

To my mother and father, who left everything they knew behind in Puerto Rico for the hope of success for their children.

—
"Legacy. What is a legacy? It's planting seeds in a garden you never get to see."

It's the willingness to recognize that what you are working for is more than just what meets the eye.

The planning.

Our legacies, our gardens, start with planning. We know that soil is the foundation of life on Earth and is critical in maintaining balance. But our families, friends, and mentors prepare our soil. Our families nurture us, our friends provide compassion and sympathy toward us, and our mentors teach us. We spent our childhoods learning to brace for and work with the seasons. We learned to "treat others the way we want to be treated" and "honesty is the best policy." We learn these lessons during the most formative years of our lives— when we prepare the soil for our seeds. What seeds you choose is entirely subjective. Think—*what* do you want to reap? What do you *want* out of your life?

And most importantly, what *are* seeds? Your seeds are your values, hobbies, interests, the things you love, and your dreams. Especially your dreams. As children, we are introduced to all types of seeds. At this age, our imagination knows no bounds. You may have made space for unpractical plants such as Banana Flowers or Plumerias (neither native to Pennsylvania). I dreamed of being a rockstar in a '70s band on a spaceship shaped like a guitar pick (which isn't native anywhere). Regardless, our legacies start here -- in planning what seeds to plant.

The sowing.

Next is the sowing. Sowing is complicated because this is a point in the process that never truly stops. Sometimes, we will plant a seed that doesn't grow, such as my guitar hero dream

~~. Other times, a stray seed will take root when we least expect it. Inevitably, people will make it their business to judge how many seeds you have in your garden. They may also judge how few, the size of your seeds, and the dreams themselves. Others may tell you how to care for them or that your actions are wrong. When this happens, and it will, it will make space for doubt – which I like to call *weeds*. Weeds can lay dormant for years underground. If you allow other people's doubts about you to sit in your head for too long, weeds will take over and feed off your plants. And weeds can look pretty and harmless, but they can choke out what you are trying to grow.~~

The waiting.

Waiting is the most critical but infuriating step because we all want to see our plants grow. There have been copious amounts of waiting throughout our academic "careers." In the last year alone, for example. Waiting for letters of recommendation to be written, transcripts to be sent, and for admissions decisions to arrive— senior year has felt like quite the waiting room. But like every year before this, as we have been patient and watched our flowers bloom, we have also watched some wither. In the storm of trying to impress our families, the drought of searching for academic achievement, and the fluctuating temperatures enticing us to decide *where* we should go, neglecting the seeds we planted so long ago is easy. Remember, gardens represent life and impermanence. It's normal for flowers to

wither— for dreams, ideas, and actions to fail. It is okay to cut those flowers at the base of their stems and let them grow again. And it is also okay to remove them from your garden. In doing so, you make space for something healthier. In loss, there is always something to be gained.

The reaping.

Reaping, which connotatively sounds negative, is quite the opposite. It romanticizes the idea of *loss*. You have reached the result in reaping, and it is time to pick your flowers. You have spent all these years tending to your garden. Your seed of athleticism thrived by being involved in sports. Your seed of creativity grew half an inch taller every moment you invested yourself in your work. This is the time to enjoy it all. My fellow graduates, we are currently reaping. I encourage you to stop and smell the roses. Pick the best ones and give them to your family, friends, and mentors that helped plant those seeds. Give back to those who believed in you. And once you are done commemorating your success, next comes the repeat.

The repeat.

Our legacies are outstretched in front of us as great spaces of potential. It may feel incredibly overwhelming to see all that space, but we are cultivating our futures one flower at a time in the planning, the sowing, the waiting, and the reaping. The choices we make regarding what to grow, where to plant them, how we take care of them, and what we do before the repeat reflect how we nourish our bodies and souls while uplifting those in our community. The desire to create a legacy drives us all, but ask yourself, do you want to be temporarily remembered in an award

and other materialistic items or rather be immortalized through your garden?

Thank you.

It is with great pleasure to (re)introduce our superintendent, Dr. Roche.