



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
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COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS

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JUAN BOLIVAR-ESCOBAR *B.A. in Philosophy*

Good evening fellow graduates, family members, friends, esteemed faculty and staff. Thank you all for joining us in celebration of this great achievement.

I would like to thank Dr. Liu and the philosophy department for giving me the opportunity to address you all today. I am honored.

As inquiry is the nature of philosophy, it seems only fitting that I begin with a question. It is a question those of us who studied philosophy have no doubt been asked before; perhaps some of you in the audience have found yourselves asking this very question:

“What can you do with a degree in philosophy?”

And while this question often brings with it derision, sarcasm, and fear, the implicit assumption is nevertheless this: your education should be practical; better yet, it should provide you with instrumental skills that transfer into a ‘real’ job.

Because let’s face it, philosophy gets a bad rap. Those closest to us fear that we will end up walking the earth jobless. And people outside of the discipline think philosophy is nothing more than asking questions that never yield any answers!

But philosophy helps us cultivate so many ‘marketable’ skills.

- We can think logically and critically
 - We can communicate clearly
 - And we can solve complex problems
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Skills, that according to a recent survey by The Association of American Colleges and Universities, 93% of employers value more than one's undergraduate major.

Not to mention, philosophy graduates absolutely crush various graduate school entrance exams like the GRE and LSAT.

But that's not all...

While these instrumental skills are nevertheless useful, they were a mere side effect of our education. Philosophical training is so much more than an exceptional employee-training program, or a fast track into graduate school.

Our philosophical education has been a transformative process.

We spent our time here contemplating questions that matter to all of us:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- How can I live a meaningful life?

Among others...

But answers to these questions don't come easily.

The process demands that we question ourselves, and the world around us—continually challenging all of the claims that we take for granted.

And in doing so, we learn not only to value the answers we find, but also to value the process of inquiry itself. Because the point is not to find an answer and call it a day, the point, if there ever was one, is to continue to question, to continue to learn, and most importantly to continue to grow.

And yet, none of these skills came without difficulty. We earned each and every one of them. We worked rigorously to get to where we are. We wrote numerous essays (all of which were great, I assure you); we spent countless grueling hours reading and re-reading all of the texts our amazing professors tortured us with (I mean assigned to us).

To our faculty:

This journey would have been impossible without you. You are a group of some of the most intelligent and passionate individuals I have ever met. Thank you all for making this a memorable and life-changing experience.

If I may, Dr. Coplan and Dr. Calarco:

Thank you both for encouraging me to pursue this major, I never imagined the impact your classes would have on my life.

- Dr. Coplan who made it impossible for me to watch a movie and not try to interpret it philosophically.

And

- Dr. Calarco whose lectures on existentialism changed the way I see the world and my place in it, and they may have literally given me anxiety—sorry, angst...

To our family and friends:

Thank you for your continued support: for reading our drafts, listening to us ramble on and on about philosophy, but most of all, for being such great sports when you lost an argument—there's a reason philosophy majors make great lawyers.

And finally, to my fellow graduates:

Congratulations! I wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors. Whether you decide to continue in philosophy or you find yourselves on a different path, trust that your education has given you the skills necessary to succeed.

And to conclude, it seems only fitting that I leave you with a question:

“What KANT you do with a degree in philosophy?”

ALEXANDRA BORUNDA *B. A. in Geography*

Alexandra Fraire Borunda is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Geography and a minor in Mathematics. She has been a member of the geography club, and you can catch her weather reports as a Weather Watcher on KCAL 9 and CBS 2. Alexandra plans to travel the world as often as she can before she continues her academic journey with plans to pursue a master's degree in Meteorology.

Good morning everyone, you did it!

At some point in your academic journey I'm sure everyone here has heard the infamous question, "Oh Geography Major huh? So, what is your favorite rock?"

No, I do not study rocks, nor do I memorize every state capital or road in America.

