

Mark Hoffmann, Chair of the Visual Communication and Design Division

Faculty Commencement Speech 2024

I would like to start off by saying thank you to the students, thank you to the families and friends here today. Without you all we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be part of this special day. And we wouldn't be part of each other's lives. Thank you for lending us your loved ones for their time at Montserrat. It has been a pleasure to be part of their journey. However it is time to take them back. Please, take them back!

So... I brought along an important item for you all today.
(pull out tissue box)

Last time I gave a commencement speech, in 2014, I had said that I had a "Cry Count" from my classes of 11 students. I have easily doubled that number, if not raised that to triple digits. And before you, or those powers that be on the stage with me here get concerned, let me state that I am happy to report that the tears didn't always come from fear, or anger in the classroom but from true human emotion that pours out in life. Sometimes it's from exhaustion, sometimes from fear, but more and more I am seeing tears come from the joy of accomplishment. It reminded me that at one point I, and every faculty, staff, and alumni, were where you are today. Happy, exhausted, and a little bit scared, no... really scared. I was once you. I was once in your shoes. But we all went through those same moments of joy, exhaustion and pain that goes along with art school. We all have shed tears, literal or metaphorical in our time in school as students and even now as teachers.

I have now been teaching for 20 years and I am at the age where I am reflecting more on my time in the classroom and the impact of it all. What has become evident to me is that my role has shifted over the years. When I started out teaching I thought it was all about the influence I would have on the students. I thought that I had so much to teach. But that's not true. I wasn't always the teacher. I was often the student. I was learning from you all. Learning about how to be a



better communicator, learning how to be empathetic, learning how to adapt, and unfortunately, learning too much about memes that I still don't understand.

I had a senior this year in class mention how much the faculty have become their family away from home. Please know that we will forever be your family. Now knowing that I am basically the age of your parents, I have shifted my thinking away from being just a teacher, but rather to that of a rent-a-parent, or sometimes rent-an-annoying-teasing-asinine-older-brother, while you are at school. Obviously we are here to teach art and creativity, but that's not the part I will remember at the end of the year, or the end of your tenure with the school. The stuff that sticks in this peanut of a brain lodged in my thick skull, is all the times we connected outside of the art. All of the times you chatted, opened-up, laughed, shed tears, and for some of you, continued trying to explain those memes even though it didn't help.

So, what now? Even though we are scared too, for what lies ahead for you outside these walls, we have to send you off into the world. Just like your families did when you came to Montserrat. You'll go out there and make art, share your art, share your love of art. And help others make it to where you are today. But know that there is always family here in Beverly. There is always a friend here waiting with a tissue for those, hopefully, joyous moments you come back home to us. Now, if anyone needs a tissue let me know I have some waiting for you.

And finally, yes finally, there are no more due dates.

Thank you.