



*Lead with Heart.™*

# Class of 2016 Valedictorian Speech

## Kelly Cheung '16

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Good morning Sister Jean, Sister Joanne, Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Perfetti, Mrs. Baulch-Zullo, faculty, family, friends, and, of course, my fellow graduates, the Class of 2016!

I am so honored to be able to speak to all of you today. I spent a good amount of time reminiscing about my past four years at Sacred Heart as I was writing this speech, and one particular memory stood out to me. Last month, former FBI agent, SHA alumna, and former Cordette editor-in-chief, Mary Galligan, visited my Gender Studies class. As she talked about her experience after graduating Sacred Heart, she said something that really resonated with me. She said that even though we might not know it yet, we SHA girls exude a special confidence that distinguishes us among others. This statement struck me as particularly ironic since the thematic focus of Gender Studies this year was – exactly that - confidence.

So, I ask, what is confidence? This would have been a difficult question for us to answer freshmen year. We entered this school at fourteen years of age, both anxious and excited at the prospect of starting high school, with our minds swirling with questions. Will I fit in? Should I go to tryouts? Should I get a David's Cookie for the third day in a row? These all seemed questions of monumental importance since four years ago, most of us were unsure of ourselves, approaching matters hesitantly in order for our fragile egos to avoid embarrassment, failure or rejection.

The fearful questions that plagued our minds as freshmen diminished over the ensuing four years at Sacred Heart as we met girls who became our closest friends and faculty who became our trusted mentors. At Sacred Heart, we learned not only to accept ourselves, but also to uplift and bring out the best in one another. We were encouraged to challenge ourselves by trying different activities that interested us and we were instructed not to fear failure. I remember being absolutely terrified during Red and Gold tryouts freshmen year. In fact, I almost talked myself out of showing up for tryouts. Thankfully, I mustered up the courage, the confidence, to meet the challenge and was rewarded with an inspiring experience. Participating in Gold Dance has given me some of my favorite Sacred Heart memories. Many of you probably have had a similar experience involving your favorite sport, club activity, or class here, and it goes to show that we have to overcome that freshman fear of embarrassment, failure or rejection and try, try, try. We have to have the confidence to try in order to find what is truly worthwhile, and Sacred Heart has fostered this confidence in us to do just that.

As Ms. Galligan said, many of us do not yet realize that we possess this confidence that Sacred Heart has instilled in us. As we head off to college in a few short weeks and later begin our careers in our areas of interest, we will have the opportunity to tap into this confidence and exercise it to a greater degree. In contrast to our uncertain fourteen-year-old selves, we will have the self-assurance to go for what we want and to accomplish what we wish to achieve without fear paralyzing us. Our experiences in college will only make us more aware of our confidence. We will inevitably encounter obstacles as we strive to pursue our aspirations. People will doubt us and naysayers will underestimate our abilities because we are young women, but as SHA graduates we will exhibit the confidence to constantly improve and prove that we are more than capable of anything to which we set our minds.

I asked earlier, what is confidence? Confidence is a feeling of self-assurance that is rooted in an appreciation of one's abilities, qualities, and judgment, and I believe that we, the Class of 2016, embody it. I am so proud to be a part of this exceptional group of confident young women. So, congratulations, Class of 2016! I wish you all the best of luck, and I am confident that each of you will achieve wonderful successes in the future. Thank you.