



## Institute of Human Nutrition

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

### *2008 MS Year End Ceremony Speech*

#### **Reflection and Growth: The Importance of Asking Questions**

Shama Sud

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, distinguished professors, honored guests, and fellow students. It is an honor and privilege to be speaking before you at this monumental celebration of learning and achievement. This afternoon I would like to take the opportunity to reflect over the growth and development we have undergone as students at the Institute of Human Nutrition over the course of this past year. In addition I'd like us to collectively look toward what awaits us and highlight the important role we will be assuming as nutrition professionals in the near future.

Albert Einstein once said, "The important thing is to never stop questioning."

When I was in grade 11 one of my closest friends gave me a book entitled "ever wonder" by Kobi Yamada with that quotation in the inside cover. The book is a compilation of different questions to ask yourself, with the aim of illustrating the importance of asking questions and how much we learn about ourselves through

the questions we ask ourselves and are asked by others. At the beginning of this year, on our first meeting, Dr. Akabas said something that reminded me of this book and inspired me to read it again. She said that throughout the year always be asking ourselves why we were being taught something and to look for the importance behind any lesson we were given from our professors. Between Dr. Akabas saying that to us, and reading through that book again, I began to realize what a profound influence the questions we ask ourselves have on our lives and what we take away from our experiences. For instance, by asking ourselves about the importance of nutrition and the unique role it plays in the development, prevention and treatment of illness, we found ourselves as part of the IHN this year. By asking ourselves what field of nutrition interests us the most, we wound up in our unique academic tracts (molecular nutrition, clinical nutrition or public health. By asking ourselves where we want to make a difference in the field of nutrition we took on our thesis positions. Clearly the questions we ask ourselves have a large impact on our development and play a significant role in directing our lives.

Questions are important not only to guide us in the direction we want to go and to stimulate learning, but they also allow us to reflect on past experience and gauge what we have taken away from a something. In fact, it's amazing how much self-

realization we undergo through being questioned by others. I know that a great deal of my awareness of the progression we've made over the course of this year has come to me through family and friends asking me about my experience at Columbia. Of course no one has asked me more questions than my mother who is still desperately seeking the gratification that her money was well spent! For instance, when I went home for the first time for Thanksgiving back in November, one of the questions I was asked repeatedly was "What are your classmates like?" It was amazing because the one word that continually came to my lips was diverse. Although we share our common interest of nutrition, the Masters Class of 2007/2008 is comprised of an incredible array of gifted individuals, which is a quality that makes the Institute of Human Nutrition so special. It truly attracts the most assorted group of students. From our academic tract (molecular nutrition to public health to clinical nutrition) to our personal interests (bodybuilding, singing acapella, knitting, running marathons, ultimate frisbee) to our unique backgrounds, California, Florida, Texas, the Midwest, Turkey, Trinidad and Tobago, even Canadians! We are a diverse group of individuals! However, rather than allowing our differences to separate us we use them as a key to unite and grow together. We learn to appreciate what makes us different from one another and respect diversity in every shape and form both academically and personally. I have learned so much from the talents, interests and unique backgrounds of my classmates this year. For

example it's not a "washroom" it is a bathroom or restroom. You don't write an exam – you take one. And degrees celcius might as well be French.

By the time I went home over Christmas break, although still omnipresent, the line of questioning I was receiving had changed directions. My grandmother had a list of nutrition related questions for me to answer, only 12 pages in length, my sister was eagerly anticipating a personalized diet plan, and of course my mother was still trying to gauge whether her money had been well spent! And although everyone was curious about different aspects of my education, the underlying question I was being posed with was what had I learnt over the course of my first semester? What knowledge had I come away with? Having written my exams – I'm sorry taken my exams only a few days earlier and not yet pressed the automated delete button that seems to go off following every set of exams I was able to answer most of their questions – reassuring my mother. But what really amazed me was that for questions that I did not know the answer to I knew where to find the information, how to ensure its accuracy (I guess preparing 12 hours every week for readings class wasn't an entire waste!), and how to carefully relay that information to others. And that is because as students at the Institute we not only develop a solid understanding of the concepts fundamental to nutrition, but we also learn how to be self-directed and life-long learners. We learn how to

acquire new knowledge quickly and effectively, how to evaluate our current knowledge, and to set learning goals for ourselves to ensure we continue to grow and progress. Ten years down the road we may not remember what the clinical manifestations of a copper deficiency are, what the nutritional therapy recommendations for liver transplant patients are or how to calculate the Harris Benedict Equation (although I'm sure all of our professors would hope we would!), but because we have developed the skills to be effective self-directed learners, I know that we will still make our professors proud!

As we move into our final months of the Masters Program, although my grandmother is still asking me for nutrition advice, and my sister is still waiting for that amazing diet plan I now find that most of my questions are now coming from within, with me doing most of the asking. What will my role be as a nutrition professional be in the future? Where does the future of the field of nutrition lie? Where do I want to make a significant contribution? And it is interesting because no matter how many times I ask myself these questions, it always seems to come down to one word - prevention – maintaining good health and wellbeing and teaching others to use nutrition to prevent the development of illness in the first place. As the incidence of preventable illness continues to rise, with limited medical treatments, increasing the strain on our healthcare system, it is becoming

more and more apparent that the cure lies in the prevention of illness in itself.

Nutrition, more than any other field, has a fundamental role to play in the prevention of illness and one that we as nutrition professionals of the future must embrace, no matter what area of this field we end up working in.

As we embark on our unique journeys following this program with some of our classmates attending medical school, others osteopathic school, law school, Ph.D. programs and more, I'd like to encourage all of you to never stop questioning.

Always be asking yourselves what you can learn from an experience, where you want to go next in your life, where you want to make a difference and more! As Kobi Yamada says, "ask questions and live into the answers."

This past year has been an incredible journey. We have grown such a great deal both academically and personally, none of which would have been possible without the guidance and support of our incredible professors. You are truly an inspiration to all of us and we are so privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from you this year. I know I speak for all of my classmates when I say that we aspire to join you at the forefront of the nutritional sciences in our own professional pursuits in the near future.

And in closing I'd like to take a moment to go over the "take-home message" (as Maudene likes to say!) from our amazing year at the IHN:

Always remember:

- Beans beans they're good for your heart
- breast is best
- omega-3s omega-3s omega-3s
- Go for the MUFAs and PUFAs, forget the saturated and trans
- you can never have enough fiber
- it's not juice, it's the "j-word"
- and last but definitely not least – eat beans at every chance you get

Thank you!!!