

“15 Seconds”

As a class: We speak 15 languages. We are from 16 US states and 7 countries. And we spend 25-80 hours/week studying (I would like to do some more polls and come up with more meaningful statistics; these numbers are arbitrary until the polls are carried out)

Ladies and Gentleman, these are just some of the characteristics that distinguish students within the Institute of Human Nutrition (IHN).

I encourage you to reminisce...

As children, most of us think we are invincible. We identify, for example, with characters in cartoons like the Road Runner, where a coyote crushed by a huge bolder comes out unscathed. It is not until we begin growing through knowledge and experience that we start to appreciate the value of life. Many of us may recall being unable to sleep the day before school started because we were anxious, uncertain and naïve of what awaited us... kind, warm friends and teachers, or according to your big brother or sister, bullies that steal your chocolate pudding snack and teachers that give you “time-out” in the corner by yourself, while everyone else plays dodgeball at recess. Has it been that long since we were getting on that big, yellow bus with our brown-paper bag lunches and superhero back packs waving goodbye to our mommy’s and daddy’s? Of course, we had to continuously assure them not to worry and that we would be okay... and yes mom, I will remember to wash my hands after touching everything. ☺ Am I not the only one who still daydreams of story-time with apple juice and cookies? Or naptime? ☺ Honestly, I think we can all benefit from a 20 minute hiatus in the afternoon... we’d call it “de-stress, grab a teddy time”. What felt like 15 seconds after elementary school began, came high school... waving good-bye to our parents became a sprint for the bus with a Pop-tart in our mouths. ☺ I remember thinking if I can just make it through high school, I will be able to show my parents that I am independent, despite their reluctance let me go. But really, all our parents were worried about was that we would grow up too fast and forget about them. Mom, that’s impossible, you birthed me and are the only reason why I am here today. Not to mention, you still do my laundry. ☺ And dad, you taught me that there’s a time and a place for everything, which is also how I reasoned my way here today. After high school...it then became, if I could just get through college, I will be on my own living life the way I want it. Now it’s, I made it through graduate school, wait a second, there’s still more school? ☺ Of course there is, because many of us here today will go onto medical school or pursue our PhD or maybe decide that healthcare is not for us. The message that I learned is simple: when are we ever going to be happy, unless we are happy now. While it is nice to catch sight of the light at the end of the tunnel, it is the journey that we will always remember.

You'll look up and down streets. Look them over with care.
About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there."
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,
You're too smart to go down any not-so-good street.

I encourage you to take a step.

Many of us have read *Oh the Places You'll Go*, by Dr Seuss. It is amazing how much life knowledge we are given even at such a young age. Life is an adventure. It is filled with uncertainty, but also excitement, anxiety, as well as pleasure. Ask any of my fellow peers in this room, the road to getting where we are today required a multitude of attributes: discipline, devotion, fortitude, sacrifice, perseverance. Suffice it to say, many of the roads that we will embark on in the time to come will be filled with twists and turns, insecurities and doubts. Many of us have been in a quandary over MD or DO, continue in healthcare or switch to business? Fortunately, almost always, we have a choice. Sometimes we will have to make three lefts just to turn right, and other times we will take 2 steps only to find ourselves falling 1 step back.

I'm sorry to say so
But, sadly, it's true
And Hang-ups
Can happen to you.

You can get all hung up
In a prickle-ly perch.
And your gang will fly on.
You'll be left in a Lurch.

You'll come down from the Lurch
With an unpleasant bump.
And the chances are, then,
That you'll be in a Slump.

And when you're in a Slump,
You're not in for much fun.
Un-slumping yourself
Is not easily done.

I encourage you to get back up on your feet.
(If possible, play snip from Madonna's song "Into the Groove")
Get into the groove
Get up on your feet, yeah
Step to the beat

With undying determination, we must rise after falling, bringing us 1 step closer to our vision. This is what is what will separate us from everyone else. This is what separates us from everyone else.

IHN is a group of extremely passionate, uniquely devoted, exemplary individuals. We model our professors... or at least, we attempt to ☺ ...through our insatiable appetite for knowledge. Learning comes naturally for us, because we have a passion for reading and sharing this wealth of knowledge with others. Memorizing the steps of glycolysis is important for a profound understanding of how energy is formed, but our teachers have taught us to think more colorfully, and ask meaningful questions... why is this particular conversion reaction important as a

