

## **NOBLE Scholars Banquet**

Keynote Address — **Ms. Hannah Fuller**  
2014 NOBLE Scholar  
2014 NOBLE Scholarship Recipient

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Hello class of 2019. Great news—only two months until graduation!

First of all, I want to congratulate you on your success. Each and every one of you has shown that you have taken the extra steps to invest in yourself. You've each demonstrated good academic standing at your school and completed 40 hours of community service. You've already proven that you have the abilities to go above and beyond the majority of your peers. Not all of your friends are sitting in this room here this evening so you should be very proud of yourself. I'm looking into this crowd and see so much potential.

Now let me tell you about myself, just 5 short years ago, I was in your very shoes. To be honest, I didn't know what direction I wanted to take at that point. I had completed almost a year of college by the time I graduated so I felt the pressure to pick a major quickly. I actually remember at orientation they divided us up by majors so here were all these groups of people that knew exactly what they wanted to do and then here's me, which had no idea. And if that's also you, don't freak out! I knew I needed to pick a passion, not just a job. After researching, job shadowing, and thinking practically I finally declared my major and decided to study communication sciences and disorders. I'm so glad I chose this field and I have enjoyed "almost" every minute of college.

I wanted to pursue a master's degree to become more marketable and increase my future salary. Getting into a speech-language pathology graduate program is very difficult and competitive but I was willing to put in the effort. I passed the first elimination round and got an interview with the program. I felt confident in my interview but knew the program only offered around 20 spots. A few weeks later I got an email from the office and found out I was weight listed. This meant I would not be guaranteed a spot, but would have the opportunity to be admitted if another seat became available. To be transparent, the next few weeks were challenging. I began planning an alternative direction—I applied for jobs and trusted that there was a plan for me. A few weeks later I got another email from the department—I had been accepted! This was the best news I had ever received because my hard work was about to pay off.

In 2017, I graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University with my Bachelor of Science in communication sciences and disorders. The next semester I began graduate school. These past two years of graduate school has been some of the most trying times but I can honestly say they have made me a better person. I have learned so much, not only academically and professionally but about myself. I've found a passion, not a job- something I urge you all to do. I've made the right friends. It's important to really consider who you choose to spend your time with. Put yourself around others who also strive to succeed, and you'll have the best support system.

There are some things I want you to learn from my story—it's okay if you don't know what you want to do when you grow up. You don't want to limit yourself to one possibility so keep your options open. No one else can give you this answer so it's up to you to discover your passion. To do this, spend time volunteering and job shadowing. I promise the Google description of the job and hands on experience in the field will look quite different.

If you choose to go to college I urge you to apply for scholarships. It will be time consuming but so worth it. I know going to college is a financially tough decision but there are ways to alleviate the costs. When I was a senior in high school I pursued the NOBLE scholarship and was awarded it in 2014, so thank you to all those involved in that selection. Your generosity is much appreciated. The financial assistance this program provided along with

other scholarships and grants allowed me to graduate with my bachelor's degree debt and loan free. I want to encourage those planning to attend Stephen F. Austin State University to compete an application to be considered for the award as well.

I want to give some general advice to keep in mind as you prepare for your future of success and opportunities. Something that will apply in any setting you choose to pursue- whether that be a university, community college, trade school, workforce, or military, to name a few. Or even if you have no idea what path you want to take yet. I wanted to make a few specific points that will hopefully stay in the back of your mind. These are "speak up, speak now, and speak loud".

- **Speak up**—when I say speak up I mean use your voice and seek opportunities. A few years ago you would never know I was in the room and now here I am speaking to a ballroom full of people. These past few years I've learned how important it is to step out of your comfort zone—and to do so frequently. I recently read an article that stated the magic happens when you step out of your comfort zone. This is such a relatable statement that speaks to me. If you're in a similar situation I urge you to not be scared to speak up, especially when it affects your future.
- **Speak loud**—speak loud means be persistent and passionate. There's a difference between saying "I'm looking for a job in speech pathology, here's my resume" versus "Hi, my name is Hannah Fuller. I love working with children and I've seen great things about your company. Here is my resume, I would love to be in contact with you about any potential job openings." There's an obvious difference between these two approaches. Speak loud means put yourself out there and make yourself known.
- **Speak now**—when I say speak now I mean be proactive and driven, sooner rather than later. Always be planning for your future! Do things that will look good on your resume. I promise you're never starting anything too early.

These next few years pursue things to make you become a well-rounded individual. Soak up these last few months of high school- enjoy your last pep rallies, last dances, and even last school lunches. Don't forget to thank those who helped get you here. Congratulations on your achievements. Set your goals high and stay persistent until you achieve them. Thank you, NOBLE Scholars Program, Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce, and all the sponsors involved in this opportunity. Good luck to everyone as you begin this next chapter of your lives and remember—speak up, speak loud, and speak now.