

Hi! My name is Chloe, and I'm a proud Paterno Fellow, graduating with degrees in History and German and minors in Econ and International Studies. Despite my degree audit, when people ask me what I "do" here at Penn State, I have no idea where to start. My identity isn't one specialty or one club: it's Penn State, all of Penn State, because with the support of the Paterno Fellows Program I have been able to say yes to all the opportunities that have come my way. So, basically, when people ask me what I do here at Penn State, my answer is simple: I *do* Penn State.

Every class I took, every club I joined, every opportunity I took advantage of became a springboard to dream bigger. I can rattle off a lot of involvement, as can everyone here today. My highlight reel would include interning at the US Embassy in Berlin last summer, completing a 112-page honors thesis on the economic impact of Turkish guest worker migrants to postwar West Germany, serving as the founding Content Director for State of State—a conference to promote dialogue in the Penn State community—teaching tap dance classes for all four years, and actually convincing a company to hire me after graduation. I'll be working in Atlanta, Georgia as a Management Development Candidate with McMaster Carr, an industrial supply company. And I know so many people here today with highlight reels exponentially more impressive than mine. Isn't it absolutely jaw-droppingly amazing that we have been able to do so much? To pull off classes and research and clubs and jobs and travel and, just maybe, sleep? And haven't you noticed how you always see the same people everywhere, peppered through your honors classes and societies, in the news and on your newsfeed? And haven't you noticed how many of these students—our peers—who have earned their way to the top of Penn State are right here today as Paterno Fellows?

As Paterno Fellows in the Liberal Arts, we not only have the tools, but we also have the expectation, to go beyond classroom learning and to, for the first time, taking off these training wheels we've become so accustomed to. We are taught how to communicate in a global marketplace and to understand philanthropy as a way of life—to give back what's been given to us. We are expected to recognize the ethical intensity of daily decisions and to lead our lives as moral role models. We are given the cushion of research grants and encouraged to ask the big questions.

We're all idealists who want to leave the world better than we found it, and so many of us want to put that passion into a career. We're *those* people sitting at Café on a Friday afternoon deconstructing the gender binary or ranting about how the mainstream media completely misrepresents macroeconomics or sharing an intense love of ancient epics with our friends.

Yet we're also allowed to be realists. We need jobs. We're probably not going to get our dream job right out of college. And in interviews, when the HR specialist is trying to figure out if we'd be good managers, citing Shakespeare won't always get you the job. That's where the Paterno Fellows Program's emphasis on enrichment makes all the difference—in my case, the financial support during my unpaid internships and the scholarships during the semester that allowed me to reduce the amount of time I worked a wage job and instead funnel that energy towards involvement and extracurriculars. I'm going to be 100% honest: although information I've learned in classes has come in handy during my internships, during all of my interviews for full time jobs, I don't think I ever once talked about my classroom learning experiences. No: they all wanted to know about my leadership credentials, my self-directed research, and my study abroad experience. Interviewers want to know when you took initiative, when you showed integrity, when you showed what couldn't easily be seen from the service, and if you know how talk your way through case studies. When they would ask me something like, "how have you

handled a situation with conflicting responsibilities?” it turns out they don’t want you to say, “Well, as John Stuart Mill’s consequentialist ethical decision making framework would recommend...” But having studied John Stuart Mill, we know how to look at a situation from multiple perspectives, how to think with empathy to understand the viewpoints of others, and how to find the common ground necessary to resolve those conflicting responsibilities.

And as a Paterno Fellow, we’ve been able to be realists and do awesome things and be ready to enter the labor force as leaders and innovators. For that, I’m always thankful and I always champion a healthy dose of practicality.

Yet, despite this practicality, I don’t want to discount even for a second the value of a liberal arts education for its own sake. If practicality were the only reason to go to college, then we’d all be vocational or business students. College would then just be a time and money investment in our future careers—we’d race through the curriculum as quickly as possible, we’d take laser-focused classes that gave us the most practical skills, and we’d all probably get well-paid jobs after graduation. But we don’t do that, because our future careers aren’t the only things we’re investing in. We’re investing in our future selves. Our future minds. Our future personalities and experiences and human existence. In the liberal arts, we plug into the rich, expansive, and obsessively interesting web of all the knowledge that ever was and ever will be, and we learn about people and places and ideas and facts we will never once use in the so-called “real world.”

I argue that education is an end unto itself. Education—sharpening your mind, learning histories and fantasies and poetry and languages, understanding the nuance of argument and logic—education doesn’t have to be a means to an end. Yes, it makes you a more informed voter, a good conversationalist, and a more open-minded friend, but it also makes you better company for your own self. Education is fulfilling for its own sake. Education isn’t just reading the

standard litany of classical works of arts and knowledge—it's falling in love with what *you* define as major influences and engaging with them and maybe even contributing your understanding forward to future generations. And if that isn't the real world, in all its full complexity and vibrancy, I don't know what is.

We have an obligation to provide for ourselves and for our families: we should treat college as a financial investment in our financial future, and Paterno Fellows lets us collect the payoff by investing in ourselves from the beginning. However, we also had the chance to study with the best and brightest educators, to pour over books in one of the best research libraries in the country, to surround ourselves with insightful peers, and to challenge ourselves every day, not because of our financial future, but because we decided to flex the muscle that makes us human: our brains.

And this isn't something that stops today, at graduation. We've done a lot of cool stuff at Penn State and around the world as Penn State students, but at 21 or 22 years of age, our own contributions—our work, our careers, our legacies—are yet to be earned. College should be the best four years of your life so far, but don't let them be your peak. As we gather here today, surrounded by blue tarps and new spring flowers, we are reminded that as Penn Staters, we never have the right to stop growing, improving, learning or perfecting ourselves. But the foundation is solid—our foundation of wisdom and inquiry that survives long past our memory of all those formulas, dates, and theorems. We have the skills and the tools—Paterno Fellows, the College of the Liberal Arts, and Penn State—gave them to us. Now let's get to work.