Hello everyone and good afternoon. I am so glad to see so many new faces entering the Honors College here at Mizzou, so I feel I can speak for everyone when I say thank you so much for being here.

My name is Breanna Carter, and I’m a senior in the dual Bachelors and Masters of Occupational Therapy program through the School of Health Professions. That means I have an additional year to learn about taxes, investments, and which wines to pair with which meals, you know, all of the “real” adult stuff, instead of being forced to leave this upcoming May. It is so crazy to think that it has already been three years since I was sitting in the seats that you all are now, listening to another student giving a speech about their time at Mizzou. So believe me when I say that this time will go by faster than you may think.

While the School of Health Professions has been my primary home throughout my time here, and bear with me because this is going to sound cheesy, but the Honors College will always have a special place in my heart. I credit the Honors College as being one of the primary reasons for my attending the University. I was offered the Brazeal scholarship which opened up a number of opportunities that I would never have thought possible. Being a part of the Honors College provided a foundation and an extra set of eyes and ears available to me that I did not think I needed when first moving 2,000 miles away from home in Seattle, Washington.

I’ll be honest in saying I was a little hesitant when I received the email asking me to speak to you all today. Speaking to a crowd of people for ten to twelve minutes can be pretty daunting, and I am sure you understand, ten minutes can either go by really fast or really, really slow. However, once I heard this was an opportunity to basically talk about myself, I figured I could manage it.

First, let me set the record straight. I am not here to lecture you on how to get through college or how to do it “right”, or to take one
path versus another. We all share different experiences that shape who we are and how we get through life. I am here to speak about MY specific experiences; what I wish I would have known coming into college, what I have witnessed and learned while at this school, and some general pieces of advice that I believe have helped me survive the University of Missouri.

I began freshman year in Schurz Hall, a primarily Honors dorm. My favorite part of being immersed within the community was how small it made Mizzou feel. Taking Honors sections of courses like Psych 1000 or Nutrition 1034 allowed for much smaller classes—thirty instead of 300. And to be taught in unique ways: I remember in my Psych 1000 course our teacher brought in some pills that individuals with diabetes take if they want food to taste sweet. Normally I do not advocate for accepting pills from people not well known, but these ones were actually really interesting, so I’ll make this one exception. Yes, it is true that additional work may be needed in order to receive that letter H on your transcript, but with that letter H comes the ability to learn about topics in new ways within a more intimate environment.

My freshman year was also the time that I began the Discovery Fellows program that some of you may get to experience this year. What are the odds that a professor within the Occupational Therapy Program would be doing research and allowing a student to assist them with the process? And I would be lying if I said I knew research in occupational therapy existed prior to being a Discovery Fellow. Working with Dr. Hebert allowed me to see an entirely different side to the profession I was interested in, and the two years that I worked with her provided me with knowledge that I felt gave me more of an upper hand when I finally applied for the program. I was published within her work and I was lucky enough to present it at the 2014 Undergraduate Creative and Research Achievements Forum here on campus.

The Honors College provides numerous classes; some of them tailored to the general education classes, and others more unique. Everyone in the college will tell you to take the Humanities series
because it is so amazing. I really wish I could jump onto that bandwagon and say from first-hand experience that it was amazing also, but the reality is I didn’t take it. I only took one honors level course each semester because I thought that was all that was required of me. While I would not consider this a “mistake”, I would say that it made my Honors experience more complicated. Let me clarify something that I was unaware of when beginning college. In order graduate with honors, you MUST have completed 20 credit hours that are considered honors level. I did not know this information until I was going into my sophomore year.

Coming to college is such a new beginning for everyone. It is your first time to really express who you are as an individual. There is no one to control your schedule or what you choose to do with your free time except for you. You don’t actually realize how much freedom you have until you’re sitting there in your dorm deciding whether to binge watch Gossip Girl or to actually do one of the readings for your history class. I wish I had known or better prepared myself for that much freedom, but then again, if you’re not just thrown into it, how will you learn to survive?

Some of you may be scared at this moment. Some of you may be from Columbia so you are right at home, and some of you may be hundreds, or even thousands of miles away. It’s okay to be scared. This place will see you at your best and your worst. This place will give you late nights and early mornings, days of stress and days of ease, events and opportunities at every corner, and while everyone has access to the same things, each and every one of you will make these next four years your own. I am not going to lie to you and say this place is butterflies and rainbows and everything I could have ever dreamed of. I have seen this school unite as one, and I have seen it divide in a short amount of time. But while the bad can seem unbearable at times, it is with those moments that we learn the most. I feel like we learn best when we’re uncomfortable, and who would I be if I didn’t share an example of when I felt uncomfortable when attending this school?
I am sure all of you as incoming freshman heard about all of the events that occurred here at Mizzou last fall when it came to race and diversity here on this campus. I am sure all of you heard how differently it was portrayed on each news station and in each paper, or you heard the opinionated version from a family member or friend. It was something that made an impact not only just at this university, but also throughout the entire nation. Coming from the west coast, I had an idea of what I would be experiencing when moving to the Midwest for school. However, I did not think that the college campus itself would still be having the same issues one would expect more during the 1950s and 1960s.

It would be completely unfair to say that racism and discrimination did not still hold true to many people today, and it would be unfair to believe that those negative views did not hold true with people we have classes with each and every single day.

