

## IBEI Graduation Talk (Barcelona June 28, 2019)

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Molt bona tarda a tothom i benvinguts. Estimats convidats i estudiants a punt de graduar-se, Cristina Gallach, Director Jacint Jordana, president Narcís Serra, estimades professores i professors, gràcies a tots per voler celebrar la graduació amb nosaltres.

I will do my best to keep Drake from ranting about politics. [She will try her best.](#)

First of all, I wanted to say what an absolute honour it is for us to have been chosen to speak today, it is one of the most exciting things we've ever been asked to do. This was a contested position - we have to admit the bar of expectation is quite high. We've been wracking our brains trying to find something funny to start this off - Quinn's memes would've definitely been helpful here.

I have to admit I was very surprised when I was notified. I regretted saying yes immediately afterwards. I began thinking of excuses on why I couldn't do it, I mean what do I know? I am not wiser or smarter than any of you. Many of us can probably relate to how easy it is to belittle ourselves and our accomplishments. It's astounding how quickly we forget we were cast as leads in our own life. As we close this chapter, that wave of self-doubt might be rising as the big question becomes what are we going to do next? We usually get words of inspiration saying that the world belongs to us. I don't know if anyone can relate but I, for instance, am still looking for a paying job and considered moving back to my parents at one point - I literally own nothing. But it's ok. We're taught to plan and get used to planning non-stop for the rest of our lives. So when we don't have plans, it's easy to fall apart. Some can relate to that horrible feeling of not having a plan; terrifying, right? But as we all know, plans don't always work out. And it's ok, having a beautifully designed plan fall apart before me brought me here, with you. And what a lovely place it has been. So it's ok, to not have a plan, is ok. Those challenges are what makes us who we are, so don't shy away from uncertainty or what it's painful at first - you might have just walked into your new plan. That is one of the many things I learned here, thanks to you. Somehow life takes you not where you want, but where you need to be.

As I struggled to write this, memories from our first days in Barcelona rushed in. Those first few awkward meetings, leading to the creation of nearly a thousand WhatsApp groups for every specific topic. Nights at Bar El Born, which you would think would've been banned after someone found a cockroach inside but nope, you guys are gross and kept going there. Of course, this was written in the student room, next to many of you furiously typing your last essays. Despite having one of the most beautiful libraries, we just kept going to the student room - something about that room. You rarely got anything done. You would think master students go partying on Saturdays. No, we spent the entire last semester trying to break into that room on Saturday mornings. We got drunk afterwards.

Nine months ago we arrived to Barcelona to start a masters. There were times, I at least, wanted to give up, pack my books and bags and leave - question when exactly did I think it was a good idea to do a masters. Honestly, that would've been the easier choice, but

we're not here for easy. We stuck through it - long nights at the student room until we got kicked out by security, all-nighters, tears, and all that alcohol when everything else failed. And for everything that lies ahead, all the challenges, that will come, I encourage you to do the same. I encourage you to never relent.

As most would agree, coming to IBEI was a challenging and enriching experience. We learned about each other, learned valuable knowledge and more importantly we learned about ourselves. However, what struck me as odd the very first day and still does is that despite the vast differences between our cultures, nationalities, religions, and tongues we all share a common vision. For a cohort representing nearly 100 countries, it is nothing short of remarkable that we have one idea in common, let alone many. We learned from each other as much as we did from our professors - at least I did.

Our values Broadly speaking, we support democracy. We believe in human rights. We cherish minority rights and vehemently defend them, we agree that one person should equal one vote. We cringe at unchecked corporate power. We believe that healthcare as a human right is not a controversial issue. We question archaic gender roles and advocate for equality of men and women. To varying degrees, we believe in economic state intervention. Military interventions, however, we agree should be used as a last resort. We not only empathize with and reshape our habits around the environmental crisis, but have been so deeply moved to action by the existential crisis facing our planet and enraged by the tepid responses of our leaders to solve this crisis that we have quite literally vowed to enter the political realm to change it, myself included.

These are frustrating times to be alive. The task in front of us is daunting. We are the first generation of the last century to be poorer than its parents (the situation is bleaker in the global south). For some of us, our homes are being ravaged by new civil wars or authoritarian leaders. For others, our seemingly intact democracies are experiencing backsliding and the undoing of checks and balances meant to protect institutions and citizenry. For others still, our lands are experiencing a resurgence of fascist or extremist parties that echo the pre-WWII era, one of the darkest moments in modern history.

The world is full of monsters, some of them, unfortunately, happen to be world leaders. As I said before, I am not urging you to take on the world, by yourself. In this individualistic and oppressive society, the most revolutionary thing we can do is fight together. Borrowing from Ella Baker who once said, if you have strong people, you do not need strong leaders. As I look around, I see strong people. And it's a scary thing, to face our contemporary issues, is terrifying. But bravery is not measured by a lack of fear. Bravery is to not turn away from what is frightening and to stand for what your heart knows to be right and fair. In our current state, to take a stand is a necessity. I have no doubts that all of you will continue on to your exciting and rewarding lives - what I want from you to always ask, whatever you're doing, who and what am I standing for? If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

To many, even the most optimistic, it may seem that we are entering a dark-eve-of-war phase. We have been told by our elders that our goals are too lofty, too ambitious, too expensive, too flawed. What they are essentially telling us is, "Give up. It's impossible to change things. Do not try." They'd like us to believe that we are so small that we can't possibly enact significant change. That we cannot master humanity's problems and its consequences. However, it is precisely small groups at key moments in history that have charted the course for the future. In 1516 Sir Thomas Moore wrote his book Utopia, a

magical city where the leaders were elected by the people. Little did he know that nearly 400 years later the leaders of his own country would be elected in exactly the same way. In 1914, Jean Jaures, tired of war and strife, imagined a peaceful and united Europe. Little did he know that such would be Europe's fate nearly 30 years later. Today, our task is the same: to imagine a better, more peaceful, more united world.

For some, the problems we face are simply the pendulum of history swinging in one direction, to be swiftly corrected in a generation or two, which implies that someone will swing the pendulum, but an action cannot happen without an actor. And that actor, my friends, is you.

So, imagine with us. Imagine if our generation were to take power. Imagine if we entered the halls of office with a vision of radically changing the world before the worst-case scenarios took place. Imagine we transitioned from and banned the use of fossil-fuels, imagine if we could sequester carbon to bring the climate back to normal, imagine if we prevented the extinction of the 1 million species the UN says will disappear within our lifetime. Imagine if we took our core message and lived by it: that despite its flaws, democracy is good and not only deserves protection, but merits expansion into the places where it is weak or not yet present. Imagine if we had education systems so robust and economies so centered around citizen well-being that they became models to emulate the world over. Imagine if no citizen died for want of health or inability to pay. Imagine if political checks and balances lived up to their name. What's more is imagine instead of looking for a leader to accomplish these feats, you simply looked in a mirror.

We have to continue working and fighting for the values we know to be fair: social and environmental justice, equality, feminism. We could keep enjoying the pleasures of our individual worlds but I encourage you to find other ways, taking a stand acknowledging our position and acting with responsibility in regards. These will be long, arduous fights, but in life there is only the try. For far too long our leaders have practiced politics as the art of the possible and the practical. It is time we practice politics as the art of making what appears to be impossible, possible. That's why I want each and every one of you to fight like our lives depend on it because for many of us, they do. And so, as we enter our new careers within the following weeks and months after much rest and deliberation we will be back at it, at this fight of wills and wants, of emancipation and reprisals, this political project of human liberation, centuries in the making to fulfil the democratic promises made at our start, not yet met in our present.

Muchas gracias y felicitaciones!