

IBEI Graduation Talk (Barcelona June 29, 2018)

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Dear students: First of all, **congratulations** for having completed the Masters program at IBEI's 2018 class.

Dear families: You can be really **proud** of your grown-ups. I can attest that each of them has worked hard for months to earn the degree that we are celebrating today.

This is the end of your masters program and it is a good moment to reflect back. I think that **we have been successful if the masters program has achieved three main things:**

The first is a good **network** of people who will be in similar occupations and to whom you can turn for help and advice. This cohort at IBEI has been particularly active. It has been extraordinarily diverse. You embody the word "**international**" which is so core to our institution and the masters degrees.

I remember last September at the welcome talk, when **Robert Kissack** asked you to introduce you to others and explain something fun about yourself. We heard anecdotes on sports, traveling and families and I thought "wow, here is **a group of very interesting people**". Indeed we have been fortunate to have you. This is a fantastic cohort.

But most importantly, you are not just a bunch of interesting people from different backgrounds, but a **network** of people who are diverse but also **now** have a lot in common. You have a common academic background and thousands of hours of shared experiences. You will be spread around the world very soon again. But please cherish and take care of the **group that you are today**. Tell us where you are in ten years time and turn to the group for help. **Keep in touch with each other and also with us.**

The second thing that a masters program provides is a **set of valuable skills**. You have worked hard in hundreds of readings, classes, assignment and exams. We teach here a lot of specialized knowledge about international relations, development and security, but we also strive to train minds in classical analytical skills.

I have a three-year old daughter now, and these days I think a lot about **which skills she will need in life** (I know it is perhaps too much anticipation, but the neurotic in me can't help). The world is profoundly being transformed by brilliant new technologies and is changing at a speed that is unprecedented in human history. **What are valuable skills in the age of artificial intelligence?** Rather than being blind to the challenge of today's labor markets, or be paralyzed by worry, it is wiser to try to address these questions honestly.

My view is that machines are becoming very quickly proficient at solving **specific predefined tasks**. Give them a concrete goal, and an algorithm can be trained to perform well. But machines are very dumb at jobs that require judgment and switching

between many different tasks. The goal of education today cannot be to solve just one specific problem or routine task.

So, will I say that the goal of education is to “learn to learn”? This cliché is certainly true, but it is also too broad and bland to be really useful. I think a masters program should give you **general background knowledge** that you can quickly recall, so that you have good judgment and are not easily fooled. It should teach you **complex skills such as putting together compelling arguments, combining theory, logic and hard facts, leading teams of diverse people and fine-tuning interpersonal skills**. We will have been successful if you have cultivated here these analytical and social skills and have developed judgment about when is the right moment to apply each.

Third, and finally, a good masters program should also be transformative at a deeper **psychological level**, so that after a year in Barcelona you come out stronger and more resilient for the rest of your adult life. The program has given you confidence in your skills and familiarity with complex subjects related to international topics. But above all, I hope that the masters at IBEI has also strengthen some core **values**. So I will focus on values for the rest of the talk.

[I must say I have been reading graduation speeches these days to prepare and most of them are about “do this” and “do that”. “Break rules”, “don’t settle”, “do great mistakes”. I am not sure about this grand advice. What you need to do in your life will depend on your background, constraints, and personal style. But, however you are, a good liberal education cannot give up on transmitting some core values that we thing help lead a good life.]

The value of tolerance and respect of others is ever more important with the growth of **international migration and increasingly transnational lives**. Your generation has much to teach us older people about this. You have traveled so much and interacted with people who are incredibly diverse. [I say this humbly. While I have lived abroad for a few years, I chose to live in the city where I was born.] I urge you to remember for yourself and remind to others that collaborating with people from different backgrounds makes you richer and diversity is a powerful asset for everyone.

2018 has been a great year for **gender equality**. And again, your generation has much to teach us. We have discussed this in faculty meetings. We have many powerful smart women in classes and respect of people from different genders and sexualities. I was proud that the last number of **Argus**, the journal that people from your cohort created is devoted to gender issues, which shows your commitment to that. So keep on!

In the age of **political polarization** it is a good moment to remember that the extremes are seldom right and wisdom is often in the **middle road**. You have learned here ways to think about complex problems. This advice is harder for young people, but **tolerance** also implies trying to understand people with whom we may strongly disagree -- even Brexiters or Trump. So, **always listen to the other side**.

Finally, one of the most striking recent developments is the **erosion of democracy**. Studying complex problems should make clear that it is unlikely that a strong man has the right solutions for all. But the deeper commitment to democracy comes again from liberal values. One is that no one is clearly superior to others in ways that justify preferential treatment.

The second is that **no one can judge what is the best interest of a person better than the person herself.** [And this applies to parents, as your kids are adults.]

Together they make a compelling case for the superiority of the principle of “one person one vote” which is at the core of the normative case for democracy.

But more generally, these values of deep respect for others views can also be a guide to live good adult lives.

Good luck!