It was freshman year, and after a season of playing back-up goalie on JV3 Soccer, I decided that I wanted to get in shape. I wanted to try something new, something interesting, something fun. So I signed up for wrestling. New, yes. Interesting…yes. Fun…not so sure.

Everyday I stood, toe to toe with the behemoth of a man known as Hector Cintron. For those of you who know Hector, you know my pains. For those who don’t, imagine The Hulk, but not green and with impeccable grammatical skills, and that’s Hector. Back then, I was about 1 foot shorter and 25 lbs heavier than what you see today, so you can imagine that facing Hector was not the easiest time of my life. Everyday I’d go into practice, dreading wrestling against Hector. He’d pick me up, and smash me down to the ground, over and over again. My body was mangled in positions I didn’t know were humanly possible.

It may sound like Hector was a bully, but that is the furthest thing from the truth. Everyday, Hector would work with me, before, during and after practice, to make me better, to help me enjoy the sport. And slowly my attitude began to shift. I stopped seeing wrestling as 2 hours of torture and began to look forward to the challenge. I saw my teammates around me, working harder than I’d ever seen anyone work, struggling for the same cause as me.

I made it a point everyday to try and score points on Hector, usually always failing. Until one day, when Hector was caught off guard by a sudden burst of explosive energy, as I tackled him to the ground. Needless to say, that never happened again, and I was quickly put back in my place with a tight headlock. But, in that moment, I realized that within a few months of starting here at Andover, I had changed. My outlook on challenges in general had changed. I had learned that I could in fact achieve what might have seemed unimaginable at first. This moment of realization unlocked a whole universe of potential experiences and achievements here at Andover – and the best part is that this was not an experience uniquely mine - we
have all gone through this realization each in our own unique way. And that realization has been central to our Andover experiences.

Our class has seen many changes over the last four years: the shift from Commons to UnCommons to “Paresky” Commons; from Ryley to The Den (which will always be Ryley to me); Life Issues to PACE Class; FCD Week to Wellness week; Students Activities Coordinator Ms. Efinger to Mr. Capano; and Cluster Sports to Intramural Sports. Most important, however, are the internal changes we have witnessed within ourselves and each other. Each of us has changed and all of us have grown, and we have done this together.

We have made it through the dizzying highs and dreadful lows of teenage life, and coupled with the rise and fall of Andover tensions, we’ve experienced quite the emotional sine curve and we have come out the better for it. We’ve learned here that all things worth doing are, in one way or another, difficult. That challenges test us—our willpower, our drive and our ability to stay up past 3 a.m. They provide us an opportunity to discover who we are, to chisel away at the marble surrounding our true, inner selves. We have shared these challenges, and they are what bring us closer together.

I can see, very clearly, that a natural bond exists between us. It’s something rare, something precious. Not quite as explicit or obvious as friendship, but a more innate connection we all share, simply because we have gone through this journey of Andover together. It is so natural, intangible and indescribable; almost familial. Our kinship spans age, gender, origin, faith, political persuasion, friend groups, anything and everything. Even one year spent at Andover is enough to create these lifelong bonds. These bonds and connections enable us to lean on each other, to support one another in times of need and strife. (What, you think I write my own speeches?) In this moment, our network grows not only from within our class and the classes that we’ve lived with, but now we join an expansive group of individuals who were once student members of this school.

You know that our times together have been great. You can all recall those moments which you simply wished would never end. Memories are captured through our senses, and in these last few weeks, our senses have been heightened. We can now feel the power of a tender touch on a shoulder, the simple joy in a warm hug between friends, the uplifting spirit of laughter heard on the Great Lawn. In our final few weeks, when the stresses of classes and sports, of college and extracurriculars ebbed away, we found ourselves immersed exclusively in each other, and we realized that we enable each other to thrive; we have kept each other
afloat for four years. These have been the important moments for us, and we will always treasure them.

Look at where we are now, the heart of Andover. These are the paths on which we walked everyday, the buildings in which we called ourselves students of this Academy. The steps of Samuel Phillips Hall are the legendary steps upon which we have walked countless times. Now, think of all those who have walked on these very steps before us. Think of their legacies, their extraordinary contributions and accomplishments. And know that all of them once sat in the very same place where you are sitting now. Today, we shall join them as alumni of this great institution – and forever, we shall be part of that living and breathing legacy.

