

16th Annual Last Lecture
Vic Duarte
Last Lecture 2021 Student Speaker

Vic:

Hello everyone, I hope this video finds you in good health and even better spirits.

Welcome to the 16th annual Last Lecture. My name is Victoria Duarte but please call me Vic.

Being selected as this year's Student Speaker or, as I see it being given the opportunity to represent a cohort as resilient as ours is an absolute honour.

While I haven't written a speech in quite some time Dr. Greg Kelly's presentation in the persuasion course has prepared me for a moment like this one.

I promise you nothing has come as close to daunting as those four speeches we did back in second year of Media Studies. Speaking of that course, according to my handwritten notes: commemorative speeches by definition pay tribute to or praise a person, an institution, an event idea, or place.

Today I hope to commemorate each and every one of you to pay tribute to all of the hours you put into yourselves and others, the wins and lessons of your undergraduate experience and of course the legacies you shaped here at the University of Guelph-Humber.

I'll begin by sharing three stories. Real stories. One about trust, another about turbulence, and one last one about transformation. While I'm the protagonist of these stories I hope you can all see yourselves within these narratives and can reflect on what these three words have come to mean to you over the last four years. So, like I said these are all real stories from my personal life that I thought I would share with you, and I have them written down from all of my four years.

My first story is a story about trust. It is September 7th, 2017, my first day as a Media Studies student. I have no idea what is coming my way. I do not see myself making it to the end of the semester, let alone to graduation as I sit in my first lecture. I write with vigour, unsure of my abilities, my stamina, and so much more but my heart calms down when smiles on two faces to my left complement my handwriting. I choose to trust the path I have been given. To trust that no matter how hard things get, to embrace where the universe has put me in its gallery. This story always reminds me to trust when its hardest to and I know you can too. Today, and in the future.

My next story is a story about turbulence. It is May 14th, 2018. I'll never forget this evening on my first study abroad trip. Dr. Glenn Barenthin is gracefully jogging beside me as I apocalyptically run in my wedges. I look behind to find my friends Savannah and Lindsay with the biggest smiles on their faces, their eyes glossy with happy tears. What they said about the Eiffel Tower at night appeared to be true. Which is why we were trying so hard to get a closer look. When I finally got the perfect view I felt compelled to think about my life. I felt this remarkable sense of turbulence as the tower sparkled before me. I had spent two years in the Media studies program gaining confidence in my academic abilities, but I had this gut feeling that existential change was on the horizon. I was right. In the following year I transferred into the Justice Studies program. With little knowledge of the law, a newfound love for education, and a whole lot of determination. This story reminds me that life is most interesting when it is turbulent. That we come to know just how powerful we are- when everything changes, but we can still remain ourselves. If you ever doubt your ability to adapt to change, remember how committed every one of you were to finishing the degree, the diploma, through just not just a college strike of course but an entire virtual fourth year during a global pandemic.

This last story is gotta be one of my favorites and this story is about transformation. It is March 23rd, 2021, I am presenting a speech as this year's Student Speaker. I'm coming to the end of a four-year two-program ten-semester transformation of a lifetime. I've made it and I have my family, my friends, and the University of Guelph-Humber community to thank for that.

If you told me on September 7, 2017, that I would study abroad, twice switch programs, become a Student Senator and Senior First Year Experience Leader, be the Vice-President of a criminal justice honour society, publish a research paper with my professor, be a part of the international case competition team, and Agora Fellowship all in my time at the University of Guelph-Humber, I would have laughed out loud. But here I am, and here we all are. My time at GH has been the most challenging four years of my life.

But I wouldn't trade it for the world. GH taught me how to fall in love with learning, how to stand up for what I believe in, and above all else it has taught me how to listen. To listen to the diversity in others, and to celebrate every moment of life. Because it is so short. I want to thank you all for joining me today as we celebrate the end of our time at the University of Guelph-Humber together.

It is without a doubt that I say we have transformed the UofGH community for the better. And that we've definitely given a new meaning to the term undergraduate experience. Cheers to the class of 2021! It has been an absolute honour. With love, Vic The Great. Cut! Scene! I don't know! Woo!