

Nicholas M. Esposito

Nicholas Esposito Commencement Speech Undergraduate Exercises, Westchester

President Caputo, trustees, honored guests, officers of administration, faculty, family and friends, and the class of 2003! : it was 1997. I sat in my writing class at Pace straining my eyes to see the print on my partner's paper. How could I give him feedback if I couldn't read it? "Where are your glasses?" my professor asked. "I don't wear glasses," I replied. But, if I didn't wear glasses, why couldn't I see the page? I finished class, and drove home, anxious and frustrated. With my hands clenched tightly around the steering wheel, sweat poured down my face as I guessed whether each traffic light was green or red. Later, when I arrived safely home and shifted my car into park, I thought, "I really do need glasses." I had no idea that this would be my last day driving, and my last day at Pace as a sighted student.



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In the weeks and months that followed, I began to miss the wonders of the seeing world-the multifarious shapes and colors, the beautiful images that dazzle the eyes-but I also began to miss my education, and the university that I was forced to leave behind. I thought of the students I had met, the classes I had taken, the professors who had taught me, and the knowledge I had gained. All of this was gone-lost in the clouds that blocked my sight. But, I longed to push my way through the clouds to the light of knowledge that awaited me on the other side. I wanted to move on with my life, and go back to Pace.

As I learned to travel independently, use Braille, and computers with speech software, I looked ahead toward the day I would return to Pace. I became eager to learn, and to enrich my mind with pictures and ideas. I often stayed awake much of the night captivated by the stories and adventures that I found in books on tape. I also found myself getting readers to read me books that I hadn't finished from the classes that I was forced to withdraw from. I was losing my sight, but gaining an appreciation for the education that Pace had been giving me.

In the fall of 1999, my goal came to fruition. With my guide dog, Guthrie, I returned to Pace. Filled with pride, I sat in the class of the professor who, nearly two years earlier, had asked me where my glasses were. Returning to school began a rebirth for me, and Pace stood at the center of it. With the help of God, and with the support of my family and friends, I achieved the first goal I had set for myself since I lost my sight. Knowing that the Pace University motto is *opportunitas*, or opportunity, I believed that, As a member of the Pace community, I would achieve my next goals and graduate from Pace to become an English teacher.

In my new life as a blind student, Pace proved to me that it is not merely Pace-- a name, an institution-- but a community of people who care about each other's personal growth and learning. The people of Pace are the ones who have inspired me to write this speech and stand here today. Countless times, my fellow students have driven me places or have read to me; staff members have helped me in a variety of ways; advisors have guided me; librarians have assisted me in gathering books and research; and professors have helped me become a welcome and active member of their classes. Because of these people, I have proudly called myself a Pace student, and because of them, I will proudly call myself a Pace alum.

My fellow graduates of the Class of 2003, let us not be blind to our surroundings. Let us open our eyes, and treasure the family members, friends, and members of the Pace community who join us today in our celebration. Let us also treasure the experiences we have had and the knowledge we have gained in the last four years. For, we walk away today with

more than a diploma; we walk away with knowledge. It cannot be found in a frame on a wall, but within each one of us. Let us use it to let in the light and brighten the future.

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