

Mia Chaaya - Academic Assembly Speech 2021 - Class of 2020

Who are you gonna be?

Note: I am not asking you 'What are you going to do?' 'What are you going to do in 5, 10, 20, 50 years.

No. My question is 'Who are you going to be?' I am asking about how you plan to live your life every day. What impact you plan on having in the world as you grow. How are you going to respond to situations that don't go according to your plan? How do you want people to remember you and look at you deeper than the surface. These attributes are what define us, not the day you get a promotion or get public acclamation for what you have succeeded in, you are defined by the times that cause you to stumble and fall, but you get back up and move forward even stronger than before. This is the kind of question I asked myself when starting Year 12, because I wanted my learning journey to impact me deeper than receiving high grades and was probably one of the reasons I was driven to work hard.

This year is a critical time of your life, as you move from being a teen into an adult, and if you are like me, young for the Year, you're still moving into adulthood nonetheless. Thus, this year will play a large role in shaping who you are going to be, not through the end result of how high your ATAR is, but how much you have grown - a journey, working towards goals and meeting them, shaping you mentally.

The HSC is no doubt going to require hard work and more hard work, but I want to focus on, in my opinion, the most important element of it; your mindset.

After everything that began happening in the Year 12 journey, starting with the bushfires, I aimed to see everything as an opportunity; that's who I wanted to be, and as 2020 College Co-Captain, I wanted to lead my Year and the school to success. I focused on the positive and determined to persist to do well and COVID provided the greatest opportunity to me of all to grow and to succeed, because if my mindset wasn't positive and I didn't see it as an opportunity, 2020 would be the biggest struggle I had ever faced. I understand that the HSC seems like some examination process put into play by NESA with no apparent relation to our lives or future career. That's one way of looking at it, often the most common way. I refused to see it like that. And I discourage you from seeing it like that, and honestly, yes, you are never going to be asked to recite the most important quotes of The Crucible and be able to perform differentiation and integration to math equations, but you *will* be expected to work hard to attain your personal goals, you *will* be expected to keep moving forward when times get tough and you *will* be expected to be selfish as you strive towards your personal best. My mindset allowed me to recognise that HSC was the perfect opportunity for me to practise. To practise making mistakes, to practise receiving critique of my work and to see how much I could achieve if I simply put in the hard work. Your mindset should view the HSC as developing a skillset, not developing marks and grades. The skill of persistence and discipline. Even in your SOR exam where you need to decide which religion you want to write your 20 mark essay on within 3 minutes - that will technically determine your final mark. Knowing what religion you can address best won't help in life, yes; but life is going to expect you to be able to work under pressure, make decisions under pressure in a limited time frame and the HSC is the safest environment for you to practise.

The resilience required for this year is immense, and I *vividly* recall crying in front of Mr Graham after I got my SOR mark and was ranked 32nd in the cohort, and while this may not seem so bad to some of you, I was deeply worried that I would not get a Band 6 in the subject. But through a mindset that was looking beyond marks and focusing on a desire to improve to reach my potential, I

pushed myself to do better and ended up getting 2nd in the state. Rather than having bad ranks upset you and slow you down, guide your mindset to view it as motivation to keep going and to get better - because you will.

Never in my life did I even consider getting a state rank, so I ask you, to never ever say the term 'I can't do this', because you really don't know what you can do just yet. You need to prove to yourself that you can do it or at least try to, because you can and the HSC will show you that you can survive immense amounts of workload and responsibility. And you will realise that part of the answer to 'Who you are going to be', is a woman aware of her strength and ability to accomplish what people around you think cannot be accomplished.

So a practical step: Firstly, get a whiteboard. I had a whiteboard propped up on my desk with my ATAR goal on the top right hand corner. Above it, I had the quote "It is not your aptitude, but your attitude, that determines your altitude". A bit of late night inspiration for myself sent by Mum. I also had my subjects written and underneath, dot points of all that I needed to get done for it. Some things I would cross off that night, some things stayed up there for months. Whether or not things get crossed off immediately is not the point, but it's the mindset and reminder of having work that needs to be done. In so doing, instead of being overwhelmed when you decide to sit and think about all the work you need to do, you always see it when you're home, so you can plan your time, social life and extra curriculars accordingly, so you don't get stressed at 1.00am in the morning when you remember the assignment you needed to get started on. Write down small goals also - another important aspect. Even something as simple as finish reading the chapter of the book, even if you have two pages left, write it down and cross it off. In so doing, you feel as though you are achieving things even when you feel incredibly unmotivated. Even things like English assessment - don't write it like that, break it up into several smaller tasks so you constantly feel as though you are progressing, and hence, are subconsciously motivated to keep working so you can keep crossing things off that list.

During the year, I strongly leaned on older girls for support, especially in the Year above. I encourage you to take advantage of the girls who were in your shoes one or two years ago. Bernard of Chartres said "If I am seeing further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." To the teachers, for constantly answering our emails, calming us down and having sheer faith in us that we never had, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart on behalf of the class of 2020. To the Class of 2019, although not here today, I say thank you on behalf of my cohort, for guiding us whole heartedly through our HSC year to great success. I believe the success of our College is through steps we take daily, over months and years. So the teachers and Class of 2019 being the giants my Year stood upon, you young women sitting before me should constantly ask my Year advice. We are only a text away, about anything and everything, whether it be trial prep, how to study for an English exam and how to cope with the workload. In doing so, you will add to the height of the giants so that you, the Class of 2021, will see even further than we did, and so that you can be even more successful than we were.

I am not asking you to leave this assembly in love with the HSC and the exams, simply to be generously spirited to it. I am telling you that if you let it, the HSC will be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life; not because of the ATAR and final marks you receive, but because of the hardworking, brilliant, resilient, determined young women it produces. I promise. But only if you let it.