

Class of 2016 Farewell Address

By Brooke Hirsheimer



Have you ever grabbed a sample at Costco and identified it as a persuasive reciprocity strategy? Have you ever stared your Notre Dame basketball fan best friend in the eye and felt the deepest feelings of cognitive dissonance? Have you ever self-identified as an Eros lover, a high-self monitor, and a consistent offender of the third person effect?

If you can relate to any of these predicaments, then you are probably a Communication Major about to graduate the University of Connecticut.

Over the course of the past four years we have developed a lens through which we perceive the world differently than any other major. Imagine it this way: the past few years, we've been viewing the world through a microscope, which we'll call the "Comm Major's microscope."

Other scientific fields require extensive lab equipment and tools. But the beauty of the Communication science is that our Comm major's microscope is always with us. Through intellect and senses, we perceive the world in a particular way, and we are always prepared to collect data at any given moment.

During our freshman year, looking through our microscope lenses, the image was blurry and we were

stumbling to make sense of the scenery. The Communication field was still unknown territory. Each year however, we experimented and adjusted the settings of the microscope, each time getting a clearer picture.

We are now seniors. We've completed our curriculum, internships, research, study abroad, etc. We have analyzed a vast array of social specimens. And finally, our microscopes have come into focus for us to see the full, interconnected picture.

With that said, I'd like to use this speech as an opportunity to reflect upon our journey, fine-tuning our collective microscopes.

Let's start with freshman year. We started our journey with four letters. Freshman year was plagued by the painfully catchy phrase YOLO: You Only Live Once. For many, this was simply an acronym for a "live free or die" attitude, a "young and reckless" mantra. But in COMM 1000 we studied how Millennials differ from previous generations. When Drake rapped, "It's the motto baby, Yolo" he was speaking to the very characteristics that made our generation unique. For example, we had learned that in comparison to previous generations, Millennials are more individualistic. More likely to challenge authority. And they actively chase adventure and their personal passions. So when our best friend posted an Insta pic, proclaiming "Eating this piece of pizza instead of going to the gym, #YOLO," our budding Comm brain saw it as a shameless expression of Millennial pride. But this was just the beginning. Our scope of the Communication field was still fragmented and blurry.

At some point during our sophomore year, we opened our laptop and witnessed Oprah, Bill Gates, and LeBron James dump a giant bucket of ice on their heads. Next thing we knew, our sophomore self was standing on our own front lawn, talking into our brother's go-pro saying, "Hello, my name is Brooke Hirsheimer and I have been nominated to do the ALS Ice Bucket challenge." Five gallons of ice later and we're practically viral. But then, our blossoming Comm mind kicks in once again. We realize that what we just partook in was a brilliant

campaign tactic, and arguably the most effective PR stunt of the decade. The task of dumping ice on one's head was feasible enough for anyone to complete, yet uncomfortable enough to produce just the right amount of adrenaline for partakers to feel a sense of accomplishment. Every local, regional and national news outlet picked up the story. Not to mention, the highest profile celebrities were joining in on the fun. The ALS cause and foundation was at the top of the public agenda for months and at NO COST to the foundation. After all this, we felt accomplished, understanding that this campaign was successful because it harnessed the social proof principle. We were adjusting the settings on our microscope and the optics were starting to make sense.

Our junior year was marked by what I like to call SnowpocalYaking."

SnowpocalYaking is when you use Yik Yak, an anonymous messaging app, to narrate every detail of the blizzard occurring right outside your window. It's as if the world is ending—thus, the "snowpocalypse" portion of the verb. Ultimately, Yik Yak allowed the UConn community to voice their every thought while remaining completely incognito. From a Comm perspective, this new mediated platform was a playground for thought. Was this app a blessing or a curse? Were there other issues that could benefit from a similar community-based, instantaneous yet anonymous online forum? Perhaps yik-yak was the future of reporting crimes. Perhaps corporations could use such an app to collect anonymous feedback. We felt our communication lens growing stronger and stronger. Everything was coming into focus.

That brings us to this year, our senior year. Back in November, the news was saturated with the tragedy of the Paris Attacks. One by one, we watched friends on Facebook change their profile picture to the French flag. Our friends saw this as an opportunity to empathize with the French people. But once again, our Comm brain saw it as so much more. We realized the power of social media to bring together not only a local but also a global community. Yet, we looked critically at why #PrayForParis was trending, and why the Kenyan and

Lebanese tragedies were left out of the conversation. Then we remembered the in-group vs. out-group theories. We started asking ourselves questions like, how can we play-up unifying qualities in cultures that are so different than ours to ensure that they too can receive global support during their tragedies. We scared ourselves a little with the complexity of our own idea. And that my friends, is what's beautiful about the well-trained Comm major brain.

Whether it comes in the form of YOLO, the Ice bucket challenge, Sowpocalyaking, or #PrayForParis, all disciplines of Communication are intertwined. Mass media, interpersonal, group, intercultural, organizational, you name it. When we have the ability to understand and utilize all aspects of Communication, we are empowered to strategically transfer information and messaging like no other major can. We are now equipped to step out from behind our microscopes and into the intricate professional Communication landscape. With our refined Comm major lenses, we will be the content producers who generate iconic moments for the generations to come.

To conclude this speech, can I ask a favor of all of us Comm grads out there? Take a mental snap chat of this moment. Except, make it last for more than 24 hours. Make it last for your entire life. And I'll tell you why: Looking around this room we are sitting among our most powerful asset—and that is each other. Together, we have gotten stuck in wind tunnels on our trek to Arjona. We've enjoyed Amanda Denes' pet pictures. And we've channeled our inner Jimmy Kimmel to deliver killer speeches for Rory's class. Most importantly we have developed an unparalleled network of highly motivated, like-minded individuals.

On that note, we owe the most massive thank you to the parents who got us here. Another massive thank you to the wildly passionate professors who helped us fine-tune our microscopes. And, finally, a thank you in advance to each other for being our lifelong support system—as friends and as Communication professionals.