precursor in energy production; this thought process has allowed us to create the puzzle despite the missing pieces. We commit 100 percent to a mission, a vision, a challenging task and we strive to do it with perfection. We have chosen to master our knowledge in nutrition, a multidisciplinary science that has enabled us to integrate diet and lifestyle in the prevention and treatment of a multitude of diseases, including but certainly not limited to obesity, diabetes, and coronary artery disease. We are dedicated to a lifetime of education and helping others. I have learned that what we do is important, not just to the students, but to the professors, the doctors, to the parents, to ourselves, and to the world around us, and that knowledge is everlasting, if recycled. We are not the only former Nutrition Masters students to be part of a bigger picture; and will certainly not be the last. Dr. Akabas, the director of the Masters in Nutrition Program who loves to brag about how she graduated just recently, 5 years ago, at age 21, in collaboration with Dr. Lederman and the tremendous faculty and staff at IHN, have made a powerful impact on the students through their guidance and passion for education and innovation. People will always want to be part of this force. I am simply grateful that I made the right choice when it came down to deciding between a transitional-year at home with my parents and Columbia IHN. Both have their benefits: home-cooked meals, dad's big hugs, playing video games with my brother, even though he's 25 and I'm 23. But in all seriousness, what can be better than a year spent earning a Masters in Nutrition from Columbia? Okay, maybe just saying on our resume Masters in Nutrition without the year ☺

To the class of '09, though we are small, merely 60 students, I know our impact will be powerful. Guys... and girls... well, mostly girls, ☺ I have learned with you and from you and the stimulating questions and discussions that we have shared during class. I can honestly say that I could not have asked for better peers, colleagues, or friends. Whether you're the astute, proactive student who gets 9 hours sleep before the Biochemistry exam, and calmly sips a cup of English breakfast tea while listening to Mozart or the belated student who falls into the exam with their shoe laces untied, hair disheveled, and eyes twitching, but can recount the glycolytic pathway like a cunning 19 year old can recite their fake ID, we have all been challenged and we have all overcome our obstacles.

I encourage you to consider these differences

(I would like to pool the class prior to the speech and address their responses at this point) I asked each and everyone in the class some questions and these are their responses. Where did you come from last year? Where are you going this upcoming year? What did you learn this year, not just in class? What is your advice for someone stepping into IHN?

My fellow classmates and I share the same passion to make the world a better place and we have been striving diligently toward this goal, learning with an insatiable fervor, so that we can attain the knowledge and skills that will empower us to help other people. Volunteering and offering comfort and support to patients, tutoring fellow classmates in academics and participating in philanthropic events, such as making hundreds of bagged lunches for the homeless community for Thanksgiving are just a few examples of the selfless acts of kindness that define and distinguish us as a class. The successful mission of the Institute of Human Nutrition (IHN) has been to provide outstanding academic, professional education, and training programs in human

nutrition and conduct basic science and translational research on the role of nutrition in human health. Based on this mission, I feel compelled to share some knowledge with you all.

I encourage you to live healthfully.

Dieting really doesn't have to be so black-and-white. You don't have to be left hungry and you don't have to restrict your intake to only fruits & vegetables, but you should consider eating them to obtain your nutrients; pills may claim to provide you with the same vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, but there is truly no comparison to an apple or a salad, which as fruits & vegetables, have been implicated in lowering the risk of many diseases that plague our society. My faculty advisor, Maudene, who was also our Foods in Nutrition teacher and a very resourceful dietician, explained the deviation in global consumption patterns. For example, any bottle or can of Coca Cola is now larger than it was when the product first appeared in 1916; similarly, a regular sized fountain soda served at Burger King in 1954, equals a child-sized drink in today's stores. And, of course, movie theaters make it even more challenging by inflating the prices of small and regular sizes and charge a difference of merely a quarter sometimes for a large. So what's the take home lesson? Try and eat smaller and smarter, despite the 15 oz steak that you may be given in the restaurant. Let me define an important word for you to help put everything into context. According to the Oxford dictionary, a nutrient is a substance that provides nourishment and is essential for growth and maintenance of life. Don't you want to preserve your life? If there is any hesitation in your mind, then consider your family, friends and loved ones. Maybe it will be easier for you to avoid the saltshaker, or the cup of ice cream before bedtime, if you consider for a moment what you may be leaving behind. Cardiovascular disease alone is the number 1 cause of death in the world, claiming over 17 million lives in 2005! According to the World Health Organization, the most significant causes of heart disease and stroke are unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco use, which are all modifiable or preventable risk factors!

All we have is this moment right now and our memories of the past, which we hold dear to our hearts. It is only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth and that we have no way of knowing when that time is up that we will begin to live each and everyday to the fullest, as if it were the only one we had. John F. Kennedy once said, "One person can make a difference. Everyone has the power to make changes in the world". What will you do with your the next 15 seconds? 15 hours? 15 years?

Dr. Seuss said it best,
Congratulations! Today is your day.
You're off to great places!
You're off and away.

Thank you so much for your time and congratulations class of 2009!