

**Christina Huffaker**  
**James C. Finlay, SJ, Award for Outstanding Integral Honors Thesis 2013**

**Honors Convocation address, May 2013**

[Note: President Pestello was unable to attend the 2013 Honors Convocation]  
Provost Le Mura, members of the faculty, parents, friends, and fellow honorees:

I'm supposed to offer all of you graduating seniors some meaningful life advice that will remain with you longer than the desserts do at the reception following this convocation. I've been told that receiving the Outstanding Integral Honors Thesis award qualifies me for the job. But I'm only twenty-two, graduating just like the rest of you, and to top it off, one of my favorite catchphrases is "I don't know anything!" So I'm not entirely secure in my authority to offer sound advice, but I can at least explain briefly the project that landed me at this podium. My Honors thesis is a literary analysis of the influence of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* on Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women*, which novel I then adapted and choreographed into a half-hour ballet, performed at the PAC the beginning of this semester. This interdisciplinary project combined elements of literature, religion, theatre, and dance, among other disciplines. That it was possible at all speaks volumes for the focus on, and support for, innovation and creativity at Le Moyne College.

Three weeks after my thesis defense, like any dedicated student exemplifying Le Moyne's Jesuit ideals of "Spirit, Inquiry, and Leadership" during finals week...I was scrolling mindlessly through my Facebook newsfeed when something that my friend Emily Powers had posted caught my attention. It was a quotation from A.Ailne, the author of the original Winnie the Pooh stories, and it's been oft repeated during graduation season, but I'm going to repeat it once more. It reads: "How lucky we are to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard." As I sat and contemplated just how TRUE this quotation is, I began to reflect on some of the reasons we ARE lucky to have spent the last four years at Le Moyne.

Just a few days later, I found myself working on the very final copy of my honors thesis project, in which I was including an acknowledgements page. I'd never written an acknowledgements page before, and I immediately began wracking my brain to make sure I included everyone who had helped me in a significant way. As I continued to list people, I realized how easily I was coming up with names. I was amazed, really, when I reflected on how many people had assisted, influenced, or inspired me, just on this one, albeit lengthy, project, and I discovered that my one page allotted for acknowledgements was going to have to be extremely abridged. I finished writing my page, which barely fit even after I had edited out a lot of adjectives, but I didn't stop thinking about it. I started wondering about what would happen if I wrote an acknowledgements page for all sorts of experiences and projects in my life. So I tested it out. What I have here is my acknowledgements page for the past four years at Le Moyne, with adjectives included this time:

Acknowledgements

I am incredibly grateful for all of my family, friends, professors, and mentors. I wouldn't even be standing here giving this speech without the influence and encouragement of each one of

them. First, thank you to my family, for their constant support, guidance, and patience. To my dear friends, some of whom are sitting in this room right now, thank you for the laughs, craziness, and stability you brought to my life at Le Moyne. I'm indebted to all of my professors, not only for showing me what to learn but for showing me why it matters. My mentors, especially Julie Olin-Ammentorp and Larry Crabree, with whom I worked on my thesis project, thank you for sharing your passions with me and inspiring me to work to find ways to use my own. Grateful thanks to the Integral Honors Program for surrounding me with outstanding professors who were eager to share their expertise, take us on educational trips, and show us how absolutely awesome interdisciplinary learning can be. My Honors classmates, thank you for making those two hour classes bearable, for challenging me and keeping me accountable academically, for participating in our civil disobedience by taking those extra minutes of class breaks as we escaped to the Den, and for the overwhelming support and collaboration among us as we worked on completing our theses.

The PAC community has also had an unbelievably positive influence on my Le Moyne experience. KB, Matt, Mr. Barbour, thank you for the tireless energy you put into the theatre department. Not only do I notice it, but it has given me so much motivation to try to work half as enthusiastically as you do, and to make sure we always take care of ourselves, each other, our space, and our show. My dear PAC family, I feel so blessed to have been able to work and grow with such talented, driven, and fun people for the past four years.

To all the late nights full of homework, thank you for revealing to me how much sleep I actually need to function. I'm also grateful for those days when two of my three meals consisted of cereal, because they taught me how to truly appreciate all of those free lunch events hosted by the Honors Program, which gave us nourishment on many levels as we conversed over sandwiches with intellectual speakers and guests from diverse backgrounds.

Here's the thing about writing acknowledgements—it makes you start looking for people to thank. And I think that's a really valuable inclination, but one that can be hard to put into practice. Writing these two acknowledgements pages, for my thesis and this speech, made me appreciate that A. A. Milne quotation much more than I had, but most of all, it has made me appreciate the unique experience Le Moyne offers. Le Moyne is special. The people here care for you. They want to help you succeed, and by golly, they put every effort into making sure that it happens. The Jesuit emphasis on caring for and educating the whole person is the reason we honorees are all here today. We've all heard it over and over, but today we get to rejoice a bit in seeing the evidence.

But don't think I'm letting all of you seniors off so easily. It's too easy to take things for granted and to overlook small experiences. Sure, you can say that you're lucky, but enumerating and verbalizing your thankfulness for the positive influences on your life makes you feel a hundredfold luckier. So I'm here to give you your last Le Moyne homework assignment. Start writing acknowledgements pages. I expect double-spacing, twelve point font, and correct MLA citations. The Acknowledgements don't need to be lengthy or complicated and you don't even need to share them with anyone else. But start writing them. We're about to head off into the real world, and it's not going to be all smooth sailing. But if we have the ability to take note of and appreciate the good happening to us, we will be able to feel lucky. A verse in the fifth chapter of Thessalonians says to "examine all things, and hold fast to what is good." Do this. Examine all things, remember and cherish the positive, and start writing your acknowledgements pages.