

IBEI Graduation Talk (Barcelona September 6, 2021)

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Good afternoon, everyone!

I am a little nervous to be standing here today. This is an unusual situation for me and for you. So many of us, in the same room, offline, in person. If I have a blackout now, I can't pretend my laptop died or I accidentally muted myself. And most of you had to comb your hair and wear real pants or even dresses and heels! Good job!

Well... at this point: hello to everyone joining us online, I hope you enjoy your cup of coffee or glass of wine, wearing your comfy clothes. Rest assured, I will not start this with a stressful icebreaker, you can go on, cook your lunch, shower or write your thesis on the side. Whatever feels natural to you during online events.

However, I am not only nervous to be standing here, but also very proud. Proud to be celebrating this moment with everyone of you, our families, our professors and IBEI staff. If we forget about our final research project for a second – we did it, yeah!

If anything, we can be sure that this cohort REALLY wanted to study at IBEI. Most of us applied for this master's program, knowing there was an ongoing pandemic. Many of us moved here from cities in Catalonia, Spain or abroad - knowing that they would have to fight through visa processes, travel restrictions and high uncertainties. We did not know what life in Barcelona would look like. We did not know that we would learn the very useful skill of walking home past curfew like a ninja... always in the shadows. (At least that's what the one glass of wine made you feel like).

We also did not know when we would be able to meet any of our classmates and professors in person. We did not know then that the IR theory exam would be the first time, some of those names on the screen would finally be connected to a face. We did not know that dinners with a maximum of six persons would help us to form deeper connections.

We did not know a lot about this master's in advance, we were adventurous.

Well... and we were well supported. It is not by our own accomplishment alone, that we can be here today. We can be SO grateful to all the professors, staff members of the admissions office, the academic office and all the other persons behind the scenes. We (and Covid-19) caused a lot of extra work.

Yes, we were expecting uncertainty, but it didn't stop us from asking a looooot of questions. And while Covid was a challenge to everyone, I always felt well informed by the university. You could feel how much time was invested in fighting for any little way of lifting the restrictions, working with different scenarios. All to make our experience as valuable as possible.

These loooong emails explaining the first measures to get back to hybrid teaching format. The opportunity to follow online lectures on campus. Together. To use the library. To be more flexible regarding deadlines or course changes. To provide high quality online

teaching. I think this is the right moment to thank IBEI for their hard work with a round of applause!

(Applause)

Now, I am nervous again, because I have a confession to make: Even though I am graduating in international relations today, I have only googled the difference between relations and relationships a few days ago. I mean, I can proudly spell 'sovereignty' and ... 'Przeworski' (I said spell, not pronounce), but I wasn't entirely sure what I had even studied. (And to be honest to my Mundus MAPP friends, it also took me a few lectures to find a good grasp of what "policy" is).

And maybe I am the only person here struggling with seemingly easy terms, but I will try to explain the terms relation and relationship anyways.

According to the very trustworthy source "differencebetween.net" a relation "identifies similarities between people". For example, "we are in the same blackboard collaborate session. In the list, your name, like my name, is fully spelled out with all the ugly middle names you would rather like to be forgotten."

If we have a relationship, however, then there is a connection between us. Like the bonding moment of meeting in a breakout room, finding out that we are all secretly wrapped in blankets under the desk. Forming friendships over our duvet cover designs before passionately debating with the devil's advocate in the reading group sessions.

So, I guess, my message for today is: Don't just relate to others, but form relationships.

Because this is what we have been missing. This is what Covid had almost prevented us from having. The lecture content was still there to be consumed, hundreds of readings to be studied. But the heated discussions and desperate study groups, the loong coffee breaks and smaller or bigger workload crises – we almost missed that. Relationships.

Sitting alone in your room attending the online lecture, you will imagine everyone sitting there: happily nodding to the lecture content, understanding each and every word, and ready to give a qualified comment at any time. You don't see their confused faces and hectic note taking. The others are feeling just like you! Here, Whatsapp groups like "The sinking ship" were the most useful tool we had in our studies. A safe space, where we can admit not to have understood a single word of the 2h online lecture that has just finished. Where we can celebrate the moment of handing in essays just one minute before midnight via skype. Where you can admit being overwhelmed and not always functioning like you think you should.

Looking after each other's mental health more is something we have all had to learn in Covid-times and it is something we all should maintain. Asking each other: What's the craic? How are you? No, really, what is the craic? And then even harder: answering the question truthfully.

These relationships are what kept us going. They are the secret to our success. Well.... THAT and the constant assurance of our dear economics prof Josep, which became a mantra in our joint whatsapp group - Don't worry.

So, don't worry. Don't worry about your future. Covid has certainly changed everyone's plans, we are flexible now. The curfew has given (some of) us a few months of long good night's sleep and we are fully rested to start into a bright future! Well... maybe you were more the type to organize meetings lasting the exact duration of curfew, the famous 22 to 6er parties. Perfect! You have stamina. You are innovative, creative, flexible regarding rules and regulations. You will be very successful in politics!

Okay.....maybe we should worry sometimes. It is part of the job description of a politics student to worry. PLEASE, worry guys. Worry about climate change, worry about US elections, about xenophobia and homophobia. Worry about outbreaks of violent conflict and humanitarian crises. Worry about the distribution of vaccines. Worry about the distribution of power.

Unfortunately, this masters has taught me new ways to worry. New ways to think about politics. Unfortunately, with this knowledge comes responsibility. And I say 'unfortunately' because there is a lot to do! And no one can do it alone. But we can also not do it together, if we are just relating to others. We need true relationSHIPS. In world politics just as much as in our private sphere.

Let's make sure to start here, today. Have meaningful relationships. Let's be a strong network of friends supporting each other professionally and personally. With LinkedIn contacts or funny memes, job offers, research input or a couch to sleep on in a new city. We started our friendships online, it should be easy to continue online and across borders. Come on, let's build international relationSHIPS.

Thank you!