process, let us find a way to leave our legacy.

Juniors, the class of 2024. Welcome. All grown up. Take a moment today to be proud of how far you’ve come. It wasn’t an easy journey, I’m sure, and the year ahead of you won’t be one either. As you start your second year at IMSA, be extra cautious to avoid the toxic Mohs hardness scale cycle of comparison. **Fools gold** looks an awful lot like real gold, and it’s SO easy to get distracted in the superficial.

And lastly, the sophomores. You all are like **geodes**, in a way. Perhaps you are a little nervous or shy on the surface right now, but over time, we’ll be able to see your inner shine. As you navigate your first year at IMSA, remember that you are not alone. You have a supportive community as tightly bound together as the atoms in a crystal lattice, and know that you can always rely on your upperclassmen to help crack you open– not in a literal sense of course, that would be kind of bad.

IMSA students, faculty, staff, guests, administrators, welcome home. The 2022-2023 school year will be one to remember.

Thank you. (Pause for clapping). Now, please welcome to the podium Dr. Evan Glazer, president of IMSA.