

Class speaker: 'We can proudly say that we are ready'

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/891/class-speaker-we-can-proudly-say-that-we-are-ready/>

Graduating class speaker Vanessa Virbitsky, of Harrisburg, Pa., evoked laughter and tears with her address at UW Oshkosh's 2008 Commencement Ceremony. The transcript follows:

Welcome to the 2008 UW Oshkosh commencement ceremony.

Well, it's that day. Papers have been turned in and our last exams have been taken. It's finally time to graduate! Now that we're here at the end, let us reflect for a moment on the beginning.

Before we attended our first class at UW Oshkosh, we were presented with a few choices.

The choice to learn.

The choice to expand our minds.

And even if you didn't know it at the time, the choice to attend one of the most prestigious schools in the state of Wisconsin.

Whether you chose to attend UW Oshkosh because it was your hometown, simply because it felt like home or even because your other choices didn't work out as planned, we all chose to be educated at this school.

I chose Oshkosh from my parent's home in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. So, yes, although there have been many discussions and I continue to be laughed at for my pronunciation of the word "flag," I've been happy with my choice to move to the Midwest.

Experiencing classic state traditions like brat fries, Culver's custard, cheese curds and Packer games has enhanced my experience as a UW student. I'm told the last official step to becoming a Wisconsin native, however, is drinking out of a bubbler...whatever that is.

Culture shock aside, we all were presented with several more choices as we first drove down Algoma Boulevard – past Blackhawk Commons, Reeve Union, Clow and Dempsey.

Many of us chose the first place we would live without our parents. We also chose majors. We chose if our 8 a.m. anthropology class was more important than an extra hour of sleep. We chose our friends.

Some of us chose to pursue our athletic dreams by suiting up as a Titan. Others chose to rush for sorority or fraternity life.

And several of us chose to join student organizations like the Model United Nations, Marketing Club or

the Multicultural Education Coalition.

The ambitious chose all of the above.

No matter where we came from or how old we were when we arrived, these choices have defined who we are — who we are on this graduation day 2008.

Sitting here now in our caps and gowns, the end of our collegiate journey presents us with yet another choice — “What do I do next?”

Anyone scared of this next choice? I am.

Have you had one of those moments yet, where the reality of this next big choice creeps up on you?

My moment was at my last gymnastics meet in this building.

I cried through the entire warm-up.

Just when I was getting comfortable, I was also waving goodbye to the very things that I have fallen in love with — this town, this university and these people who mean so much. In fact, in these last few weeks before graduation, I've often thought about all the things I'll be leaving.

I'll be leaving a school that has given me the freedom to discover my independence as a young adult. I'll be leaving a 20-year career in gymnastics. We'll all be leaving something behind in Oshkosh.

We will no longer be afforded the luxury to collaborate with peers and professors. The demands of our everyday lives will no longer be put on hold while we discuss Darfur or attempt to understand Freud.

This is the end to a time that knew no boundaries because staying up until 3 a.m. became natural...for various reasons.

This is the end to the time where we passed footballs on Irving Street, rocked out to our favorite bands as we commuted on 41, painted our fingernails in Scott Hall and studied into the night with our good friend Mr. Polk.

As we come to terms with saying goodbye and begin to look into the unknown, we must remember that we chose to go to college to have these very choices we now fear.

More choices, more doors, a variety of decisions — this is the beauty of what we've gained at UW Oshkosh. This is why we chose to go to college.

And now that this chapter is ending, how will we use our college experiences in the next chapter of our lives? Which door will it be?

Will we choose to enter the professional world, where, I have heard, there are no spring breaks?

Will we choose to begin another first day of school as we pursue a graduate, law or doctoral degree? Roughly eight years and \$100,000 later, we may be searching for a new definition of graduation.

Will we choose the Peace Corps, travel the world or make a break for Hollywood?

The options are endless now because of the choices that led us to this day.

Whatever option we do decide to take next — whatever state, whatever country we decide to call home — let us make a choice today about that decision.

Let us choose not to be afraid of what lies ahead.

Let us choose to have faith in our education and our experiences.

Let us choose together to see our graduation from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh as a celebration — a celebration of the end as a great beginning.

And this celebration begins today, graduates.

For today, we enter the fortunate 1 percent of the world's population that has earned a college degree.

Today, we say thank you to the people who have supported our choices — the families, the professors, the teammates, the coaches, the friends.

Today, we choose to take another step in defining who we will become and how we will affect our world.

You can take this step with a smile, a tear or perhaps a shrug of indifference.

But, in the end, it's your choice.

By using our UW Oshkosh education — the one thing we will always have in common — we can proudly say that we are ready for the choices that lie ahead.

We are ready to finish today and begin our tomorrows.

Thank you, Oshkosh, for sharing your home with me and with all of us...

Congratulations Class of 2008!

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