Obviously, Geography is more than that. Like Mae said, all of us here use this major to study a variety of subjects and like those unique subjects. They mirror the uniqueness of every student's journey leading up to this point.

My journey began with a me starting out as a film major.

I know, a 180-degree switch in majors. After I took a few film class I realized that, doing it as a career would not bring me happiness. I eventually decided to follow my true passion, my love of the environment and weather. Which lead me to become a Geographer and I finally feel like I belong.

Although this department is small, it is tight net. The beauty of a small department is that you get to know your peers and your professors on a much more personal level. Because of this close relationship, everyone in the department knows that I am the weather girl. One day I saw Zia in the hall and he encouraged me to apply for a weather internship. This internship was the REU (Research Experience for Undergrads) internship at the National Weather Center in Norman Oklahoma.

Almost a year ago today, I left to embark on that summer internship and my life has never been the same. It was the hardest, most intense and yet best

summers of my life. There I analyzed a Tornadic Debris Signature from an infamous tornado. I am continuing that research today and I hope to publish it by the end of this year.

So, as we transition into the world of the unknown let's remember to seize the opportunities given to us and not be afraid to take risks. I took many frightening risk throughout my academic journey and I could never be happier because they have lead me here. And I have had the best, unforgettable memories here.

I am going to miss this department, I'm going to miss walking out of the elevator and being greeted by the mural. Walking into the lounge after class, seeing someone sleeping on the couch, everyone gathered around the table, bonding. Having a camp out in the lounge and meeting ghosts. I'm even going to miss the simple things too, like carrying a backpack. Walking around this campus, attending school events, seeing my friends every day in the lounge. Paying to do my work, instead of getting payed to do it. My life being centered around one spot.

Thank you to the faculty, staff and all my peers before me for making this the best college experience I could ever ask for.

Thank you to my mom, dad and brothers who have encouraged me my entire academic journey and who have always been there for me.

And it was my brother who shared this quote with me from *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. As you graduates go out into the world and build a life for yourself, I hope that you can keep these words in mind as I have throughout all of life's endeavors:

"It's never too late, or in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. There's no time limit, stop whenever you want. You can change or stay the same, there are no rules to this thing. We can make the best or worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. And I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of. If you find that you're not, I hope you have the strength to start all over again."

With that said, I am honored to have had this opportunity to speak to my graduating class. One last quote, by the great Shia Labeouf. "Just DO IT!" Just do it and get out there and change the world. Good luck to everyone and thank you for the unforgettable memories and I hope our paths cross again.

VERA DE ALMEIDA *B. A. in Latin American Studies*

Good morning

I would like to thank the Latin American Studies Program and its faculty, for the honor of speaking to the class of 2018. To my fellow graduates here today, congratulations, and my best wishes of great success in your future. I also want to thank my family, my children, and especially my husband Cesar, for their support and encouragement. Cesar, thank for the delicious dinners you cooked for us. Over 30 years ago, when I first came from my home country Brazil, escaping an evil dictatorship in a country in distress when my friends and teachers, were killed, I spoke very little English. Along the way, I learned the basics of the English language by helping my children with their homework. Even though in Brazil I never had the chance to have a higher education, I always believed in it as a tool to succeed. As a blue-collar worker, I had a housecleaning business, and I had to work, nonstop, to send my two children to college. Back then, there were few grants for new immigrants, so I had to pay to send them to college. After my daughter Priscilla graduate from law school, and my son Victor left to finish his medical physician schooling, I decided that it was my turn to finally achieve my dream to obtain a college degree. Starting from the very beginning at the Continuing School Education, I worked hard and paved my way towards attending Fullerton College. At Fullerton College, after taking several courses, my English 100 teacher recommended me for the teaching's aid program, and after I finished it, the Fullerton College Basic Learners department gave a job as a Teacher Aid for ESL classes and I have been working there since. It was while working there that I noticed that most of my students were from Latin America. Because of my work, I became more interested on learning more about the different cultures of Latin America, so