The one incident that still burns deep within my mind was while I was at work at the student success center. I am sitting next to one of my friends and both of us are working with students when I overhear her “client” speaking about how he hated high school because there were “too many black people.” While I tried to focus more on my job instead of his rambling, he went on to tell her about how he doesn’t make friends with black people because of their lifestyles of being “thugs”, etc. I think what blew my mind the most was when he looked me straight in the eyes after saying all of this, than looked at her and asked, “don’t you agree?”

Those words, “don’t you agree” stuck with me for days. Who was this guy to ask one of my best friends if she agreed to not be friends with someone based on the color of their skin, based on how they look? How could he make the assumption that she would agree with him? This was and still is the norm for so many people. The events that occurred last fall may seem like they were dramatic and unnecessary, yet they were not. I am not going to get into my opinions on how things were handled here on campus, though what truly matters is that it
made each and every person here feel uncomfortable in some sense. And by now the topic of diversity and inclusion is included with just about every aspect of our lives, just as it should be.

Without those negative experiences, we would not be able to truly reflect and realize how great the positive ones are. This, for me, is one of those positive moments. I’m going to get cheesy once more with you all, but you have no idea how much it means to me to be able to speak to you at one of your first events as a Mizzou Tiger. Out of all the amazing people that the Honors College produces each year, being chosen to do this will hopefully have an impact on not only my life but also all of yours in some sort of way.

I get so excited thinking about the talent and creative minds that enter the leave the Honors College every year. The doors that you choose will impact how you will leave this school four years from now, and impact how your creative and bright mind will differ from the person seated right next to you.

I began the Occupational Therapy Program the summer after my sophomore year. The biggest downside to entering a professional program was that there were no honors specific courses to take, meaning I had to figure out how to get the necessary credits another way. It was stressful; nevertheless it was another shot at using that newfound freedom I was talking about before.

The Honors College has the option to receive credit using “learning by contract”, something I would highly recommend if you are 1) given the opportunity, and 2) are not afraid to actually speak to your teachers. It was through this that I learned to really utilize my creativity. One semester, I chose to interview staff and students within the school of health professions and ask them questions about diversity in health care and wrote a research paper based on my results. Another semester, I learned about assistive technology utilized by individuals with visual impairments. I was able to interview a couple that is well known within the visually impaired community in Missouri. I learned
about what equipment they use daily and how I as a future healthcare professional could better advocate for them and those like them.

My recent love for research has turned into the chance to expand on projects I had done in the past. I have decided to go deeper into the topic of diversity within the health professions and how various programs throughout the country recruit and retain students of underrepresented populations. I am currently one of two students of color, and the only African American within my occupational therapy class. With the world population becoming more and more diverse and mixed with each second of every day, why is it that the professionals providing care not better represent the population in which it is serving? Why is it so difficult to find a doctor, or a nurse, or a therapist who is able to relate to you better? It is these questions I am interested in and through my work I plan to come up with some potential solutions for them.

This has been a lot of information about myself, about who I am, about what I do here and why it has been important to me. However, at the end of the day, when you all walk out of these doors and either remember or forget this ceremony as a whole, I hope that the one thing you take from all of this is to take advantage of everything that college has to offer. I know, everyone says “these are the best four years of your life”, but they truly are. Where else can you find tens or hundreds of people who all love ultimate Frisbee, Harry Potter, and Game of Thrones just like you do? Where else can you find a class that has you analyze television shows and their commercials? The answer to that one is the Honors College.

Here is the part where I provide you all with some general rules of advice about the Honors College and just being a part of Mizzou as a whole. Do what you want with this information because I cannot reiterate enough, you and I are different, and that’s okay.

First, get involved. Whether it be with your specific major, being an ambassador for Honors College, or being involved with Relay for Life or Dance Marathon, whatever it is that peaks your interest, get
involved! They are a simple solution to meeting new people, and it makes a school of over 30,000 students seem so much smaller.

Second, do not forget that you need 20 honors credits in order to graduate from the Honors College.

Third, allow the Honors College to be a part of your lives. This school has a set of staff that cares about each and every one of you and are nearly always available to answer whatever questions you may have. Every single person here wants to see every single one of you at that graduation ceremony in May of 2020. I know that for me personally, the Brazeal family has become important in my life both inside and outside of the classroom.

Lastly, make time for yourselves. While I told you to get involved and express who you are, there is a fine line between having a great time and overwhelming yourself. One of the biggest challenges I had was telling myself I needed to slow down. And when you do become overwhelmed, allow yourself to take a break. Go on a walk, go get some ice cream, or watch a movie. You have to find peace within yourselves if you are going to have peace in life.

You all are destined for great things. This time will be full of ups and downs, it will see you at your best and at your worst, but it is going to be amazing and will all be over quicker than you think it will. But, you should be excited. I feel as though I can speak for the entire Honors College when I say welcome, we are so glad to have you, and we cannot wait to see what each and every one of you will accomplish within your time here at Mizzou.

I hope that listening to me today has made you excited for your time here. I hope that I could maybe be an influence, or a voice of reason, or maybe just another body showing that I survived here so you can too.

It has truly been an honor to be able to speak with you all this afternoon and the class of 2020 will be one for the books.

Thank you.