

**Doanya Gholami**  
**Class of 2021 Valedictorian**  
**Acadia University**

- Hello, everyone. Welcome honoured guests, administrative staff, faculty members, friends and family, the amazing graduates, and Kyle Lowry. Wow, this is a little different than I imagined it being.

It's hard to picture a crowd in their underwear in a virtual world, and there's no one here to laugh at my jokes. I guess that saves you all some big laughs though.

I want to say how honoured I am to be able to be here and speak on behalf of the graduating class of 2021. My name is Doanya Gholami, and I am graduating from the business program with a major in marketing.

Although in this unique little town, it's hard to not somehow know one another by this point. I call this town unique because I can't think of many other places you can go where you meet the best people, have the most fun, drink the best wine, see a familiar face everywhere you go, occasionally smell manure, and yet be the most beautiful little town there is. So beautiful, that I bet most of you fell in love the first time you stepped foot.

But the best thing about this place is the Acadia family that we meet here.

There are not many other universities you can go to and build such strong relationships with your professors, coaches, classmates, and teammates than we can here, and we are extremely lucky to have that.

I want to start by coming from a place of gratitude. To our friends and family who gave us unconditional love and support over the past few years, we thank you.

To the inspiring faculty and staff that gave us guidance and wisdom inside and outside the classroom, we thank you.

To the brave and caring staff that kept our campus safe and clean, and the public health workers that kept our province safe and allowed us to be here over the past couple months, we thank you.

To our fellow peers who we stayed up late nights with studying for that midterm, writing that paper, or dancing at The 'Vil, we thank you.

To that Highland hill that gave us unbeatable cardio daily, we thank you.

To Acadia University that provided us with endless opportunities to build and grow in an incredibly rich educational setting, we thank you. And to this little town of Wolfville that we have been lucky enough to have called home over the past few years and brought us to our lifelong friends, we thank you.

Graduating class, I want you all to know, I want you all to think of the first day of classes, first year, probably hot and sweaty in the BAC somewhere, nervous, looking

around at all those unfamiliar faces. I want you to picture those people, those strangers around you. And now I want you to think of those same people, the memories you've made, the memories you'll share, the places you've been, and the places you'll go.

You're looking at the world's next doctors, lawyers, chefs, artists, comedians. Think about how far we've all come, individually and as a class.

Looking back on first year, it seems like it was just yesterday: the first football game, the first Homecoming and Cheaton Cup, the first night at The 'Vil, the first time trying Scott's skins or making a calzone in Meal Hall, the first time choosing between Picassos and Prontos, the first relationship, the second relationship.

We've all come a long way and grown so much, physically and mentally. Think of all the music and fashion trends we went through from tie-dye shirts at homecoming, although I know some of you still wear those, to making the dance floor collapse while listening to "Gucci Gang", or hearing "Old Town Road" come on for the third time in a night.

This Class of 2021 has undoubtedly been presented with the toughest obstacles, and yet has come out stronger, more courageous, and more resilient. During our time at Acadia, the men's football team won two championship titles, the women's basketball team won two championship titles, and the men's swim team won a championship title. Acadia also has the highest percentage of academic all-Canadians for an undergraduate university in Canada, and that is something to be incredibly proud of.

In our years here, we have also lived through some of the most significant events in recent history: Meghan and Harry leaving the royal family, Trump's impeachment, Justin Bieber got married, Hurricane Dorian, Tiger Woods comes back and wins the Masters again, the Raptors defeat Golden State for their first-ever championship win, and then there is what seems like the never-ending global COVID-19 pandemic.

We've had to spend the past year isolated from loved ones, six feet apart from each other, and wearing masks on our faces. However, I truly believe that everything happens for a reason, and I think we were meant to be reminded that no physical distance can stop us from making memories and building relationships that will last a lifetime, and no distance can break this Acadia bond that we have.

I have no doubt that one day, in a world that we will call our new normal, we will come together and celebrate this amazing accomplishment as we should. The fact that we all made it here stronger than ever just shows our perseverance and commitment to excellence.

