

My grandfather spoke German. This was a tradition—one whose practice stretched its hand across the ocean, reaching out to touch the men and women of my family before him who spoke German. From a vineyard in the Rhine river valley to cabinet-makers in New York, to a man who helped put men on the moon, and now to some kid in New Mexico my family has spoken German. Languages—whichever they may be or wherever they come from—are a way to speak to the past, to the ancient and inevitable narrative of human beings we're all dragging around on our backs. And I'm proud of that, and I'm sure if he were here my grandpa would be proud of me too. Proud to be a part of a chain that stretches from the beginning of spoken word to the present and into the future, a chain whose links are sounds that make words that shape thoughts that inspire actions. This is a tradition which is continued through the FLL program—connecting where we've come from with where we're going.

I'd like to share a few statistics with you. An estimated 31% of of-age United States citizens have graduated from a four year program. This is slightly less than one third—the fact that we now can count ourselves among this third is certainly noteworthy. But going further than that: only an estimated 6.7% of the world's population has attained at least a bachelor's degree. 6.7%. Being able to count ourselves as one of the few people on the planet blessed and privileged enough to reach this level is truly extraordinary. Of course, reaching this plateau was hardly a solely individual endeavor. So on behalf of everyone I'd like to first thank our families, both the ones we've been born into and the ones we've been lucky enough to find over the years—for the sacrifices, the meals, the sympathy when it was asked for, and the inspiration and drive when it was needed. I'd also like to thank our professors—for recognizing that growth in college is a combination of education, knowledge, and wisdom—and for knowing that all three of those things are different, and for being able to provide examples of each one. I wish I had had the opportunity to take classes with all of the educators in this room, because the program they've built here, and the opportunities they've provided us are life-altering in the best possible way. While we've been here, we've been convinced that we're learning languages—and we have. But what we've really been learning is empathy. There's nothing easier in the world than to write off another person as other or alien because you can't understand what they're saying. Learning languages is a fundamental step to destroying the binary of us vs. them—an attempt to understand first. That tendency—to reach across boundaries—is all too rare, but it's one that has been instilled in all of us, thanks to our time at UNM.

Now, I suppose this is the part where I wish us all a bright future. But you know what? I want more than that. I want our future to be an adventure. I want the world to be big and beautiful and totally exhausting. I hope there's never a gap between what we can imagine and what we can create. I want to fall in love with the act of living, and I want life to fall in love with me. Maybe on the way I'll even be able to convince someone that I'm a grown-up. Who knows? Our futures aren't bright or dark—they aren't some intangible force that with any luck will turn out ok. Our futures are what we make of them. I don't know exactly what's going to happen from here on out, and personally I would never want to have the surprise spoiled for me, but thanks to the support we have and the lessons we've learned from everyone in this room--family, faculty, and friends--whatever we make is certainly going to be worth seeing. Thank you, and congratulations to the class of 2014.