Mark Angus Meyer, Class of 2018

Today, I would like to speak with you about nothing—more specifically, nothingness. And when I say nothingness, I mean an empty void, negative space, the air among us here in this moment.

Before I entered this space, I tried to imagine the feeling of living among these striking buildings. It was a feeling that I couldn’t quite place, but I knew, somehow, it would be magnificent.

In my first studio class in the Visual Arts, my instructor gathered us around a blank canvas. She painted a red square in the center, and we discussed the square’s features, but no one remarked on the untouched margin. Our instructor anticipated this, and that’s when she painted an extension off the lower right-hand corner of the square and into the margin. All of the sudden, we started talking about the areas left untouched and how the extension gave substance to the void. That’s when I started to see things differently. I started to engage with negative space across disciplines. I even wrote my German thesis on air.

To this point, a good friend of mine remarked, “so, your 16 years of education culminates into ‘nothingness,’” – and I take great pride in that fact, because there’s substance in nothingness, and all of you helped me understand that.

We shared this space together for the last years. Though crowded, each and every one of you created your space. Some of you made your space in a physical place, be it a niche in the Reg, the turf of the Ratner athletic field, a molecular engineering lab. Others among you made your space in a more abstract place, be it your house culture, a concentration in your field, a group of peers in a student organization. Among this crowd, each of you founded that space here and made it your own.

The buildings that surround us are gorgeous, but they ended up not meaningfully contributing to the feeling, the vibe, of our campus. It was all of you. We gave substance to the negative spaces here through the vibrations of our voices that dispersed as ideas through the halls, classrooms, auditoriums and even into the pores of the stones surrounding us. At the end of the day, these structures are just that—structures. It’s the presence of students that turn any building into a space for education, but the presence of each and every one of you that has made this space magnificent.

In closing, let us today and tomorrow enjoy the negative spaces around us that we have collectively enriched; because these spaces stand as our creation. As the parents and grandparents might attest, when we return the buildings here will more or less be the same, but the feeling in the air will change. As we graduate from this institution, we will each be dispersing with a little bit of this Chicago air in our lungs, bringing it with us near and far.

The future too is a negative space. It’s full of substance, yet difficult to visualize. And if you ask me, I’m positively optimistic about the future, because we will be there giving substance to the negative spaces—researching the unanswered questions, filling empty apartments with furniture, building families. Exactly because I know that you will there with me, I know the future will be magnificent.