

## Class of 2011 Undergraduate Valedictory Address

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Father President, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honored Guests, Members of the Faculty and Administration, Family, Friends and Members of the Class of 2011. I we

115 “friends,” our number of good friends averages only around one and a half.

Here at Fairfield, we've been fortunate to experience intentional communities—ones similar to those support systems found in Okinawa—our own Moai's. From Freshman Experience classes to living and learning communities — Fairfield students have unique opportunities to connect.

Those who lived in the Loyola residential college our Sophomore year had Moai's that explored deep, thought-provoking questions firmly rooted in the Ignatian tradition: Who am I? Whose am I? And who am I called to be?

Those who went on service trips bonded while playing soccer with kids in Jamaica, and building a house for a family in New Orleans.

Those who went abroad found their Moai in the fellow Fairfield students who explored new worlds with them in places such as Florence and Brisbane, Galway and Rouen. We traveled together, and transformed ourselves into global citizens.

The third blue zone trait is "Ikigai." Roughly translated from Japanese it means, "the reason for which you wake up in the morning." This is a large part of college — discovering what it is you love to do, what fulfills you. This is also the hardest part of college. Many of us have changed majors, changed career paths, changed our maps for the future, and that's a good thing. Because nothing can be more important than truly finding that one thing that makes you wake up every day with a smile on your face.

Some of us will find it in a certain career path — being a teacher or a molecular biologist. Others among us will find it in being a parent. And for some of us, we'll even find it in our pastimes, whether they be hot yoga or fly-fishing.

When I was on service trip in Ecuador, we traveled to a barrio built on a trash dump. So many houses and stray dogs and people live on this lifeless land that smells of burning trash and dry earth. It was there at an after school program that I met Aidriana, a precocious little girl with a big dream: she wants to be a doctor. This is her Ikigai. It's the reason she's so driven in school, why she's teaching herself English and why she does extra math problems while the other kids play soccer and jump rope.

Seeing her so set on this goal, seeing the passion in her eyes when she talks about it, compelled me to start thinking about my driving passion in the Communication field. In a way, Aidriana helped me find my Ikigai: helping people share their stories; journalism.