I want to make a toast to the ones that we lost along the way, the ones that we started this journey with, but couldn't finish with. To their friends and family, we love you and we support you. To those who lost their friends or loved ones while being here, know that they are watching over you right now, and they are so, so proud of everything you have accomplished.

Graduates, you're all powerful, intelligent, and courageous individuals, and I am proud to say we made it here together. To say that we're an Acadia family is an understatement. We are the brothers and sisters we never had, sometimes a shoulder to lean on that we often need, the reason why we can dive into the adventures of life so fearlessly, because the Acadia family is always there, and will be forever.

There's that cheesy poem that goes, "Friends are like stars. "Even when you can't see them, they're always there." That's how I think of each and every one of you, and that's how I want you all to think of one another.

No matter where we all go or where we will be, we will always have one another in our minds and in our hearts. We are one big Acadia family, and our flame will never die.

Graduating Class of 2021, we made it. I want you all to know how proud of yourselves you should be. Through arguably the most eventful and life-changing years of our lives, we made it, and we made it here together.

Although these past four years have brought incredible people into our lives, given us the best memories, and built our alcohol tolerance, there's still so much life to live and enjoy. In fact, if midterms, finals, and hangovers are the best years of your life, then you're missing out.

The journey is just beginning, and these people, this place, and these memories were brought to you for a reason.

Use these years of learning and growth to help shape your dreams, build your goals, and create what happiness and success means to you.

As actor, philosopher, and rapper, Drake, once said, "All in all, I learned a lesson from it though. "You never see it coming. "You just see it go."

I always knew this day would come when we'd be sitting side by side, getting ready to say goodbye or see you later, although of course I didn't picture it like this. One day I said to my dad, "Dad, I don't want to not be a kid anymore," and he said, "What do you mean? "You can always be a kid at heart," and that stuck with me.

Always have wonder and delight for what the world brings your way. No one could have seen what was coming for us these past few years, and we won't know what's coming next. So, cherish it. Appreciate the people in your lives, and live every moment like it's another Thursday night in Wolfville. You're all going to make a huge impact on this earth. Our class is going to make a huge impact on this earth. I can't promise that whatever is coming is going to be easy, and we won't be able to expect what's coming our way. Life is like a tunnel. Sometimes there is light, sometimes we are in darkness, and we never know what's going to come.

Always have hope that you will reach that light at the end, and based off what I've seen from this class, I have no worries that you will. But what I can promise you is this: No matter where we all go, what we do, and where we end up, we will always have these

memories, and we will always have each other. We have the most valuable thing in life, which is the friendships and relationships we have created while being here, ones that will last a lifetime, and for that, we are forever lucky and forever grateful.

At the end, we're not going to remember that bad mark, that scary presentation, or that silly fight. We're going to remember the friendships we made, the people we met, how we made each other feel, and how this town made us feel.

When I think of what I've learned over my past four years at Acadia, I've learned a lot. I learned how to walk to class without crows eating my food, how to cook and clean for myself, how to spend six hours in Meal Hall with my friends on a Sunday in first year, and how to spend six hours in the library on a Monday night doing absolutely nothing. But the most important thing I've learned is that learning has no end, and it is limitless.

Class of 2021, be humble enough to know that you have a lot left to learn. Be ambitious enough to know that you can be anything you desire to be. Be easy enough on yourself to be able to enjoy, to laugh, and to have fun. Be brave enough to accept failure and learn from it.

We are all different pieces of one puzzle we call the future. We are on our unforgettable journey through time and space to a paradise found where you are the master of your own destiny, all things are possible, and your every thought changes everything. Have fierce trust. Trust that you love what you do so much, the outcome doesn't matter. Don't let go of your courage the moment things stop being easy or rewarding. Create whatever causes a revolution in your heart. The rest will take care of itself.

Measure your worth by the dedication to your path, not success and failures. As Nelson Mandela once said, "We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in your hands to make a difference."

To transform the world, help others. Lift others up. Change lives by spreading love. Life is not about finding yourself. It's about creating yourself, and Class of 2021, this unforgettable milestone is just a building block, and we can't wait to see what you create.

Thank you all for creating the most unforgettable years of each other's lives. This is not goodbye. It's see you later. Congratulations, Class of 2021. Thank you.