Humanities Department Convocation: “Well-Rounded”
May 24, 2013 Sarah Kyo

"San Jose State gives us the tools to go out into the world and make it a better place if we use everything that San Jose State has to give to make a change," Valedictorian Jessica Apple told her fellow humanities graduates. (Stan Olszewski photo)

(This week, SJSU Today’s small but mighty band of writers and photographers will take a peek at graduation receptions and convocations campuswide so we can share with you the excitement of the more than 8,000 members of the Class of 2013. We’ll post more photos on Facebook.)

Representing degrees in humanities, liberal studies or religious studies, the Humanities Convocation on May 23 at Morris Daily Auditorium celebrated individuals who will influence and change the lives of others, many by becoming teachers.

When asked by Associate Professor and Liberal Studies Coordinator Susan Verducci how many of them were first-generation college graduates, roughly half of the group raised their hands.

All of the graduates overall were the lucky ones, according to Humanities Department salutatorian Maimona Afzal. A SJSU 2013 Outstanding Graduating Senior, Afzal wrote an impassioned speech presented in spoken word style.

Her booming voice was full of anger as she passionately spoke about societal challenges and injustices in education — dropout rates and economic disadvantages among others — and how despite all this, this group made it through and can change a child’s life.

This is a path she herself will follow. Afzal has accepted a position at Teach for America, where she will be working with special needs children in East San Jose.

Valedictorian Jessica Apple, who also plans to become a teacher, shared a game that she played with incoming freshmen at orientation, when she would ask, “If I had a magic wand I would _______.”

Magic Wand

The freshmen would fill in the blank with their dreams of making the world a better place. Afterwards, she would tell them SJSU will prepare them well to make their dreams come true.

“San Jose State gives us the tools to go out into the world and make it a better place if we use everything that San Jose State has to give to make a change,” she said.

The components of everyone’s own figurative magic wand, she said, are optimism, self-confidence and skills and knowledge.
In the role of Honored Speaker, Lecturer Judith Georges addressed the graduates about being liberal arts scholars in the center of Silicon Valley in the diverse but expensive Bay Area.

"We don't know how to use a wafer to build a chip. We think it better to serve wafers and chips to elementary school kids," she quipped, drawing laughter from the graduates and audience.

In spite of this, she said these humanities graduates are also nerds in their fields by tackling the challenge of being well-rounded people academically.

She imparted on them what she described as a sacred trust: "Be defenders of a well-rounded education."

Shout-Outs

In a recent survey, SJSU asked new grads if they would like to send a shout-out to family and friends. Here are some of the responses we received from humanities and liberal studies majors. More will be shared at Commencement.

Michael Reinken: "Dr. Ormsbee, thank you for pushing me academically like no one else and being a mentor and friend."

Megan Mohacsi: "Thank you to my friends and family who have always believed in me, even when I didn't believe in myself, especially my fiance, Ian who has always been right by my side."

Sarah Limongelli: "Thank you Professor McCraw for always putting his students first, a little something every teacher and future teacher could learn."