

Dear Class of 2016,

Congratulations! You're two months into senior year – one of the best years of your life. It might not feel like it right now (I know – it feels like college application deadlines are right around the corner, but you also wish you could just be done with them), but it will be. Application season will be over before you know it. This is the last stretch to the finish line – you're almost there.

To introduce myself – I'm Tammy. I graduated from MSJ in 2014 and am currently a sophomore at Princeton. I'm not going to give college application advice because you've probably heard enough of that from your teachers, your parents, your counselors, your friends, and Google – and plus, that advice would only be good for another month. What I do want to talk about is what you should take away from senior year.

I think people, and especially MSJ students, have a tendency to spread themselves too thin sometimes. You're always feeling that pressure to take one more AP test, to join one more organization, to apply to one more college. Some people thrive on that pressure – but only in the short-term; in the long-term, it's a recipe for emotional burnout and mental/physical exhaustion.

One of the most important lessons college has taught me, that I wish I knew earlier, is this: You are human, and there are only so many hours in a day, so many days in a week, and so many weeks now left in your senior year. Being able to prioritize the relationships and activities that are most important to you are key to having a truly memorable and meaningful last year. What's adding value to your life right now, what really excites and motivates you? What's not adding value, and is bringing you down? Balance and restructure your life according to what really should be at the top of your priority list. Cut down on the rest of the noise. As much as we think we should be doing everything at once, it's better and more worthwhile to be doing a few things really well than a lot of things fairly mediocrally.

This year will be full of lasts – your last first day of school, your last homecoming, your last prom, your last finals, your last time getting dress coded at school (as much as we all love our campus supervisors, that's a definite perk after high school). For those of you who will be leaving Fremont for college, and especially leaving the Bay Area, this year will also likely be the last time you see most of your classmates and the last time you live at home for such an extended period of time.

So – really think about what's made your years at MSJ meaningful, and what will continue to make senior year meaningful. You'll inevitably fall out of touch with many of your high school friends, but the ones who matter most will be there no matter how far away you are – find those friends, deepen those relationships, keep them close. Continue to pursue the activities and classes that you've found real value in and end your high school years knowing that you've accomplished something amazing and unique for yourself. Don't let senioritis get the best of you – now, in your last year, is the time to lean in rather than pull back (on a practical level, too, once you've fallen into the trap of senioritis, it's realllyyyy hard to motivate yourself at the beginning of college). Hang out with your parents more in this last year you're living at home.

Get to know your teachers – they’ve been through all this, and can be more of a friend than you realize.

In closing – so much of this year is about looking ahead to the next year, but remember to always stay present in the moment. In the months you have left, really take the chance to deepen your existing relationships, pursue the activities you love, and reassess the balance in your life. Don't waste the time left on things that don't have a positive impact on your life – seek out what will leave you with the most memorable and valuable last experiences. Some will be lasts you look forward to; some will be bittersweet. But in the end, they're all part of this chapter of your life that is coming to a close. So make these lasts count, because senior year of high school only ever happens once.

Good luck!

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