

Harvard College Class Day  
June 3, 2009  
Ivy Oration  
(Text is as prepared for delivery.  
Check against delivery.)

*Matt Lauer: A Biography in Four Volumes*  
Alison Rich

Matt Lauer. Volume 1. Matthew Craig Lauersteinowitz was born in New York, New York, the son of Marilyn and Robert. In his youth, he was known as a “terrible, terrible person.” Things happened. Then other stuff. Then he came to Harvard to give the class day speech. Hi, I’m Alison Rich and the senior class committee forbids me from getting any “realer” otherwise I can’t shake Matt Lauer’s hand today so I’m just going to stop.

Sooooo in that case, I was hoping to take a few minutes to talk to you guys about something that’s been bothering me. Let me start off with a little story. The night before I left for senior year, my dad told me he wanted to give me something. “Please” I thought. “Please let it be lots and lots of free money.” But no! It was an article entitled, “The Disadvantages of an Elite Education.” “What?” I thought. “What disadvantages? Being too awesome?!”

But actually this article had a ton of complaints about the ivy league. Now before I go on, I need to tell you that I don’t know how to pronounce the article’s author’s name, so I’m just gonna call him Susan. Ok, the first disadvantage Susan mentioned is called “ivy retardation.” - Oof, I forgot Susan was a little insensitive, but when I read this phrase, I thought I knew what she was getting at. “Ivy retardation - Is that like when someone asks you where you go to school, and you come off looking like a jerk?” As freshmen we handled the whole “where do you go to school” question like champions of social awkwardness something like this... “I go to Ha Ha Harvard. I’m sorry! I promise, I’m dumb.” But these days, as seniors, Harvard has amped up our egos so much we answer more like this, “I go to HARVARD. That’s right, Harvard - 7% acceptance rate and I go there! Yeah, maybe I’m a legacy, but I’m over it, so you get over it! I worked really hard in high school. I had a chronic case of claw hands (*raises hands and tenses*

*them to show the state of stress*), but now I'm served gold out of gold cups, and the world shall bow down to my Crimson Glory!!"

That's actually not what Susan meant by "Ivy Retardation." That's just rude. No, the so-called Ivy problem that Susan was trying to bring to the fore is apparently what happens when you meet someone who didn't go to an Ivy league school - for Susan, this happened to be a plumber - and you can't figure out what to say to this strange non-Ivy League creature. Apparently Susan opted out of Foreign Cultures 92: Plumber Chat. I guess the full title of the article should have been "The Disadvantages of An Elite Education by Susan who is a Dbag." Sorry Susan. I have to respectfully disagree. I'm pretty sure an "elite education" is not the reason you can't talk to people from different backgrounds. If anything, Harvard has taught me never to make assumptions about people's intelligence. I mean, I have a friend who is graduating phi beta kappa summa cum laude habes corpus et tu brute - and she once ate an entire bowl of mayonnaise before realizing it wasn't yogurt.

"Ok" I thought. "Take that Susan. No disadvantages here."

And I was going to keep reading, but then I got sleepy. But I couldn't stop thinking about what disadvantages really might exist when you go to Harvard. I mean sure, I may not have any marketable skills. I may leave here feeling impervious to oncoming traffic. My peers and I may have the social skills of drunk cats, but come on! Are these really disadvantages? Or are these just things that make us all delightfully eccentric like wearing a cape, or studying Folklore and Mythology, or wearing a cape *while* studying Folklore and Mythology? Right?

But just this week, I started to figure out the real disadvantage of going to Harvard. Ok go with me on this. Lately everyone keeps talking about the future and the real world, to which I reply (*sticking my fingers in my ears and closing my eyes*) "LA LA LA LA I CAN'T HEAR YOU LA LA LA! Point me to Narnia! Or just send me to that version of New York City they had in *Friends* where everyone has giant apartments and Jennifer Aniston was so flighty."

Because I'll be honest: I'm afraid. I mean, I plan on being a big deal. I plan on being successful. I want yachts - 1000 mink encrusted platinum endangered baby yachts. But I don't *know* that it'll happen. Do you? I mean, we have all these ambitions. And

that's great! They give us direction. But what if we don't succeed? Well actually, to be honest, I think we can all agree that I'm going to do really well. Check out this smile: (*Makes awkward smile.*) But I don't know about all of you. I saw you guys at the Last Chance Dance, and some of you people move your bodies in ways that the real world is not about to accept! And you refuse to be stopped! Lumumba Seegars!

But why are we so focused on this whole success thing anyway? Because that's what's supposed to make us happy, right? Well maybe not.

See this one time, I went to my Science B Core, Human Mind. And there was this cute old lady with a fierce perm there they call Steven Pinker. And Pinker said that when people get something they want, their happiness only increases for a few hours or days. And then they just sink back to their old level of happiness. So what's the point in obsessing over success if the happiness isn't going to last?

Quick side note – don't take Human Mind senior year. Bad idea. It's rife with beady eyed naturally caffeinated freshmen who go to class as much as half the time and sometimes even take notes.

Ok back on track: so our future happiness really isn't wrapped up in the success we get after going to Harvard. Now I know what you're thinking, "Alison! What are you saying? Should I have gone to some far inferior university like that place they call Yale?" (*aside to myself*) Yale joke – check.

No crazycakes! Harvard and the Harvard drive to achieve is a wonderful thing. Take pride in your excellence and the places it takes you, but widen your focus. Because the real disadvantage to going to Harvard is in being so determined to be successful that, that becomes the sole focus of your life. Since, we've already established the fact that achieving these goals may not provided a sustained increase in happiness, we need to look to other elements of our lives to truly find fulfillment. So I say invest not only in your dreams, but in the dreams of your peers as well. Because there are going to be times where we're not doing so hot achieving our goals, so step back, take the focus off yourself, and see if you can get pumped about helping your friends. It's the bonds formed in serving our friends that are truly going to bring lasting pride in our lives

I know this sounds crazy foreign to the competitive Harvard mentality. And this is definitely easier said than done. I know I'm dreading next year when I get a call from

one of my old Harvard friends saying, “Goldman is so great! I have soooooo much money. Turns out I love money and health insurance – but that’s just me. How are you?? And all I’ll be able to say is “Unemployment is so great. I’ve watched ‘The Real Housewives: Compton’ sooo many times. Turns out I love “The Real Housewives” and being sedentary – but that’s just me!”

So yeah that might be rough. But just because some of us might be successful later than other’s doesn’t mean we can’t celebrate our friends’ accomplishments in the mean time even if you and your best friend want the same thing. How awesome would it be to receive that Pulitzer Prize with your freshman year roommate, Chuck? Ya know scurvy Chuck, the guy who ate all chickwiches freshman year and then got scurvy? Chuck was so cool and orange!

It’s been said “that to those who much has been given, much is expected.” Well much has been given to us. And I’m sure you’ve got the whole “much is expected” part down all by yourself. Why not frame this next era of our lives as “to those who much has been given, much should be shared.”

*(Aside to myself)* God I’m so wise. *(To audience)* So congrats Class of 2009! We’re gonna do great things – each and every one of us.