

Welcome Speech - Penelope Graspas '22

Welcome to the Berkeley Preparatory School Commencement ceremony celebrating the class of 2022, and to everyone who has supported, loved, and nurtured our class throughout our journey here at Berkeley- parents, family, and friends, our teachers, coaches, the Board of Trustees, and Headmaster Seivold. We truly appreciate and thank you for celebrating with us today. Whether you drove us to school, rallied behind us at athletic events, attended our Saturday matinees, or helped us master precalculus, you all have been a part of our journey, and we cannot thank you enough for your support.

As I stand before you all today, classmates and friends, I reminisce on our Berkeley vision statement. Imprinted on the backs of t-shirts, the napkins at luncheons, and the wall above the Aye, these 11 words are ingrained in our lives as Upper Division students: that 'Berkeley puts people in the world who make a positive difference.' As ubiquitous as this statement has been, it is no surprise that our class has absorbed this mantra, and lived it. From triumphs in academia and athletics to exceptional community service and inspiring extracurricular endeavors, this class has truly embraced each and every opportunity for growth and impact.

This class made the world a better place by participating in community service and sharing academic passions through countless accumulated hours in tutoring with the Berkeley Academy, Hoover Writing Center, Math Lab, and Science Lab. Members of our community taught Debate skills to students of local elementary schools, while another student scuba-dived to restore coral reefs in the Florida Keys. Seniors have led Berkeley to the World Robotics Championship and earned our Debate Team national recognition. Over 20% of our dedicated senior athletes have committed to play collegiate athletics, and many leave Berkeley having broken multiple school records. Our artists have received numerous Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and one member of our class won Outstanding Supporting Performer in a Musical from the 'Broadway Star of the Future' program. Our seniors hosted Berkeley's first-ever Tampa Bay Model United Nations conference and introduced new extra-curricular opportunities such as Science Olympics, the Gender and Sexuality Forum, Red Cross Club, and Asian Cultural Club. While driven by our passions, we have inspired younger Berkeley Bucs to harness the power of their own passions to impact our school community and the world.

In our eagerness to make a positive difference, our class has embodied the 11 words of the Berkeley vision statement. It is remarkable that our grade is filled with such a diversity of pursuits and paths yet we have a collective dedication to positively impact our world.

As we embark on our next journeys, I am overwhelmed by excitement to see where these passions lead us, whether in Florida, out of state, or abroad. While our chapter as a class is ending, 162 stories are still being written - all tied together by our collective passion to make a positive difference. Congratulations to everyone, and I hope you all enjoy the rest of the ceremony.