

Graduation remarks, International Relations Diploma Ceremony, 2015

Nina's Remarks

It's now time for the awarding of the prizes and diplomas. I'm sure you'll be happy to hear that my speech is going to be short. I just want to say a little about who you, the graduates, are and what you've been doing for four years--maybe at times you've wondered yourself. My remarks are directed at you, the graduates—after all, you're the reason we're here—but your family and friends may also be interested in hearing a little about you.

The International Relations concentration is one of the largest concentrations at Brown. It is an interdisciplinary major that draws on political science, history, economics, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and environmental studies, among others. It covers a wide range of issues including war and peace; trade, development and inequality; human rights and humanitarianism; the environment, and the shaping of culture and political identities.

There are 75 seniors graduating in IR this year. About 66 of you are here today. You come from 18 U.S. states and 16 foreign countries.

You have all taken core courses in history, economics, sociology, anthropology and political science. You were also required to choose one of two “tracks.” A little over half of you (53%) did the Security and Society track, while slightly less than half of you (47%) did the Political Economy and Society track.

Beyond the tracks, each of you knows something about a region of the world. You have all taken a senior seminar on a specialized topic in international relations and many of you have taken more than one.

You have mastered foreign languages, collectively submitting 12 languages for the language requirement, although the real number of languages spoken is probably even greater since many of you speak more than one foreign language. 65% of you studied abroad for a semester or a year during your time at Brown, in 19 countries. 31% of you are double concentrators with another department, often in related fields, and even a couple in neuroscience and the visual arts.

Some of you have conducted independent studies, working closely with a professor on a topic of your choice. Eight of you wrote senior theses. Some of you have held internships during the summer at international organizations, government offices here and abroad, research and advocacy organizations such as human rights or development organizations, and businesses. Others have worked as research assistants for Watson Institute faculty or for research organizations or think tanks during the summer. Many of you have spent your summers exploring other parts of the world—for fun as well as enlightenment.

During your years as IR concentrators, you have also sent Claudia Elliott, your concentration advisor, several thousand emails. You have tried to get out of Econ 110, History 1900 or POLS 400 [required courses]—in vain, however. You have tried to get in to senior seminars as sophomores—and given how smooth and persuasive you are, many of you succeeded. You can all recite what realism and liberalism are. You have slept in class during POLS 400 or Econ 110 at least once. In at least one large class you never learned the name of your TA (that was not a class you got an A in).

You've stayed in the Watson Institute after hours and propped open the side doors to let your friends in so you could study after it was locked. You've written hundreds of research papers, and sometimes you've actually gone to the library to do the research (instead of doing it on the Internet).

More seriously, however, and more important, you have also taught and inspired your fellow students and your professors---by your questions and comments in and out of class, by your constant willingness to challenge received ideas and conventional wisdom, and by your persistent interest in the world outside your own national borders.

So that's a little about who you are as a group and what you've been doing for the last four years. My own view is that this is an extraordinarily important time to be an international relations concentrator---a time when the state of the world is more troubling than at any time since the end of the Cold War. We face challenging issues for which there are no easy answers: climate change, troubled great-power relations, poverty and inequality, the rise of fundamentalisms of various kinds, financial crises, inadequate international institutions, clashes of power and of culture. I am reassured to know that we are sending out into this troubling and troubled world such a dedicated group of young people who know something about it and how it

works. We, your professors here on the stage---and those who could not be with us today---are tremendously proud of what you have accomplished during your four years at Brown. For the sake of the world and its people, we wish you many more accomplishments in the future.

And now, the moment you've been waiting for---the diplomas.