

Senior Toast to the Class of 2011

For those of you who don't know me, I am a graduate student at Stony Brook, working toward my MBA, something that, as scary as it sounds, I will have in less than two weeks! I work in the Dean of Students Office as assistant to Dean Stein. But I'm also a proud Stony Brook alum – class of 2008. And even more importantly, I am a founder of this band and it's first drum major.

As a founder, you can imagine that this band was a HUGE part of my life in college. While I spent two years here before the band started up, I feel I finally started to become who I was meant to be when I joined this band. So much so that I **wish** I had had the band in my life freshman year.

So I know this is supposed to be a toast to the seniors, but I'd actually like to first address the underclassmen. I want to talk to you about the opportunities you have that I did not.

To many of you, this may just be another extracurricular activity. Just something else that you do outside of the classroom. But that is probably because you haven't had the opportunity to step back and examine just exactly what you are doing. To be honest, I didn't either. Not until after I graduated. But now as an alum, I want to give you the opportunity to benefit from that, sooner than I did.

I was, and still am, shocked by the skills I developed, the connections I made, and the unique experiences I had. And I don't mean the floofy skills and experiences you put on your resume to make yourself "interesting." But I mean real-world, useful, and downright impressive skills that others do not have.

I learned how to work in teams by having to learn music and drill with my fellow band members. I refined my public speaking skills every time I made an announcement to my section or the band. I was taught time management and discipline by having to balance game weekends with my schoolwork. And believe it or not, when you go out into the real world, these are NOT skills that everyone has. Because of your involvement in the band, you have an opportunity to become unique and set yourself apart from the masses.

But to really harness this opportunity, you need to step up and take initiative. Because it doesn't take a braid on your uniform to muster up the courage to lead a cheer. It doesn't take a cape and a mace to organize an end of the year event. Although, no one is stopping you from wearing a cape – I can tell you from personal experience, it is pretty cool. All it takes is initiative. Take advantage of every opportunity for personal growth presented to you in this band. Take time to reflect on the lessons you learn at every rehearsal, both musically, and within your own personal development. And then take the initiative to apply these skills and rely on these connections outside of this band.

Because that is where it really becomes powerful – going from organizing your section pride day activities in the band to organizing your staff at your job. Every single one of you has the ability to better your lives through being in this band. All you have to do...is do it.

Alright, I'll get off my soapbox and do what I was actually asked here to do.

To the seniors!

What an exciting time for you. The world is your oyster. The open road is ahead of you. Blah blah blah. These sayings are nice, but let me tell you, I did NOT feel this way when I was graduating. I was *terrified*.

It just so happened that as I was getting ready to graduate, the tapestry of my life that I had been weaving conveniently began to unravel. I was suddenly without a direction, without a plan. And anyone who knows how much I love to plan, can imagine how distraught I was. So I went to my graduation eager and excited, but without a clue as to what would happen to me once I took off my cap and gown. So what did I do? I went through the motions of my graduation day, packed up my dorm room, and did the only thing I could think to do – I went back to the band. I went back to the biggest support system I had.

I was no longer Navneet the alto saxophone player. I was now, Navneet the alum in trouble. But to my relief, the band was there for me. I started to take some grad courses, even got a job with the band.

Over the course of the next year or so, I started to slowly weave a new tapestry. I'm happy to say that while I may be on a different track, I'm finally where I need to be to move on. And I would have never made it through this time had it not been for the memories, experiences, and people within the band. I had memories to comfort me when I entered uncharted territories, I had band experiences to further my development as a person, and I had people who didn't hesitate to give me advice when I needed it, to tell me the things I didn't want to hear but knew were true, and even to let me cry on their shoulder when the pressure of it all was too much to bear. I am eternally indebted to this band and the people within it who got me to where I am today.

So my message is that while you may physically leave Stony Brook and the band, you are never truly leaving. I hope that none of you have to go through what I went through. But you might. You very well might go through worse. But if you do, know that this band will always be your family. And this is a family that will always be there for you.

But seniors, you're lucky. You get to join a new family soon – the Alumni family. And we are so eager to have you. Because with every person that joins the alumni family, we have even more opportunity to give back. Now, why do I give back? Because between tuition, housing, books, and meal plans, I certainly *gave* enough to Stony Brook as an undergrad! But this is a different type of giving. By handing out ice cream at band camp, we alumni helped give band members a much deserved break and reward. By donating toward the alumni award, we helped a student pay for their education. By offering our help looking at resumes and giving career advice, we helped students avoid the same mistakes we made and helped to ensure that they could achieve even greater things. It may sound a little selfish, but by giving part of myself back to the band, I feel like I'm leaving a LEGACY. For now, I may be leaving behind memories of ice cream at your first band camp or giving you some help paying for your books next semester. But I hope to one day leave a legacy that will last much longer than I will. The Navneet Singh Seawolves Marching Band. Has a nice ring to it, doesn't it? How much would I have to give to make that happen?

Us new grads may only be able to give a little bit now. But I hope that you will all join me and give back as much as you can when you're able to. Not only will we be giving others something from which we so greatly benefited, but we will be building a legacy for ourselves.

Seniors, you already started your legacy by being a part of one of the most influential groups on campus. We're lucky because our names will forever be etched into the history of this band and this university. I feel fortunate to have this as my claim to fame, my conversation starter, part of MY legacy. But now, we have an opportunity to leave something even greater behind. Now THAT is exciting, and an oyster, an open road, or whatever.

So with that, I'd like to ask the seniors to join me on stage as I call your name:

Mike Ayala B.E. in Computer Engineering, minor in Computer Science,
Eta Kappa Nu

Sarah Costa B.S. in Geology

Matthew Gerardi B.A. in Political Science, minor in Journalism, Pi Sigma
Alpha

Anthony Guzman B.A. in Music, minor in Chemistry

Tiffany Huang B.S. in Applied Math and Statistics and Economics , Suma
Cum Laude

Danielle Kowalski B.A. in Psychology

Jaime Lee B.S. in Biology, minor in Marine Science & Music, Magna Cum
Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Beta, Golden Key

Katie Lobiando B.A. in Linguistics/TESOL Teaching Prep, Minor in Italian,
Magna Cum Laude, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Beta

Nicholas Lord B.A. in Philosophy

Brian Miele B.A. in Economics

Bryan Scharf B.A. in English Teacher Prep

Emily Seiderman B.A. in History, Cum Laude, Phi Eta Theta
Dan Zurmuhlen BA in Sociology, Music Minor

Last Founding Member Graduates

John Havelicek B.E. in Mechanical Engineering
Jessica Carde B.S. in Biology and Psychology
Daniel Martingano B.S. in Parmacology, Minors in Jazz, Chemistry and Adapted
Aquatics

Now, please raise your glasses. Seniors, words cannot describe the contributions you have made to this band and to this university. While you will be missed by your band family, the alumni welcome you and look forward to everything you are sure to achieve for yourselves in the coming years. Just remember, we are always here for you. I wish you all the absolute best. Cheers!