
ST FRANCIS DE SALES DUX ADDRESS 2022

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2011 College Dux

Good morning everyone, thank you so much for inviting me here for the opportunity to chat with you all. My name is Tayla, and I was fortunate enough to be a student here at St Francis de Sales College from Year 5 (way back in 2004) until graduating Year 12 in 2011. When I started here at the College, we had 2 basketball courts, none of these amazing new buildings, but a few of the friendly faces you will see in class. My graduating cohort of 43 students experienced multiple changes with the introduction of a new SACE pathway, ushering in the ATAR rather than TER scoring, and introducing the Stage 2 Research Project during our Year 12 time. I was very fortunate to have wonderful mentors such as Miss Hood for Stage 2 English and Mrs Mattner for the Research Project to guide and support me through the changing curriculum.

I have very fond memories of my schooling and Year 12; we had a friendly and close knit cohort, and enjoyed times together such as our Year 12 retreat and trying to navigate early social media when Facebook was just becoming 'a thing'. Aside from studying, I participated in Senior Vocal Ensemble, Justice and Ministry Team projects, and was lucky enough to be a College Captain for 2011. I greatly enjoyed my studies in English, the Research Project, Biology, Chemistry, Religion and Maths, and was very fortunate to receive the Year 12 Dux award for my ATAR results, as well as a SACE Merit Award for the Research Project.

This took a lot of support from some amazing teachers, family and those around me, however, my education journey was not without its hiccups though.

I was absolutely sure from the age of four that I was going to be a palaeontologist like Ross Gellar from friends. I absolutely loved dinosaurs, but come work experience in Year 10, my dreams of opening a real-life Jurassic Park one day came to a screaming halt as the job was very different from what I had imagined. I was left without any idea of what I wanted to do after school. Somehow, later that year I ended up on a camp for rural students to experience what Medical School in Adelaide was like. Being a nervous, shy person throughout school, I was hesitant to attend as this was something way outside my comfort zone, but my goodness, am I glad I went! I gained a newfound interest in the human body and medicine, which spurred my drive to achieve academically in Years 11 and 12, and ultimately lead to me commencing a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery in 2012 at The University of Adelaide. When I was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I could now confidently reply that I wanted to be a doctor.

Looking back now, I realise I was very fortunate to have a clear path in mind. Many friends of mine had no idea what they wanted to do after school, or had so many interests and ideas it was hard to settle on just one.

I did not understand this mindset until I had almost finished my Medical Schooling when I was being asked by my mentors, “Well what TYPE of doctor do you want to be when you graduate?” and I had a Year 12 déjà vu experience... I had to make another big decision all over again, but this time I had SO many interests and ideas I could not settle on just one initially. After 3 years of working around Australia and overseas, and trying so many different specialist areas, I have finished my studies of a Diploma of Paediatrics (kids’ doctor), Advanced Diploma in Obstetrics & Gynaecology (a baby delivering doctor and surgeon), and am now undertaking more study to work remotely with Indigenous communities and the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

If I could give any advice to my younger self, or to any of you in a situation where you aren’t quite sure which path to go down and are feeling pressured, it is to be kind and patient with yourself. Everyone has different strengths, weaknesses, wins and failures, and discovering and embracing these takes time. I was inspired to live by our College ethos of ‘be who you are and be that well’ early in my schooling; this is something I actively try to live by every day, and encourage you to do the same. I feel this echoes our 2022 Heart value of Integrity quite strongly, defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral values. These qualities are at the forefront of my provision of safe, holistic patient care, but also guide my approach to navigating life decisions.

If you have a clear goal in mind, then go for it; try your hardest and don’t be afraid of failure. I honestly thought the world was ending when I received a less than a high distinction at University for a subject, but I can safely say that 9 years later, life has definitely gone on. University, TAFE, and trade-school studies are very different from school, and each have their unique challenges. It can be isolating, but also exhilarating to find other people that have similar interests as you, but with such different backgrounds, so embrace both the academic and social aspects of tertiary study if you go down that route.

If you don’t know ‘what you want to be when you grow up’ or if you have not yet found your passion, then that is okay. A very close friend of mine for example has been a disability care worker, a lifeguard, worked in McDonalds, studied teaching, ran a warehouse, became a SA Police officer, ran Security at the Royal Adelaide Hospital, and is now completing a Plumbing apprenticeship all in the time I have known him, and this does not make his experiences or successes any less valid. Your interests and goals may change as you grow as people, and decisions about study and life do not need to be permanent.

Some final words of advice from myself and members of my 2011 cohort:

I would encourage you all to embrace the College mission to ‘be your best self’ and approach everything in life with integrity, especially with your Year 12 efforts. Find subjects you enjoy, and challenge yourself to do the best you can, even when things are tough. If I hadn’t challenged myself to go on that camp years ago, I don’t know where I would be now.

Work smart and work hard for your remaining schooling years, as setting up a good work ethic now will go such a long way in preparing you for further study or the workforce. In medicine we love acronyms, and I encourage my patients to set themselves SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-limited); so give this a try to help you meet those deadlines and let the feeling of accomplishment drive you to achieve even more.

Finally, please show respect and kindness towards your teachers, as they always have your best interests at heart. You will find their efforts to help you achieve your best and their influence on your values and work ethic to be remarkable, and is something I am grateful for every day.

Thank you all again for having me, and to Mrs Nelson for your help; I wish you all the best of luck for your future studies and life beyond school, whatever that may hold.