

Dear Class of 2025,

In another symptom of your cohort's incurable frivolity, about which I lectured in vain, you decided to vote me a "Favorite Professor."

Some miscredited luminary said he could never be a member of a club that would accept him. I expound on that wisdom: I could never accept this honor from students who considered *me* their favorite professor. What on earth were they thinking? Were they drunk? Are they "trolling"? Had I bribed them, then forgot about it? Did their phones accidentally vote, rubbing up against them as they "exercised" in the Widener basement stacks?

Being Serbian, these doubts brought me little consolation. Alas, we all get the professors we deserve. So, before your headlong retreat from Harvard, permit me to advise you a couple of three things:

1. **Embrace change.** As you age, the world will look unrecognizable. You will regret the ideas you held sacred. People you considered idols will become too shameful to mention in polite company. You will marry, befriend, partner with, and give birth to people you never imagined being in your life. They will reinvent you. Decisions you considered failures will turn out to be your greatest accomplishments. Change your mind. Adjust your sails. Learn from your folly. Disillusionment is good. Be happy every time it happens.
2. **Fulfill yourself despite – not with – your career.** Way-too-many of you are enchanted with status, income, LinkedIn narcissism. The best part of having gone to Harvard is that you never again have to be impressed with anyone with an Ivy League diploma. Build an oasis of loved ones, and nurture it with all you have. Be reliable and caring to the people around you. I have never met a graduate who regretted sacrificing work for family. This is no sacrifice at all. It's freedom.
3. **Get out of your comfort zone.** Stop exaggerating the dangers of the real world. Stop fearing awkwardness, intimacy, and failure. War, injustice and misery are normal parts of life, and they thrive on cowardice and self-isolation. Understand the difference between feel-good politics and *do-good* politics. Go to places where life does not run high. Immerse yourself in the social problems that brought you to my classes. Be the heroes that we saw in you.

Report to me in office hours in September 2035. An exam will be administered.

With love and gratitude,

Danilo Mandić

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Danilo Mandić', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.