

WikiSpeech by the Class of 2015
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At Stanford, we are surrounded by a spirit of innovation that constantly encourages us to ask, “Why do we do it this way, and how can we do it better?” These are the questions that we, the members of the Class of 2015, asked ourselves when we were called upon to choose a single student graduation speaker. We couldn’t see why our graduation ceremony, in 2015, should be the same as it was for the Class of 1915. So, rather than choosing just one speaker to represent all of us, we decided instead to write this speech together as a class, using an online wiki that enabled all of us to contribute. The result is this speech.

In our first hour at Stanford Law School, a professor welcomed us with the words, “You’ve made it.” We thought we knew what he meant, looking around our sun-drenched campus filled with palm trees and beautiful buildings. Well, except that one. Our future classmates were accomplished, if a little intimidating—veterans, educators, musicians, athletes, activists—people who never thought they would be here, and people who knew this was the plan all along. We had made it to Stanford, and, we thought, maybe we could relax.

That lasted about a day. You may remember it: we didn’t call our families for weeks at a time. Or we called our moms every day. In the way of first-year law students, we lost the outside world to casebooks, italicized commas, balancing tests, and two spaces after a period. The plaintiffs in our casebooks achieved the status of celebrities in our minds. We dreamed of salad bar slips and severed legs. We used words like “stare decisis,” “res ipsa loquitur,” and “wingardium leviosa.” That’s from Harry Potter. We saw law everywhere.

But we didn’t see justice everywhere. We attended law school during some of the most important civil rights struggles of our time. On one hand, we witnessed—and some of us participated in—the legal battles for marriage equality. We witnessed the protections of the Violence Against Women Act extend to Indian Country. But we also witnessed the dismantling of the Voting Rights Act. We learned, in the middle of exams, that prosecutors would not indict anyone in the deaths of Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, or Eric Garner. We saw the stark contrast of learning about justice in the classroom and, at the same time, feeling helpless to remedy the injustices we were witnessing across the country and around the world—injustices perpetuated by the people and institutions we entrust with upholding the law. Injustices perpetuated by the very system we are about to enter.

But what we also started to see were the instruments, the strings, to hear the notes, and to say the words. We each found things that resonated with us—small ways we could “make” change for others—and we set to work.

There are as many stories of advocacy as there are classmates in the Class of 2015. We secured the release of clients who had previously received life sentences for petty offenses under California’s Three Strikes Law. We protected the rights of individuals to practice their faith as they see fit. We represented children to ensure they received the education that met their needs. We provided tax assistance to members of the community. We helped families threatened with eviction. We advocated for immigration reform and other human rights. We published new

scholarship, as authors and editors. And we dispersed to law firms and legal organizations across the country, carrying with us our sense of Stanford collegiality and community.

We understand now that three years ago, we “made it” because we arrived at a place where excellence does not mean perfection; where ingenuity thrives and collaboration is encouraged. We made it because we had the opportunity to learn from the great minds of our time, and put that learning to work to help our clients “make it,” too. And we made it because we found this community that we in turn “made” for each other.

For the past three years, we have lived together, we have studied together, we have celebrated together, and, yes, we have cried together. We Facebook-messaged answers to save classmates from brutal cold calls. Some of us may have even dated. We drank together at all three of Palo Alto’s bars. We destroyed undergrads in intramural championships. We carried each other through hard times, and we carried each other through Las Vegas. And we arrived at this final moment together as students at Stanford Law School, and as an expression of the great faith we have come to place in each other, we wrote this speech together, too.

We recognize how privileged we are to be here today, and we know we did not make it to this moment by ourselves. To every parent, sibling, grandparent, friend, partner, and child... to everyone here today, and those here with us in our hearts, thank you. Thank you for making sacrifices, and for making time to listen to us complain, even when you were stressed yourself. To faculty and to staff, thank you for making the last three years great, showing up when you didn’t have to, turning a blind eye when we smuggled food into the library, and tolerating us when we sent you three emails and followed up in person.

We are leaving this place as individuals with our own paths and missions, but we are not leaving this place alone. Together, we built something special here. And we don’t just mean the staircase that was under construction all of our 2L year. Take these friends, these experiences, these passions, and build something special wherever you land, at your firm or your foundation, inside the legal field or outside it. Congratulations, Class of 2015—we made it here, now let’s make it count.