

CLASS DAY 2019

JUNE 14

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Today, I want to talk to you about the weather. It's 75 degrees right now. Partly cloudy. Humidity of 40%. Weather might seem like boring small talk, but here in Chicago, we love to talk about the weather. The Starks think their winters are bad? We have days when it's colder than Mars. We have snow storms at the end of April, and our Summer Breezes always seem to turn into Summer Freezes.

But the winter means something else to us, as UChicago students. Our school has a reputation of being "tough," and we hold up the Chicago winter as a symbol of our toughness—it's something we simultaneously complain and brag about, along with grade deflation and our heavy course load. We take pride in our winters because they show that we haven't grown soft like the Ivy Leaguers. By talking about the weather with such bravado, we perpetuate a myth that our grit and burning intellectual curiosity are all we need to stay warm through the cold Chicago winters.

But this image of UChicago's toughness does not do justice to the warmth that I have experienced at this school. It does not acknowledge the way that challenges can bring out kindness. Chicago winters are cold, but over our years here, we have braved the cold for each other, and we have kept each other warm.

A few days after the polar vortex, my English professor slipped on ice and came to class with a "mild concussion," as she calmly put it. You could take this story and focus on how tough she is, but that doesn't explain *why* she showed up. She came to class for *us*, her students. This level of commitment is incredible yet familiar at UChicago. Snow, cold, or wind cannot stop us from showing up for each other.

Look at Kuvia, for another example. Its existence seems to prove that UChicago students are impervious to the cold (or maybe that we care too much about free T-shirts), but that's not why you trek through snow for a predawn workout. You walk to Crown because you're walking with your housemates, and the cold is 100 times more bearable when you're with people you care about.

And sometimes the cold is more bearable because we literally keep each other warm. In high school, an admissions officer told me that UChicago invented the football huddle. But I think we huddle less on the football field and more during fire drills, when someone sets off the smoke alarm in the middle of January, again. When we're waiting in the cold outside our dorms, we form impromptu penguin huddles with friends and strangers.

There are myriad other ways that the cold brings out acts of kindness, within our UChicago communities and within our other support systems, too. Parents and grandparents send us cozy clothing. Students deliver hot chocolate to Blue Light security guards. When the quad freezes over and turns into a skating rink, friends link arms to keep each other from slipping. And when we inevitably fall, we help each other up.

We should all be incredibly proud of the grit it took to get here today. But when you reminisce about your undergrad years, remember that UChicago is more than its image of intellectual loners. It's tempting to talk about this school as a crucible, a trial by ice that proves just how strong we are. But also take pride in the kindness we often ignore when we humblebrag about our "tough" reputation. Brag about the winters you've endured, sure, but remember to brag about the friends, faculty, and family members who made your winters feel that much warmer.