

IBEI Graduation Talk (Barcelona September 6, 2021)

Andrea Bianculli, Assistant Professor at IBEI

Good afternoon.

Dear outgoing 2020-2021 class students, dear director, colleagues, families, and friends.

It is with great honour that I stand before you today to deliver this speech, but especially to celebrate the achievements of our students – that is your achievements – during these certainly extraordinary and difficult times.

Today is a day of joy, particularly for you as you are now graduating but also for your families, friends and loved ones, who have supported you along the way.

We are all here to bid farewell to you as you are leaving IBEI and to cheer you on to your next steps, which are coming fast.

This has been a long journey, particularly exhausting and not always fun; but certainly, a fruitful and rewarding one.

Doing a master is described as an emotional roller coaster, or an emotional cocktail.

I know these phrases may be a cliché, and they probably sound a bit dramatic.

But it seems to me that they do explain all the emotions you have when you are doing a masters and living alone in a foreign country, let alone in the middle of a pandemic.

Studying abroad comes with a wide range of emotions: Happy. Sad. Excited. Homesick. Independent. Lonely. Adventurous.

And it also comes with lots of questions, like will you figure everything out? Will you make any friends? What about your friends and family at home? These questions are completely normal.

But this year you also had to face new questions and concerns created by the current pandemic.

However, you were all brave enough to take on and to commit yourselves to a new project. This says a lot about you!

You and us have collectively had our share of struggles.

Yet, I'd like to use this moment to shine the light on some of what you have achieved and learned.

Over the past 12 months, you had to deal with new educational forms and formats, which were also new to us – that is teachers, administrative and IT staff.

There was a lot of teaching online, maybe more than we would have all liked and expected.

When online, we invited you into our homes via our computer cameras, and you invited us into yours.

This created strange, and funny situations, as when we would have uninvited guest appearances, like roommates, family members, and pets, mostly cats, I'd say...

However, we still had the chance to have hybrid sessions, and go back to the classrooms, which we were all longing for.

This also came with a lot of specific issues: trying to make out who was behind the mask, keeping the windows and doors open even if it was freezing outside, and sometimes wondering where the online students were...

During these months, you also had to put up with the usual readings, paper assignments, exams, presentations, writing your thesis, doing fieldwork, collecting data, and you also had to deliver these various activities online.

In all, this academic course has been difficult for all of us and, in particular, for each of you. And yet, you continued to push forward, and you kept going, and that is what matters. And what has brought you all here today! This is all your merit.

You managed to show the adaptability and flexibility that the evolving and uncertain circumstances required in the reach for your goal.

You also learned about staying connected, supporting each other, and coming to grips with our changing reality.

Each of you has persisted in the face of adversity.

And this is another important lesson: that perseverance does pay off.

While it's certainly true that many things have gone wrong or may have not turned out as we would have all liked in the last months, please be proud of your achievements and more importantly of the resilience and success you have accomplished.

This is not the end.

It is rather the beginning of a new, perhaps even more exciting, and unpredictable journey that will lead you to the next steps.

Some of you will return to where you were before; others will go to different places.

In any case, you will all walk through new doors and face new opportunities and challenges.

It is difficult to tell what tomorrow may bring to you and us all, or how 'normality' will look like in the near future.

I do believe that you will encounter challenges and uncertainty. Life is inherently uncertain.

This should not be an obstacle but rather an opportunity to be creative and innovative, and to continue learning.

Also, and the pandemic has made it very clear, cooperation, teamwork, solidarity, and empathy are crucial to overcome all difficulties.

Always bear in mind that:

‘Everybody you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.’

Don’t forget to be kind to yourselves too.

My hope is that, in the end, among the messages that stand the test of time are that dedication, hard work and solidarity pay off.

I strongly believe, going by your antecedents and the manner you have conducted yourselves over these months, that you will surely overcome all obstacles and make the most of the opportunities.

The adaptability, flexibility, and commitment that you have shown and that you will soon bring to the world are vital.

Rarely before has the world so desperately required the skills that are essential in the disciplines represented by this class.

They certainly come at a most appropriate time.

Whatever course your future takes, we all hope that you will look back on your time at IBEI as having provided the right tools for you to meet and deal with the tests and opportunities that life presents, and make your objectives become a reality.

On behalf of IBEI, I would like to thank you all for making us part of your education and professional journey.

We are truly grateful for the opportunity!

I hope and ask you to stay in touch with us as we will miss you!

Congratulations on your graduation, students of the master’s in International Relations and the MUNDUS MAPP Program 2020-2021.

You did it! Most well deserved!

Let me just conclude by saying ‘Hasta pronto, fins aviat!’ and by wishing you every success in this new chapter of your life.

Celebrate this moment – and look forward to what is yet to come.

Thank you very much!