

Student Lasallian Commencement Address  
December 2014  
Presented by: Josiah Bolanos

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends. Before I begin my address I want to praise each and every single graduate on making it to where you are today. I especially want to applaud every individual who has supported you, loved you and provided for you while you were earning your degree.

Don't be afraid! "Don't be afraid of what", you ask. Don't be afraid of packing your bags and pursuing your dreams. Don't be afraid of finding a faith that best suits you. But most importantly, and I can't stress this enough, don't be afraid of discovering who you really are and what absolutely truly makes you happy. Finding fulfillment in life is as simple as that. No secrets no tricks. Our Lewis Lasallian education has provided us with the skills to achieve our dreams and overcome any particular fear that can set us back. But in order to figure out how we arrived to this point, we need to first ask ourselves, how did Lewis help me overcome these challenges? How did I get here?

For many of us it began on our first day at Lewis as incoming freshman or transfer students. For all of us, it was that exact moment when we decided to entrust Lewis with our future. It was tough making that transition from the familiar to unfamiliar. The majority of us had to accustom ourselves to a new lifestyle; we had to regulate our own rules in order to strive for that Lewis education. The only difference between now and then is that we are now stronger because we have already faced that challenge.

Entering Lewis as a freshman frightened me to the core. I was afraid of disappointing the people I love and deeply afraid of making any decision that could eventually ruin my education. I finally took several initiatives my second semester of freshman year. I joined Phi Iota Alpha Fraternity. I did service projects with my brothers and became a retreatant on Koinonia. My fraternity and retreat helped me experience Lewis on a deeper level.

Remarkably, in the fall of 2011, I decided to take advantage of another opportunity Lewis had to offer. I expanded my horizons and explored the world by studying abroad. But this meant that I had to overcome the fear of leaving my family. My initial studies took me to Italy, but I traveled from country to country for about four months. However, the first two weeks actually didn't go so

well. Believe it or not, I lost 20 pounds in those weeks because I was so distraught from culture shock and homesickness. In the end, however, my study abroad experience was the greatest experience in my entire life. I was so happy that Lewis gave me the chance to discover myself and show me that my future has no boundaries if I am willing to face my fears.

How have your years at Lewis challenged you and changed you? How have you confronted your challenges and fears? For those of you who are married perhaps you had to balance work, family, and school obligations. For others, it may have been health issues that made getting to school each day an ordeal. But, in spite of all, we have earned our right to be here today.

I am also grateful to Lewis for giving me the opportunity to recognize my roots as a Latino. This privilege should not be taken for granted nor ignored. I had a high school teacher who once looked me straight in the eyes and said, “You look like one of those gangbangers with all those tattoos, and you probably are going to end up in jail like the rest of them”. *Rest of them?* I took in those words of ignorance and made it my goal to go through the rest of my life not worrying about what others say about me or letting them determine who I will become. I let my actions convey who I am. And, last time I checked I don’t see any long steal bars or 10x10 cells.

Lewis’ Lasallian values of justice and association remind us that we are all free from being a predetermined statistic because of the pigment of our skin, the style of our clothing, our sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender, age, weight, disability, religion, or our beliefs. Becoming Lasallian students has given us the opportunity to experience diversity in all its forms and the wisdom to embrace the dignity of all human kind.

So, Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid to move on, leave behind, and choose the path that fits you best. You need to make the decisions for yourself because no one else in this room, including your own family, can make those choices for you. I understand that sometimes we can be our own worst enemy and our harshest critic, but don’t let fear or doubts hold you back. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes; our futures are not determined by our mistakes but the mistakes we learn from.

William Faulkner reminds us that we are not just to endure but to prevail. We don’t just overcome our fears; we share our gifts and make the world a better place. And we start today.

Congratulations class of 2014!