

Claudia Thomas' speech at the Class of 2016 Awards Assembly 9 February 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to share my insights on the VCE experience with you this morning.

Throughout my years at Sacré Cœur I constantly fought with the concept that I actually had to sit myself down glumly at my uninviting desk, write an essay here, solve an equation there or memorise last minute Latin vocabulary for that test tomorrow morning. I maintained this complacent mentality right through senior school, until, buried under a mountain of headstart homework days before Year 12 was due to start, I realised that if I truly wanted to reap VCE's rewards, I would have to be prepared to not skip every second question in the maths homework or actually read the English books more than a week before the assessment.

It was at the start of what I believed was going to be a grueling and challenging year that I finally set myself some goals and gave myself a rough idea of what I wanted to achieve from the VCE experience. I bought myself a whiteboard and in the corner wrote down what I wanted to score in each subject as motivation for me when debating whether to watch the next episode of Suits or knuckle down and study for next week's SAC. Seeing these numbers every day staring at me as I studied truly motivated me to keep up the work, and served as a reminder of what I could achieve if I put in the effort. Whatever your own goals may either be, for this year or for your entire school journey, know that you can achieve them with a little mix of determination and persistence, as well as the wonderful resources available at Sacré Cœur.

For me, the greatest attribute to my Year 12 experience is the incredible support network provided by my classmates. For those of you here today, I would like to congratulate you on your outstanding achievements, and indeed to the rest of the year level for their own successes and triumphs. I am sure everyone in our class would agree that the kindness and caring for one another not only in Year 12, but also throughout secondary school was exceptional, and we definitely could not have made it through without each other's guidance, and ability to laugh off the stresses that never seemed to cease. The level of support that the girls all showed each other throughout the year was truly admirable, each of us constantly striving to ease the tension that often crept up, with every single girl offering to either post the practice essay topics, or send out notes and links when we were all stressed. For this, I am truly grateful, and could not wish for a more supportive group to share my high school experience with.

Another support network crucial to any girls' success is the incredible team of staff at Sacré Cœur. My teachers this year proved to be an infallible source of guidance, never hesitating to give up a lunchtime or free period to answer my questions and provide some much-needed reassurance in times of stress. I would like to thank every teacher that has taught me at Sacré Cœur and in particular those who helped me most in Year 12, Ms Albrecht, Mr Tench, Ms Cedro, Mr Denmead, and Ms Van Langenberg. I cannot encourage you enough to seek this wonderful team of staff for support in your studies, as they are both inspiring and always eager to help.

However, even with all these resources at your fingertips, it is ultimately your own personal commitment that will determine your success. Education relies on the principle of seeking information, taking the initiative to enhance your knowledge, and undertaking your own research. It is understandable that sometimes, motivation levels start to wane, and it is crucial to maintain a balance in your studies in order to sustain a healthy and positive mindset to your schooling. Motivation does not come from wanting to please your parents, or competing with your friends, rather, it comes from a sense of wanting to prove to yourself how incredible you really can be. Even when told that particular goals of mine could not be achieved, I made it my mission to prove that I could achieve them, my motivation stemming from the desire to achieve my potential. Realise that success is subjective and not measured by certificates or medals, but through your own personal satisfaction and pride for your work. Focus on proving that you can perform to your very best, knowing that you have truly put in effort into the tasks handed to you. Every one of you has enormous potential, in a myriad of areas, and know that it takes only a bit of determination and positivity to unlock your own success.

Yet, even though hard work is absolutely essential to a fruitful schooling experience, it is my belief that a balance of study and leisure is paramount to success. For me, if I did not sit down every day and watch an episode of a feel good TV show, or take my dog for a walk, call a friend or even bake some brownies, I would be overwhelmed by stress and the sheer amount of work I needed to do. Without such a balance between work and leisure, it would be impossible to maintain a positive mind frame, and I strongly encourage everyone

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to take the time out of their busy lives to do something you enjoy, for being happy and optimistic has an unmistakable impact on the quality of both your work and life.

So, as a parting message to all of you still on your school journeys, I would like to advise you to approach your year with optimism, tackling each obstacle as it comes, and remember that the most important thing is to motivate yourself in times of stress, never doubting your ability to achieve your own personal success. Ensure you maintain a positive mindset, even when it seems the task ahead is impossible: your capabilities are infinite, and you can achieve your goals, no matter how often people tell you otherwise.

To the Sacré Cœur community, I would like to sincerely thank you for a wonderful five years of schooling, and providing me with rewarding experiences and invaluable memories. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have experienced such a supportive and caring environment for my learning for so many years. To the Class of 2017, I wish you the best of luck in all your endeavours and hope that your final year at Sacré Cœur provides you with the same wonderful experiences as mine did.

Thank you.