Thank you Stephen,

On behalf of baccalaureate candidates, welcome to the families, friends and loved ones of the class of 2014. I especially want to thank all our parents including my Mom who is over there. She flew from Italy to attend this commencement ceremony, but she does not understand English, so I can tell you the truth about what we did here. Well, we contributed to the local economy, every day we spent a lot of money for suspect food here on campus (I’m sorry I’m a picky Italian), during the Fall we went to Autzen Stadium to support the fastest team on earth, we, maybe, spent endless weekend nights partying and building social connections, and by the way, classes on Mondays should not begin before noon!

It must be said that the international experience for me, for us, began right here within the department. How many nationalities do we have here? Exchanging ideas among fellow international students has enriched us. We have learned to understand the “others” and the values they hold dear. We have learned not to judge based on pre-conceived notions. The daily interaction between different worlds and cultures has been a treasure of experiences that we will take advantage of from now on.

I would like to reassure all the parents that your tuition checks were also used for studying. We waged epic wars against research papers about…”the development of rural populations in the east African areas affected by schistosomiasis”. And, by the way, I am still puzzled by the question: what on earth is schistosomiasis? But this is actually an important point. At the department of International Studies we learned to be curious, to be interested not just in
international issues, but also their implications for real people. Here we learned to search beyond our boundaries, looking for knowledge. And here our Professors have taught us a life lesson: we do not know all there is to know. They have challenged and inspired us, and we are humbled by their wisdom. Thank you to the faculty, advisors, staff especially Brooke, you have been like a second Mom for all of us.

My passion, my curiosity, and all my advisors, convinced me to fly to Uganda to conduct a field work research on a rural transportation system of private motorbike taxi called Boda Boda. I arrived, with my tight schedule, in the first community where I had planned to do my research, but the village chief told me to wait one day because for every “important” visitor they are used to perform a welcoming Kikiga dance. While I was participating in this dance, and wondering if I was wasting my time…Professor Wooten… I thought about you! And your Ciwara dance. Did I really need to take part in a traditional dance? Well, yes. As you taught us, through the dance I was partly understanding the culture and, most importantly, I was being accepted by the village. My participation in the Kikiga dance facilitated the communication process between me and the local population and eased my field work.

The point is that the ideas learnt in our classes were fundamental, during my experience in Uganda, in helping me make sense of situations where sense seemed to be hiding. Remembering complex terms is maybe a good idea during a midterm or a final and…thank God we are done with that! On the other hand applying the concepts we studied here, in our future professional paths,…will not be easy…will not be a quick process but will be the key for letting everybody know that Ducks can give an important contribution to our society.
The future, for us, begins tomorrow. What are we going to do? Well, tomorrow I will wake up at noon, I will lay on my couch and watch the soccer World Cup in TV eating bread and prosciutto. So, let’s say that the future begins Wednesday. Some of us will go to Grad school. Is it a good idea? We cannot know now. We will know it in few years. Some of us will find a job in development agencies. Is that going to fulfill our life goals? We will know in few years. Kierkegaard once said that life can be only understood backwards but it must be lived forwards. Let me elaborate on this concept.

What we accomplished today is a process which began four years ago, when we did not know if our journey here was going to work and, maybe, we thought it would have been a dream completing the program. Let me tell you that what we did here has nothing to do with dreams; it has been the result of hard work. And now, looking backwards we can say: we made it.

I am therefore sure that, today, looking forward if we continue to work hard, we will succeed.

I want to close by saying that our professors have, maybe, sometimes doubted (questioned?) what we were saying or writing in our papers, but they have always believed in what we were doing, and the proof is that we are here today to celebrate our success. Congratulations class of 2014.