Dear Dean, members of the Faculty, prize winners, prize donors, ladies and gentlemen,

I am greatly honoured to have received the University Medal and been asked to speak this evening. I’d like to start by thanking all those who have made it possible for me to stand here today.

Firstly, I’d like to thank my friends and my fellow students. A major part of what made my university years so enjoyable was the people I met along the way and the great friends I made. They’ve given me tremendous support over the years as well as a lot of laughter and fun. I’d also like to congratulate everyone graduating this year, as well as my fellow Prize Winners and fellow Medalists.

Secondly, I’d like to thank my parents. I would not be here today were it not for their hard work, sacrifices and unyielding support and I admire and respect both my parents greatly.

In particular, I’d like to share my father’s story today because it has always been a major source of inspiration for me. My father grew up in a poor country town in China. When he finished high school, it was the time of the Cultural Revolution and, as part of the “Down to the Countryside Movement”, he was unable to go to university. Instead, my father had to do farming work in the country, which he found harsh, strenuous and exhausting.

When Deng Xiaoping came into power, he pronounced that everyone could attend university for free if they passed the university entrance exams. Many people of all ages undertook those first university entrance exams. My father told me later that those exams were the turning point in his life. My father hated farming and saw passing those exams as his opportunity to forever escape from farming. He was too poor to hire a tutor or purchase books but he studied hard for months on end using only his old school textbooks. Against all expectations, my father scored high enough to be admitted to study chemistry in a university in Fuzhou, the provincial capital. My father told me that he felt like he was in heaven when he found out he had been admitted into university, because his dreams had come true and he knew that his life was forever changed.

My father’s story taught me that no matter how tough, restrictive and oppressive the situation we find ourselves in, no matter how tight the bars that surround us may seem, there is always a way out if we have the will, drive and commitment to find it and take the opportunities presented to us. Importantly, it showed me that sometimes education can present the way out, and the key to expanding our horizons and opportunities. My father’s story has also made me realise and appreciate the true value of affordable and readily accessible education.

I feel extremely grateful that I grew up in a country where quality education is affordable and accessible. I’ve spent all my schooling years in the public education system and I believe that it is an integral part of this country that the public education system remains well-resourced and able to provide quality education. I also feel quite lucky that I am able to access affordable university education of the highest quality. On this note, I’d also like to thank the prize and scholarship donors who have greatly contributed to my ability to fund my university education.

As for me and why I decided to do law, I feel like I almost stumbled accidentally into law. I had absolutely no ambition to be a lawyer at the end of high school and I chose law mostly to supplement my commerce degree. My impression of lawyers was informed by TV shows such as Ally McBeal and Boston Legal. The thought of having to stand up in court and argue continuously
scared me immensely, particularly as I had a great fear of public speaking and had never liked the spotlight much.

However, when I actually started studying law, I realised, to my immense shock, that I actually really enjoyed it. To be honest, I at first tried to resist this new found interest – but the lure of a challenging but interesting job that I actually enjoyed proved too strong for me to resist.

Personally, I really enjoy the analytical and problem solving aspects of studying law. I find the law fascinating because it is dynamic and fluid, it is never black and white, and there are always different ways of interpreting a case or a statute. The law is something which pervades every part of our society, forms the structure for much of our dealings with each other, and can have a massive impact on people’s lives. Consequently, knowledge of the law is very empowering as it allows us to identify when dealings that seem ‘unfair’ have breached the law, and how to seek redress for violations of our rights. Personally, I have become much more willing and able to stand up for my rights, even when it concerns trivial matters such as the terms and conditions of a promotional offer. However, with the power which working in the law gives us, comes the responsibility of practising with absolute integrity.

Through these five years at university, I have also been taught and encouraged to not simply accept the law as it stands, but also to think critically about it and form my own opinions about what the law should be. Ultimately, I see the law as something which is heavily influenced by human, societal, policy and philosophical factors. I’ve come to realise that there are two sides to every story and often there is no ‘right’ answer and no easy solution. My viewpoint on the law is no more better than any other person’s viewpoint. However, I think that the process of understanding the policy reasons behind different areas of law and discussing different viewpoints can only make the law better.

Finally, I’d like to conclude by thanking my lecturers whose enthusiasm, passion and intellect have opened my eyes to how fascinating the law is. I’d also like to thank this university which has taught me more than just about the law or commerce. It’s taught me how to think critically and independently. It’s demonstrated to me the importance and the dynamics of teamwork and collaboration. It’s helped me overcome my fear of public speaking by forcing me to make presentation after presentation. I’ve also done things during my time in university, both inside and outside the classroom, which I never thought I was capable of doing. Most importantly, I thank this university and the law faculty for helping me discover a profession which I truly enjoy working in.

Thank you very much.