Address from Cameron Marshall (Class of 2010)
Guest Speaker, Class of 2015 Distinguished Achievers Assembly
Tuesday 9 February 2016

Good afternoon to you all. I would like to thank Mr Robinson and Mr Teys for inviting me back to speak to you all today. I would also like to thank them for giving me one last chance to have the spotlight before my sister overshadows me with her accolades.

As was previously said, my name is Cameron Marshall. Very few of you will have known me personally. However, a larger proportion of you will have had the fortune or misfortune of knowing my younger sisters Hannah and Bridget. I’ll let you be the judge of that.

I went to HVGS for my secondary school education and completed my HSC in 2010. Although I did well in all of my subjects, given how well it scales, my Extension 2 Maths result played a significant part in my overall result. Thank you Ms Austin.

While at school I participated in many music-related activities like orchestra and the annual musical. Music has always been a passion of mine and it was great to be able share that passion with other musos.

Since leaving HVGS I have graduated with an accounting degree and have just completed a law degree, both at the University of New England in Armidale. I have taken part in mentoring both at my college and with UNE’s Business/Law School. I have also been travelling to the UK – where I was born – and have seen various places there. I hope that in the near future I will be able to have a career in either accounting or law.

Armidale was a great place to go to university. Not everyone is going to get a 99 ATAR and rural unis have just as much to offer as unis in cities, if not more in some ways. Because Armidale is a smaller place with fewer on-campus students, it’s very easy to get to know your fellow students and your lecturers. One lecturer even took us out to the pub for a trivia night.
If there is any advice I can give you about transitioning from secondary school – and this is something which I wish I knew beforehand – it would be that the first few weeks at university are the most important weeks, both academically and socially. The uni style of learning is completely different to school, and it can take a little while to adjust to it. That’s why you have to be on top of it from the start.

People usually get the hang of uni study after a few weeks. Once you’ve got it, it’s much easier to relax your study habits because you know what you need to do in order to do well. Like all things, prevention is better than cure.

Also, uni is your first taste of what independent living is like. While that can be exciting, it can also make people feel homesick. And as tempting as it is to just go back home, it’s in your interests not to.

It is during the first few weeks – even the first few days – when people get to know one another. Those that do go home during that time find that when they get back, they feel out of place because they’re the only person that doesn’t know anyone. This makes them feel even more homesick and they go home again, and the cycle goes on.

Going to a college is one of the best things you can do because you are virtually forced to get to know people. However, you also have to make an effort to put yourself out there. Whilst at Earle Page College in Armidale, I made sure to involve myself in similar music-related activities compared to those at school. This was both familiar and allowed me to get to know other people from college.

Another guy I knew felt uncomfortable being at Page when he first arrived. However, rather than overcoming that discomfort, he just stayed in his room and studied without really socialising. It’s safe to say that he got a lot less out of his college experience than I did. Once you know enough people, then you can go home if you want to see friends and family, because when you get back, everyone will still know who you are. Again, the first few weeks at uni are the most important.
Now I’d like to take a walk down Memory Lane. I remember when I was at school I hated studying. I was told I needed to do about 40 hours per week of studying and to make a study timetable. The thought of studying for months and months on end with limited breaks made it feel like there was no end in sight. Therefore, I completely ignored those recommendations.

So, how did I prepare myself for exams, in particular the HSC? My solution lies in these four words: study smart, not hard. By this I mean that you maximise what you get out of your studying and minimise the time you spend.

There’s no need to spend 3 hours studying for a subject when you can do that study in one. In fact, it’s a good habit to get into because every workplace focuses on economising on time yet still producing quality work.

If nothing else, make sure you do as many past papers as possible. There’s only so many questions that can be asked in an exam. Doing past papers trains you for the style of exam questions so that when the day comes, the exam doesn’t come as that much of a shock.

Other things you can do include staying on top your assignments and your homework. Assessments and homework actually prepare you for your final exams, especially in the HSC. When teachers use your assessment and test marks to come up with an assessment mark it is a reflection of how they think you’ll perform in the HSC. And, as someone who likes definite goals, working towards completing an assessment or your homework for the day seems much more achievable than the vague goal of studying for the HSC, which is a bit like asking “How long is a piece of string?”

And by all means, if you don’t understand something ask your teacher. If I didn’t understand something, I’d ask and make sure that it was locked in my brain. Teachers have no problem with helping you out. Yes, it’s what they’re paid to do, but more importantly they genuinely want you to do well. Why else would Mr Fisher proof hundreds of drafts?
The other thing I would suggest is that you avoid burning out. If this school’s past results are anything to go by, it is shown that the students who have a balanced lifestyle do better than those who just study all the time. Working your butt off non-stop drains you both physically and emotionally. I’ve watched people do it to themselves and it’s crushing to see them wasting what could have been some of the best years of their life.

Many students from this school who performed well in their HSC have gone on to greater success. However, this success is not solely because of their results. All those people got actively involved whilst at school and continue to get involved in the wider community.

By no means am I discouraging you from doing the best that you possibly can. I’d prefer not to be blacklisted by the school. All I’m saying is that you can have your cake and eat it too. Exams are not life and death situations, although some people act as if they are.

Finally, it’s time for that ruddy philosophical bit that always finishes speeches of this type. I hope that my experiences prove to you that you have to give a little to get a little. Therefore, it seems fitting that I leave you with a quote from Tom Lehrer, a singer-songwriter and satirist from the 50s and 60s. Very few of you have probably heard of him, but all of you can relate to this quote of his: Life is like a piano, what you get out depends on how you play it. Thank you.