

Fairfield University Valedictory Address – Undergraduate Ceremony

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Aloha pumehana kākou. In the Native Hawaiian tongue, I warmly welcome Father President, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honored Guests, Members of the Faculty and Administration, Family, Friends, and the Class of 2012. Humbled, I stand *with* you today, as a member of this *exceptional* graduating class.

It was *four* years ago we entered Fairfield, *uncertain* of where this journey would take us. Some of us asked, “In college, is attendance mandatory?” “What’s a turbo?” “What do you mean I’m at the wrong Dolan?”

Yet today, we leave this fine institution with *answers* to those vexing-freshman-questions. Through our **education and experiences**, we have been changed from *those*-students who **once roamed the quad**.

On the quad, I recall my first interaction with Fairfield Jesuit, Father Charles Allen. Although my home was some *five-thousand* miles away and the transition was *confusing* to say the least, Father Allen *comforted* me with stories of Hawai‘i. He enlightened me with *his* accounts of Father Damien, a Roman Catholic Priest who devoted his life to the exiled lepers on the Kalaupapa Peninsula. I was amazed Father Allen knew so much about the history of *my* people.

Among the many *other* things Father Allen taught me, he *reassured* me first, no matter the size of the room, he is *never* in need, of a microphone, and second, there should always be those three main points.

The three points I wish to share with you today link my Fairfield and pre-Fairfield education.

From pre-school, the walls of my classrooms were embellished-with-posters displaying traditional Hawaiian values, words with **definition**, *but* little **context**. Among these are the three values of ‘*Ohana*, ‘*Ike Pono*, and *Mālama*, *ancient virtues* I wish to share with you today. Fairfield University not only allowed me to *understand* these **words**, but *to* put these **values** into *meaningful* action.

This first value is so important to Hawaiian culture that many of you may *already* know its definition, **thanks to *Lilo & Stitch***. For you *Disney* fans, it’s true. “‘*Ohana* means family. And Family means, no one gets left behind or forgotten.”

From my *first* visit to Fairfield back in 2008, I *not* only experienced my first snowfall, and first frostbite, but I also discovered how genuinely caring the students and faculty are at Fairfield. From *that* snowy week, I *already* sensed this presence of ‘*Ohana*. Be it a Jesuit, a professor, or an administrator, we always had someone guiding our personal journeys.

This ‘*Ohana* also formed through our **variety of living experiences**. From our cozy freshman triples in Regis, to the Loyola commons, to our experiences *roaming* the streets of Florence or Tanzania, *we* stuck together, leaving no one left behind or forgotten.

Throughout the years, we gained a ***Fairfield*** ‘*Ohana*, companions who represent more than a random, “*Friend Request*” on Facebook-after a night at the townhouses.

These are the friends who inspired us, challenged us, and got us through those *long* sleepless nights before finals with words of encouragement and sometimes the *free* coffee from “Club DiMenna”; the friends, we reminisce-with as seniors, asking, “How is college over already?”

This ‘*Ohana* allowed us to enact what the Jesuits call *Cura Personalis*, or care for the whole person, for with our ‘*Ohana* we developed academically, spiritually, and socially

The *second* Hawaiian value, ‘*Ike Pono*, comes from *two* words: ‘*Ike* – meaning to seek out and *Pono* – meaning righteousness. When the Native Hawaiians sailed thousands of miles across the Pacific, ‘*Ike Pono* fueled-their-voyage to **seek out the resources** beyond the

unknown horizon. Fairfield's academics and extracurriculars, guided us on *voyages* igniting our 'Ike Pono.

With a core curriculum that could make even a square look well-rounded, we were exposed to **diverse courses** ranging from the [philosophy of evolution] to the [archery in Zen Buddhism]. Entering Fairfield as a computer science major, I found myself questioning my passion and abilities for computers, *despite* my obvious *Facebook* addiction.

Without the core, students like myself would have been stuck in a major we *thought* we would enjoy. *However*, the core *guided* me to major in Biology and Psychology, minor in Asian Studies, Math, and Philosophy, and prepare for a professional career in cancer medicine. The core likewise set *many* of us on our scholarly expeditions for 'Ike Pono.

Fairfield's numerous *extracurriculars* **also** guided our pursuit of 'Ike Pono. When the seas got rough, the 'Ohana of our clubs and organizations navigated us back to calmer waters *and that elusive* seven block.

Our class is overflowing with students who made bold statements about the environment, culture, and society, through radio, media, and the arts.

This university has not *merely* cultivated educated minds, but educated minds *who* involved themselves with athletics or intramurals, dance or improv, first year mentoring or Kairos retreats.

Both in and out of the classroom we have enacted 'Ike Pono, something we have been taught by the Jesuits as *Magis*, or the more. Fairfield provided *many* opportunities in *our* expedition for *Magis*.

The *third value* is that of *Mālama*, the Hawaiian value meaning to care for others. Be it the *Kumu*, the teachers, or the *Kahuna*, the spiritual leaders, *Mālama* was omnipresent in ancient Hawai'i. At *Fairfield*, the *entire* University community showed us this sense of, caring for others.

Whether it was working with *underprivileged* children in Dr. Primavera's psychology course or listening to the elderly at the Home-for-the-Dying-in-Jamaica with campus ministry, *Mālama* was all around us.

There were *professors*, who led us into that online battle called "registration," providing us with the sacred *Pin Number*; the code granting us access to dodge 8 a.m. courses and capture once-a-week turbos. These professors we thank not *only* for their mentorship, but their friendship.

Mālama is also present in our-*many* service opportunities. During a service trip to Belize in 2011, I was shocked to see the realities of the Belizean life.

What we witnessed as a *team* were impoverished and marginalized communities with malnourished children sometimes living on a *single* tortilla bread a day.

Yet, it was inspiring to work alongside their fathers, constructing a church with nothing but a shovel and some cement.

We witnessed *Mālama* through the Belizian people who shared not *only* pieces of *tortilla*, but pieces of-their-lives.

In Belize, I realized *how* many opportunities I was taking for granted. I mean seriously, look at us! We're dressed like *wizards* on the top of a beautiful hill in the backyard of a *mansion*.

Thanks to these *unique* Fairfield opportunities, we were given a global perspective beyond the boundaries of 06824. *Some of us* even accepted offers to the *Jesuit* Volunteer Corps or *Fulbright* programs. *However*, all of us were enlightened with culture and values-like-*Mālama* that we *carry* with us for the rest of our lives.

Even within these Public Safety patrolled gates, students personify *Mālama*. I could never walk through our Barone Campus Center without being offered a delicious pastry *in-*

exchange for a blood or money donation. Jail N' Bail, Relay for Life, Hunger Cleanup, the list goes on and on.

Students at Fairfield easily discover passions *leading* to social activism *with* an understanding of what-it-means to enact the Jesuit value of *Men and Women for Others*.

'Ohana, 'Ike Pono, and Mālama. Three virtues of the ancient Native Hawaiian people, my ancestors who sailed the Pacific *seventeen hundred* years ago. For a language with the *shortest* alphabet in the world, these words carry *so much kauna*, or hidden meaning.

Our collective *experiences* revealed to me the **hidden meanings** of these values, **values** I learned in my childhood but **only-now** fully understand thanks to *you*, our *Jesuit* values, and our *voyage* through Fairfield. I congratulate the **Fairfield University Class of 2012** on this day of celebration. We *made* it and I know we will *continue* on the *voyages* Fairfield has set for us. *Mahalo* and thank you for your time.