**15297, Olla Bella Peiffer**

Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be able to speak to you tonight for this year’s spring graduation ceremony. In 2013 I graduated from the Haggerty English Language School at SUNY New Paltz, although I am sorry to say that I actually missed my graduation ceremony. Because of my absence it wasn’t until after graduation that I learned that I had also been awarded the Outstanding Student and Perfect Attendance awards. Wow, perfect attendance in school, but absent for the biggest moment of my school experience. I’m glad you have all made it here today for this momentous occasion. I am proud to say the school prepared me for entering the University as an ESL student. I have wonderful memories of my time here at this school. In addition to all my work as a student, I also managed to become a U.S. citizen during that time.

I remember feeling inadequate when I found the school on-line on SUNY's website and decided to explore it. When I came there the first time, my car somehow locked the wheel and all the functions. Because of my feeling of inadequacy, I probably pressed something what I should not have pressed. Despite my car trouble, I made it to the school, took the assessment test, and passed. Connie, the director of HELP (Haggerty English Language Program) met me there and gave me the test. It was love at first sight when I viewed the campus. It was so tranquil and relaxing. But the program is what truly won my heart. Meeting people from all over the world, spending hours talking and interacting with them by studying English together, sharing thoughts and ideas, talking about different cultures was super cool. It was also helpful in advancing my English skills and gaining self-confidence.

The people here at the school made all the difference in how well I did both while here and after I graduated. I was very impressed with the director Connie Perdreau, was beautiful, smart and wise, with very good manners. She taught English in France. Kristine Krug, Professor of the writing class, finished the TESOL program at SUNY and has been working there since then. Kristine is my hero - she is a very serious and extremely smart, religious person who believes in doing the right thing. Kristine set a high bar, but was very thoughtful, professional and flexible. She made us think hard about the world around us, and I finally understood how to write essays of different types. It was Kristine how told me later that I had won my awards. Sara Elia was devoted, fun and very gentle, and tried to teach us to give presentations and speeches. Kathy \_\_\_\_\_ was teaching us academic English and American traditions. Everybody was working together: The Japanese, Chinese, The Saudi Arabians, Russians, Colombians, etc. I truly appreciate all the efforts these wonderful put forth to help us learn our lessons and graduate. I know how hard it must have been to teach us, especially me because I always talked too much during all my classes.

Since leaving this school, I have received and aced the International English teaching certificate to teach ESL abroad and I aced it, as well. I am now preparing for GRE to enter the graduate TESOL program at SUNY in New Paltz. It’s impossible to name everyone but the people who worked with me there were just wonderful: helpful, friendly, understanding professors and instructors. The program is amazing and life changing. You are all very lucky to be able to study here and have the opportunity to experience and learn at HELP. It will broaden your horizons, give you professional choices, and you will have the opportunity to make many friends. Remember that learning foreign languages can become a life style which changes your lives forever. I want to encourage each of you to study harder, live your studying, not just study for grades, and be role models for future students at SUNY. 

Thank you,