

Speech by Amber Christino (class of 2012)
AGS Commencement 2012

It's really an honor to be here tonight and to be surrounded by so many people that I respect and admire.

I don't think I'm alone in saying that the past two years have passed more quickly than I could have ever imagined. I'm also sure that many of my colleagues shared in my angst when deciding to make this leap in the first place and to live in a foreign country. However, these past two years at AGS have given me some of the most memorable experiences of my life. The friendships that I have developed here at AGS will be life-long and we have truly created our own family from which we all draw support. The education we received here was not only academic but was also culturally enriching, pulling from the varied backgrounds of all the students.

As a member of the Graduate Student Association, I requested all graduating students to complete a survey about their opinions of their time here at AGS. I believe their collective responses will give all of you a good idea of what AGS really means to us.

When asked to describe their experience at AGS in one word, students described it as unique, enlightening, liberating, life-changing, and funstressful (a combination of fun and stressful).

I asked students to describe themselves two years ago, using only one word. Some of the popular responses included: nervous, excited, impressionable and awesome. When asked to describe themselves two years later, after completing their studies at AGS, responses included: confident, old, ready, and more awesome.

The culmination and ultimate goal of our Master's program was the completion of our thesis. As I think my fellow graduates will agree, the thesis process at AGS could be described as rigorous to say the least. Our studies at AGS afforded us the opportunity to pursue our own research interests in a way that no other university could have allowed us. When asked to describe the thesis process, AGS students answered that it was challenging, tiring, invigorating, and rewarding.

Of course none of us would be here today if it weren't for our professors. They are not only our educators, but they are also our advisors, mentors and most importantly, our friends. When asked to describe their favorite professor in one word, most students simply wrote "inspiring." Our professors have given us the tools necessary to examine the world through a new lens, offering us invaluable insights that will help steer us to our future successes.

As we all know, no university could function without the diligent support of the administration staff. In the short two years that we have been at AGS, members of the administration have done everything from helping us find apartments to scheduling cultural events. They have truly provided us with unparalleled support for which we are eternally grateful. AGS students described the administration as supportive, cool, and invaluable, with a special shout-out to Muriel for helping Rachel in dealing with the 93. Their support was integral to our success here at AGS.

Paris is known as the “City of Light,” and we have all been enlightened by our education here at AGS. Not only have we studied the theoretical and fundamental building blocks of international relations, we have also been given the unique opportunity to experience this first-hand through daily interaction with the Parisian culture. To quote Ernest Hemingway, “If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.” Using only one word to describe Paris, students replied: special, breathtaking, awe-inspiring, stunning, and magical.

But beyond the academics, theses, and other aspects of graduate life, the core of our experience at AGS lies in our interactions with one another, sharing in the cultural differences that we each bring to our community. When asked to describe the best part of their AGS experience, all students gave different versions of the same response: sharing it with so many awesome people. Whether exploring the streets of Amsterdam together during our class trip, or exchanging ideas on Middle East peace during our “Wine and Cheese” evenings, the thing that is most valuable to us was the education that we learned from each other in our daily interactions.

So, how can we summarize our experience here at AGS? Obviously, each one of us has grown in different ways through our experiences here, but I think this statement is a good summary shared by all of us; one student summed up his experience at AGS by saying: “This is probably the most unique and special experience I've ever been through. It's been quite a journey, a process of discovery through and through. I think what I'll remember the most is how, thanks to all those around me, Paris became my second home.”

When asked what they will miss most about AGS, the answers were varied; some named their favorite professor, others mentioned the AGS tradition of ‘Wine and Cheese’ evenings, but one answer seemed to show up again and again, and that was: hanging out in the library while pretending to do work, but actually just socializing with all of the other students. The library became the social focal point for all of us here at AGS, so it is fitting that as our class gift, we wanted to contribute to the comfort of future AGSers by donating a couch to the new break room. We hope that future AGSers will continue to gain valuable insights from one another as they also pursue their graduate degrees. On behalf of the Class of 2012, we would like to present this gift to AGS.

Thank you all so much for joining us on this momentous day; this journey would not have been the same without your support. I hope you all will be able to join us as we celebrate our graduation tomorrow evening with family and friends. Thank you.