

Grad at Grad Reflection delivered by Katherine Mussalli to the Loyola community on May 13, 2009

Academically Excellent

When my siblings and I were really little, sometimes my parents would spell words out to each other when they didn't want us to hear what they were saying. For example, to avoid sudden bursts of joy or anger from the four of us all at once, they might spell out the words "ice cream" or "bedtime." I remember hating the fact that I couldn't understand, and needless to say, once I learned how to read in kindergarten or first grade, little Miss Know-it-all over here couldn't help but recite those spelled words right back to them with a devilish smirk planted on my face. Funny enough, this was the first story that came to my mother's mind when I told her that I was asked to write this Grad at Grad Reflection on being Academically Excellent. For quite some time I was actually stuck with a bit of writer's block because for as long as I can remember, achieving high academic success has been one of my main priorities, but I actually began to doubt if I truly embodied the Jesuit value behind being Academically Excellent.

As can literally be derived from the characteristic, being Academically Excellent requires one to have a lucid understanding and comprehension of the material learned in one's various classes. Specifically, the profile of the Academically Excellent graduate mentions "mastering those academic subjects required for entrance into college." Through my last few years at Loyola, however, I've come to learn that Academically Excellent isn't necessarily about attaining a ninety-six average on that report card. As also noted in the Grad at Grad profile, an Academically Excellent graduate is "developing a curiosity to explore ideas and issues." Thus, it affirmed my belief that one of the core components to this element of a Grad at Grad is to pursue knowledge simply for the sake

of learning. If you asked my family, they'd tell you that I've been asking questions since the day I learned to talk, which as we all know was about two months before I was actually born, and that I persist in questioning until I'm satisfied with an answer. I vividly remember telling my mother that her "because I said so" response wasn't a cogent answer to my question. My strongly opinionated remark sent me to my room for a good half hour I'm sure, but it's funny how much of my seven year old self still shines through ten years later. As many of my classmates and teachers can tell you, my hand normally shoots up at least a few times during every class, and if ever I don't fully understand something, I'm quick to inquire. What I realized, as I was writing this reflection, was that I actually love to learn. Of course there are always certain areas that interest me more than others, but when I'm genuinely captivated by something, often it will surface in the conversations at the dinner table and make its way onto my Google search tool bar. Academically Excellent really isn't as much about academics as it is about learning.

In the United States, the government only requires one to complete education up until age sixteen. Thus for most, somewhere in their sophomore year they legally don't have to go to school any longer. Now while I can understand how freeing it would be to sleep in until noon everyday and not have to worry about homework, we're truly blessed to be given the education that we receive here at Loyola. Considering that many of us don't even technically need to be here, and that we're part of a very small percentage of the world's population who are privileged enough to receive such a strong education, it would almost be a real shame if we didn't strive to learn all we possibly could. The Grad at Grad profile highlights that upon graduation, a student is "taking pride and ownership in his or her school accomplishments and beginning to enjoy intellectual and aesthetic

pursuits.” One of my most memorable intellectual pursuits took place during the summer between my freshman and sophomore years. You see, I really struggled with math in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Though I was in the honors class and had a truly fantastic teacher, Mrs. Kwan, my test grades usually fell far below those of any other subject. Frustrated, I reasoned that math just wasn’t my forte and thus once placed in Mrs. Cerussi’s Algebra I class freshman year, I thought it to be just the right course for me. But after a few months, I realized that I was excelling in the class with very little effort. Though my grades hadn’t necessarily reflected it then, Mrs. Kwan provided me with such a strong foundation for mathematics, and thus I knew that I wasn’t challenging myself to my highest potential. Eager to push myself, I asked the one and only, Mrs. Kwan, to tutor me in the material that the honors class had covered that year so that come September, I could move up to the honors course. That summer, for two hours every Tuesday and Thursday, Mrs. Kwan came over bright and early, ten o’clock if you can imagine, and while it certainly was a lot of work, I felt so accomplished when I returned to school that fall and eased right into my new course.

But perhaps one of the most important aspects of being Academically Excellent is the application of one’s acquired knowledge and awareness of global issues. The last eight points in the Academically Excellent profile of a Grad at Grad stress the importance of understanding both our roles both as citizens of the United States and as members of humanity. As all of you now know, this past summer my family and I took a trip to Tanzania. Needless to say, it was an incredible experience and provided me with an education that will forever influence my life. Thus, once I returned to the United States, I couldn’t let the knowledge that I had just gain seep into the back of my mind and get

covered up by the hustle and bustle of everyday life. I knew that it was now part of my responsibility, as a person of the human race informed about the living conditions of a third world country, to do whatever I could to help and to continue learning. And although some could say that as a junior in high school, I was limited in the capacity to which I could help, I didn't let that discourage me. I proposed the School Supplies Drive, and not even a full year later, two hundred students have now also learned about social, economical, and political conditions of a foreign country and thousands of supplies have been collected to help aid a nation in need.

As can be seen through the profile of an Academically Excellent graduate, all of the characteristics of the Grad at Grade truly are intertwined. For how could we be curious to learn more or strive to reach our potential without being open to growth? Or how could we exemplify your responsibility to respond to our knowledge without being committed to doing justice, religious, or loving? Robert Anthony once said that "Some people drink from the fountain of knowledge, others just gargle." Thus embrace your opportunities to study, do your best to learn all you possibly can, and use your knowledge to take the initiative and help. Thank you.