Stephanie Castro '18 Imparts Wisdom Upon Incoming Students
"Find what motivates you. Find your “why.” What gets you out of bed in the morning? What will get you through those all-nighters during finals week? As high-achieving honors students, many of you may be motivated by high GPA’s; however, I encourage you to look past this goal and explore deeper within yourselves. What change do you want to see in the world?” This bit of advice was one of many that Stephanie Castro ’18, an honors accounting major, shared with incoming freshmen and transfer honors students.

The full text of Ms. Castro’s prepared remarks and advice are below:

“I moved into Melville Hall on a bright Friday morning in 2014. We had somehow managed to fit a whole dorm-room’s worth of things and my family of five into our van, all while surviving the two hour car ride from my hometown, Plainville, Mass. The night before had been a sleepless night, as I stressed over things like meeting my roommate, being away from my family and hometown friends for months at a time, and getting lost in what then felt like a maze of a campus. Before I knew it, I was saying my goodbyes to my family and was fully submerged into college life.

The next three years would be filled with exhilarating experiences. The stresses I had felt on the first day quickly diminished after just a few weeks of navigating college life, and were replaced with excitement for what was to come in the next semesters. The valuable support I found within my Emerging Scholars RAP, the Isenberg School of Management, and the Honors College community allowed me to succeed beyond what I believed I was capable of. By the end of my freshman year, I had been elected president of the Association of Latino Professionals for America, and had landed an internship with one of the Big 4 accounting firms. For someone who had not held these types of positions in high school, these achievements would not have been possible without getting out of my comfort zone and without the support I had received from the UMass community.

As my college chapter comes to a close, I have had the chance to reflect on my last three years at UMass Amherst. Here are three things I would like to share with you:

First, find what motivates you. Find your “why.” What gets you out of bed in the morning? What will get you through those all-nighters during finals week? As high-achieving honors students, many of you may be motivated by high GPA’s; however, I encourage you to look past this goal and explore deeper within yourselves. What change do you want to see in the world? Aim for a high GPA because this academic measurement will help you land the internship that will one day allow you to be the change. My motivation derives from the goal that one day I would like to be the CFO of a non-profit that focuses on the advancement of low-income populations through financial literacy and higher education. Have a specific goal and make a plan on how to get there, because doing so will make every late night and tough exam that much more worth it. Following my plan has allowed me to graduate a semester early to pursue a Masters of Science in Accounting, and allowed me to accept a full-time offer with PwC just last night.

Second, get out of your comfort zone. Use this chapter in your life to learn new things, to pursue new passions, and to allow yourself to grow. Take advantage of the wide variety of classes, organizations, and activities offered at the university to explore your different interests and to meet the exceptional people of UMass. Attend meetings and events you wouldn’t have thought to attend in high school, and keep an open mind while doing so. As Honors students, you have an even broader range of resources available to you, from the distinguished faculty and the incredibly supportive academic advisors, to the dynamic community of honors college students. Your way of thinking will change drastically over the next four years. Become comfortable with the uncomfortable, and embrace this journey of self-discovery.

And third, have fun. From personal experience, I know how easy it can be to be overwhelmed with classes, work, and extracurriculars. Remember to leave some free time for yourself, and recognize the importance of practicing self-care. Go to the next football game, grab a slice of the latest Antonio’s creation in downtown Amherst, or jump on the B43 bus for a spontaneous trip to Northampton. Take the time to reflect on how fortunate you are to experience this chapter called college, and soak in the beauty of being a college freshman while you still are one.

I wish you the best as you begin your journey, and hope that you find it within yourself to flourish personally, academically, and professionally. I know I can speak for most seniors when I say we wish we had another four years left on this campus. Enjoy the coming years to their fullest, because before you know it, you, too, will be starting your senior year, wondering where the time has gone.

Thank you.”