All of us are well aware of the oft-used quote from our Academy’s constitution, “goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble; yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous”. Less known, however, is what I consider the most important part of that quote. “[Goodness and Knowledge] both united form the noblest character, and lay the surest foundation of usefulness to mankind.” This is the legacy we must uphold. This is the responsibility charged on us by the Academy, charged on all those who sat where you are now. It means more to us now than ever before, as we leave the realm of Andover and move into the world.

We must make ourselves relevant in this world. Individually, we must all search for our own meaning of “usefulness to mankind.” This could entail ending world hunger or bringing world peace for some, but for others, the simple, daily motions of kindness are their contributions to those around them. I urge you not to submit to societal notions of “success” and “usefulness”, but rather, to find your own definition of the words.

At this point in time, however, we may not know exactly what we wish to contribute to our world, and as we move into our futures, many of us feel a sense of doubt. Doubt, fear and uncertainty. Perhaps we worry that our productivity has peaked at Andover, that we will not develop friendships as close as the ones we had here, or we will not quite find our niche outside of our little community. We have grown comfortable at Andover, and now that phase of our lives is over. But I ask you now to think back to when you first arrived here, our adoptive home. We all had at least one, singular moment of absolute, terrifying and paralyzing doubt. It came at different times for us, perhaps the first time you met your roommate, the first awkward walk into Commons without knowing where to sit, or the first class in which you had absolutely no idea what was going on], but it surely came. In that
moment, you seriously questioned the decision to come to this confusing and fast-paced place that is Andover.

Think back to that moment, and look at yourself now, and realize how far you have all come. At one point, you accepted your doubts and fears, and chose to conquer them. You achieved friendship, happiness and fulfillment, and made this place your own. And in doing so, in figuring things out, you developed certain skills which you will now be able to use in the real world. Skills in meeting people, developing friendships, and of course, allowing serendipity to run its course. In building these skills, you probably tried some things that didn’t work very well. For example, presenting a toad from Rabbit Pond as a gift to my potential Blue and Silver date freshman year—bad idea. So as you march on past this wonderful campus, out into the world, take everything you have learned from this place, and from each other, and have confidence that you are indeed prepared and that you will find your own new place of comfort – just like you overcame your doubts at Andover.

And remember that in any time of doubt, you will always have people to turn to. First and foremost is your parents and family, the people who have been with you every step of your life. They know you best, and you can always count on their unconditional love and support. You also have all those who guided you through your journey at Andover, from teachers and coaches to advisors and house counselors. At Andover, students never run short of sterling characters to look up to, who will lend them a listening ear at any time and provide wisdom and guidance accrued from a lifetime of experience. This year, we have 14 retiring faculty who have a combined total of over 400 years of service to this school. The faculty here share a sense of kindness and caring that is rare to see in people, and they give their lives for the school and its students.

Finally, we will always have those who sit among us now, those whom with we eternally share this moment. You have always been there for each other, and nothing can ever change that.

Now, I must say that it has been my honor and privilege spending these last few years with all of you. I feel blessed simply to say that I am and will always be a member of the Andover Class of 2010. There is something special about this group, something unique, alive, an enduring spirit that touches all who see it. I love you all sincerely, and will miss your daily presence, but I know our paths will cross again. You have given me more than I can ever say. You are my energy, my inspiration, my reason for loving this school. Each of you has made my last four
years at Andover the best they could possibly be, and I sincerely hope to hold on to our bonds of friendship with all of you.

Rather than a goodbye, today is a moment of Commencement, a new beginning, a time where we take what we have learned at this place and see it in action. Very soon, we will all receive our diplomas, and we will officially cease to be students of this academy. But know now that the Andover experience is not over, and that the lessons and memories we cherish of this place will traverse through time and space. Our diploma will not change us as individuals; it is but a recognition and celebration of what we have already gained. Andover will continue to change us in exciting and unexpected ways for years to come. Class of 2010, I look forward to seeing you and your Andover experiences in action. Thank you.

*This version of the Commencement address has been slightly adapted from the original remarks*