

I am Michelle Feigler, and I am the recipient of the Elizabeth Schmik Hull Scholarship and the Sunderbruch Speech and Debate Scholarship. First of all, I want to start by saying thank you. I want to express my thanks to all of the wonderful people in this room. But specifically to those who so graciously donated to me, Doctor Elizabeth Hull and Doctors Josh and Katheryn Sunderbruch. I have gotten to know both of you in different capacities and can say honestly that you are incredible people with such beautiful openness and willingness to give.

Doctor Josh Sunderbruch is actually my debate coach, who has not only given me this amazing financial support but has also given his time to me and students like me because he genuinely wants to make a difference. I truly want to thank every single donor in this room, for contributing to what I believe is the most noble cause. When you look around and notice that the world is maybe not how you want it to be, or there is just a little too much ignorance, fear, and hatred, making its way around you. I do not think there is a better action or a better way to create a change then giving to help students at a community college. The money and scholarship and support that has been provided to these students has actively propelled change forward. The recipients in this room are

now significantly more educated thanks to all of you. Thanks to what you gave, there is less ignorance and less apathy in the world than there was before.

I want to tell you all a little about myself, my journey so far in life and here at Harper. I can say that Harper has actually changed my life, and made me so much better than I ever imagined. I have spent a lot of my short existence in this world in pain. A great enduring pain that I do not think any 19 year old should have to understand. After suffering years of cruel abuse from a trusted family friend, I suppressed the memories and agony that would one day overtake me completely. I felt manifestations of this harsh reality but did not feel the full brunt of it until I was 14 and a freshman in high school. The four years of high school I lived through became solely about survival. I was forced to choose between school and finding sanity and there really was no choice to make at all. I suffered and I scraped and I bled and I fought, and I am so much stronger, and so much better, and so much smarter than I was four years ago because of that struggle.

Sometimes I look back with regret and wish that I could have been a normal student. I had always been an overachiever and so failing out of high school felt like rock bottom, it felt like I was letting down the young version of myself that dreamed of going to an Ivy League. But I'd like to think that younger me would have understood why I had to take the road that I did. So I suffered for a long

time, those four years felt like forty, and every single day was a fight to make it to the next. My point of saying all this is not to gain pity or to make excuses, but to express to you all the seriousness of what I had endured and the light at the end of the tunnel Harper became for me after years of darkness. Dropping out of high school was about the lowest I had ever felt in my life. Though part of me felt eased by the idea of never having to return to that building ever again, my inner perfectionist was screaming at me “what have you done!” I was still depressed, unsure, and needed a kick in the butt.

That summer my mom, my only present parent, had a major heart attack which kept her in the hospital and in and out of surgery for months. While this was one of the hardest things I had ever had to deal with, it was also the thing that forced me into action. I was utterly and completely alone. My Dad lives in Missouri, my sister up at Marquette in Milwaukee, and me, the 18 year old, who had never lived alone, had no diploma, no driver’s license, and no idea what to do with her life. I did probably the opposite of what at that point everyone had come to expect of me. I got my license, studied day and night and slowly but surely got my GED this past summer. The GED led me to Harper, where I took my practice test and enrolled in a math GED course.

I want to pause here and just say to all of you who have never had a reason to necessarily interact with those who work in the GED program here at Harper. They are wonderful. Chris Rich was the name of my Math teacher and never have I met a more patient and kind individual. My GED class was filled with all ages, ethnicities, languages, and walks of life. I was the youngest person there at 18, and I would be finishing my GED the same year I was supposed to graduate. The ages went up into the 50s and 60s and there would be breaks in class so people could call their kids or babysitters. I was dumbfounded and awed by those I met. Everyone had their own reasons for being there, none more justified or important than the next. Whether to move up in their career make their kids proud, or to gain personal satisfaction, everyone was motivated and determined to succeed. Devin Chambers is another member of the GED program who launched me into the future. He recommended me for the honors program gave me the contact information for the head coaches of speech and debate, and actually applied to Harper for me. We sat in his office where he legitimately asked me questions and filled out an online application that enrolled me in Harper. He was willing to spend his time doing that. He made me an appointment for orientation, gave me a good idea of what classes to register for and sent me on my way. I needed that, I really needed that.

Thanks to people like Devin Chambers, I enrolled myself in college, got into the honors program, and even started school all before my mom was released from the hospital. I grew up, not because I felt that was what people wanted me to do, not because I felt I had to (which I did) but because I wanted to, and because for the first time in a long time, I felt like I could. Thanks to the amazing people who have supported me along the way, thanks to Harper and thanks to the amazing donors sitting in front of me I finished my first semester at Harper with a 4.0 GPA, I took first place at my first debate competition and placed at several more, and met friends, people, and mentors that will change me forever. I cannot express my gratitude to this school enough. Harper took a broken and beaten down shell of a person and turned me back into who I always thought I could be. The donations you have all made have allowed people like me, people who need the resources, people whose mothers are out of work recovering from a heart attack, or people who have three jobs and are just scraping by, or those who have kids and cannot afford to support themselves, go through school and be a parent. I assure you throughout my time at Harper, through the GED program and through my honors classes as a first year college student, I have met and been in awe of all of these people. I am in awe of all of you today, knowing and understanding that you have all given your hard earned money, your livelihood

and bestowed it onto those you do not know, out of the goodness of your hearts.

I do not believe there is a thing in the world that money can be better spent on than education. Since coming to Harper I have actually completed my first semester of school in four years, and I did it well. That is something I can be proud of. And that is something, because you all made that possible, for you to be proud of too. Thank you for being a part of the change, thank you for supporting those who need it, and above all thank you for supporting a school that has moved so many people. Just thank you.