

## **Matthew Danziger's Valedictory Address to the Hamilton College Class of 2006**

In the past few weeks, everyone who asked me if I would be speaking here today told me “Danziger, keep it short and don’t be corny!”; I’m going to keep it short. But, I may be a little corny.

In my four years here at Hamilton, although I never played a varsity sport, I was considered the track groupie. People mistook me for being on the track team because most of my close friends run track and I’m constantly running around campus. So in coming up with something to say today, it seemed fitting to talk about running.

College is like the perfect mile; 1600 meters. 4 laps. Each lap a year. Each meter a stride toward the finish line: graduation.

The gun goes off. It’s freshman year. We’re here at orientation week, and a hypnotized Andrew Terry is singing Britney Spears on the starting line. The goal of the first lap, freshman year, is to establish our position, not just academically, but socially as well. We try to become comfortable with who we are and where we are going in a new race. Some of us go out too fast. Bundy parties every weekend take a bit of a toll on us. If we go out too slow, thinking we can get away with high school effort, we may get boxed in. We are unsure and a little nervous about where we are going and how the race will finish up.

Second lap. Sophomore year. We begin to settle in. Our bodies and minds respond to our pace of the previous lap. We take this time to adjust. We get into the rhythm of college, and laugh to ourselves as we glance back at the freshman in the previous lap making the same mistakes that we did. But we begin to get on track and decide how we want the rest of the race to pan out. We declare a major, get immersed in our clubs and sports, and begin to resemble the people we will end up.

Third lap. Junior year. Now, we’re feeling the pain. We’re realizing it’s going to take guts and effort to make some moves and win the race. Some of us get tired of running in circles; So we go abroad; taking advantage of the new opportunities, the gaps, the race has given us. Taking into account the first two laps, we begin to have a good idea if we’ll be able to attain a personal best. We know if we pick up the pace and push ourselves, grabbing an internship or two, the future, the end, will look much brighter.

Final lap. Senior year. We can clearly see our final position. Where we could finish comes down to how hard we kick at the end. We ask ourselves, can we find the energy within us, to give it our all, to sprint? The sprint is not to make the race go faster, because we do want to live up college as long as possible; Honestly, where else can we streak without out getting arrested. Where else can we go to basketball games dressed up in ridiculous costumes, everyone chanting at the top of their lungs about the opposing basketball team's lack of sex life? The sprint is so we can employ the skills we have obtained in our time here. We start the job search, reflecting on our efforts in the previous three laps, coming to terms with how it all came together. And no matter our position, we know if we have nothing left to give crossing the finish line, we've run a good race.

I want to thank my parents, Professors Bedient, Professor Knop, Professor Kelly, and my best friend, Matt Smith, for giving me the strength to sprint at the end.

And for the 503 graduates of the class of 2006, no matter the course of your race, no matter your time, you are here today because you established your position freshman year, fell into rhythm, pushed through the pain of junior year, and still had the will to sprint at the end. You've all run a perfect mile. Thank you.