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Good afternoon, Class of 2013! Faculty, family, friends, distinguished guests – welcome.

Two years ago, as I was preparing to leave for my Practice Experience in Guatemala, I sat down with my then 15-year-old brother Ryan to show him a video about the rural Mayan communities I was going to be working with. I wanted him to share my excitement. But Ryan looked at the video, looked at me, and said “I don’t understand why anybody would do what you’re doing on purpose.”

At that point, I was still at the beginning of my Global Poverty and Practice journey. While excited, I wasn’t so sure about what I was doing either. Three years later, after three core courses and two electives, and two years spent in Blum Hall as a peer advisor, I finally know how to answer my brother’s question. The answer lies in the four steps of the GPP process.

Step 1: Idealism. Each of us was that bright-eyed student, enrolling in Global Poverty 115 to hear Professor Ananya Roy speak. We wanted to change the world, to alleviate poverty, to make a difference – and we wanted Professor Roy to tell us how. Spoiler alert: she never did.

We learned that poverty doesn’t exist in a vacuum, but rather it’s created and perpetuated by our own actions and inactions. We learned to challenge “the system” and “the structure.” We also learned that we would have to work within these systems and structures – as “double agents” – to think critically, and to innovate, rather than replicate the status quo.

Step 2: Theory. In our core classes and electives, our professors taught us countless theories and big ideas to frame our perspectives about development – power, privilege, expertise, participation, sustainability, empowerment. Through these theories, we learned to challenge our misconceptions about poverty, to think about the consequences of our actions, and to consider the ethics and the pragmatics of our work.

Then we were in Step 3: Practice. We each chose a unique and exciting Practice Experience, and we prepared to put our theories and knowledge to the test. We experienced frustrations, physical discomfort, misunderstandings, breakdowns and breakthroughs. We felt overwhelmed, confused, anxious, and embarrassed – but also motivated, inspired, and grounded.

And then, for each of us, there were those “moments” when all of the theories, and all of these frustrations, started to come together. I will always remember my first community visit to a rural village in the Guatemalan highlands. What I noticed that day was not just the extreme poverty and lack of resources. I also noticed the beautiful hand-woven designs of the artisans’ clothing, the sun lighting up the rolling green hills, and the warm smiles I received from the women in the community, as they welcomed me into their homes. I noticed people – not just poverty. And in seeing people, I saw myself, and my own privilege, not just as a volunteer, or as a student, but as a person. It wasn’t about my “expertise” or what I had studied in class. It was about human connection, shared experience, and the recognition of finding commonalities even within extreme differences.

Which brings me to Step 4: Reflection. We came back to Berkeley looking for someone to talk to about our experiences because, let's face it - our roommates and friends were sick of hearing about it. We walked into Global Poverty 196 - what I call "group therapy for reverse culture shock" - where we challenged each other to reflect, deconstruct, and process our experiences.

It was emotional and cathartic, but this is where the whole GPP experience came together. We wrote reflections and organization reports and grant applications and packaged it all nicely together as our "Global Poverty capstone" ...and now we're done. We arrived here today, ready to graduate, ready to leave Berkeley and to leave the Global Poverty minor - but we'll never really leave it behind.

Idealism, theory, practice, reflection. We've finished the last official *requirement* of the minor...but what's next? We're now left with the challenge to translate what we've learned through this minor, into the real world.

For me, it's come full circle. In four days, I'm heading back to Guatemala to work for a non-profit. This brings me back to my brother's question: why am I doing this on purpose? It's not for the money - my salary will barely cover my costs of living. It's not for social interaction - I will be the sole Field Consultant for my region, working with just one other person on a day-to-day basis. And if you can get my dad off the state department website long enough to ask him, you'll know that it's not so I can have a comfortable, risk-free, first job experience.

The real answer is that, for all of us, poverty is going to be a part of our lives, in one way or another. Whether our professional lives are directly dedicated to poverty alleviation, or we find ways to serve the poor in communities outside of work, or perhaps we simply leave this program with a new perspective to share with others in our personal lives, we are all intimately bound to the plight of those around us who are poor.

We know that we can't "cure" global poverty, and that our actions are as much a part of the problem, as they are a part of the solution. But we also know that we don't have to be innocent bystanders, and we've seen through this minor that change is possible. The Global Poverty and Practice minor has given us the tools. It's our responsibility - and our privilege - to use them.

I am so grateful to each and every one of you, my peers, my teachers, my family - for making this incredible community what it is. Congratulations Global Poverty Class of 2013 and best of luck!