I could help my students better. Then, my curiosity drove me to start looking for more information and a good program that would fulfill my desire to learn even more about Latin America. Fortunately, I found it here at Cal State Fullerton, so I was so pleased with what I found that I changed my major from Sociology to Latin America Studies. At Cal State Fullerton, I have enjoyed the Latin American program in every step the way. Because it is an Interdisciplinary program, I had the chance to enjoy and learn through my classes in Social Anthropology, History, Language, Literature, Music, and Art. It has been such an enriching and joyful experience!! I recall having a lot of fun learning about Son Jarocho which is a traditional music genre from Mexico, and learned how to compose a corrido, which is Mexican ballad or folksong. Yes, I composed my very own Corrido. As I mentioned previously, I decided to learn more about Latin America in order to help my students. However, I'm the one who ended up receiving more benefits from my schooling. Throughout my courses, I learned more about my cultural roots and Brazil's history than when I was living there, and I learned in an unbiased way. I was amazed by my discoveries. My goal for the future is to pursue a master's Degree in Linguistics, to continuing teaching. One of the many positive benefits to draw from my experience, is that I would encourage the guests here, especially mature adults like me, who didn't have a chance, to finish or to pursue a higher education to don't wait any longer. Please take advantage of the programs offered by Cal State Fullerton, especially the Latin America Studies program, for mature students like me, like us. I received plenty of support from my program and Dr. Ishikawa. I really encourage you to do it because, you know what... I'm glad I did it. To my fellow graduates here today, I know how difficult it was, and how hard you have worked, and I'm glad we all did it. Congratulations, and my best wishes of great success in your future



ERIC DE ROULET *M. A. in Linguistics*

So, here we are, the accomplished, and most of all relieved, Class of 2018, and here you are, our many proud supporters and admirers, more important to our success than we can ever know, wondering where your favorite students at Cal State Fullerton are about to go next.

We up here are thinking about jobs, too.

Especially given our chosen majors, it's easy to believe that we now have to make the harrowing choice between following our dreams and making ends meet. One or the other. And with STEM programs being all the rage these days, and colleges all around us mutating into vocational programs, it's easy to think that technical skills are the only ones that matter now, that because computers are taking more and more jobs, we ourselves need to somehow become computers—nevermind that computers are often replaced every couple of years anyway. When you think about it, this is a pretty low standard to meet.

Rather than try to compete with the machines, I would like to propose an alternative. One of our guest speakers at this year's Linguistics Symposium stressed that schools need to focus on what she called the three L's of education: language, literature, and linguistics.

Hopefully I quoted those in the right order—that was a long day for me. Nearly forty-two hours, in fact.

To the point, our unnamed guest speaker said that our degrees aren't merely about job skills but are about becoming good members of society. These fields at once teach us to introspect and to look beyond ourselves. As we studied language acquisition, for example, while I was figuring why I had so much

difficulty learning other languages, I was also learning to better empathize with the international students in my program as they tried to navigate grad school in their second or third language. If anything, now it's even harder to imagine doing what they do every day.

Not only do I agree with that guest speaker, but I'm going to add to her argument here. Our interests, far from dooming us to return to our old retail and coffee shop jobs, can lead us both to become successful in the "real world" and to change it for the better.

For some of us, this means introducing students to new worlds by teaching English or literature classes, or working as translators to bring people together and create common ground. There will always be a need more teachers and translators, of course, but we're not limited to these roles, either. Language itself enables us to empower the disadvantaged, access mindsets and understand mindsets unlike our own, and tamper the ignorance that's oddly widespread in our increasingly-connected world. We simply have to choose how we're going to use our language and our expertise.

For some of us, this might entail working in advocacy, say through working with non-profits or providing legal representation to those who need someone to stand up for them. Others among us would rather just read and write—and that's just as good. Public engagement gives us an excellent avenue to do so: rather than only write dissertations and research articles, we can also reach out to broader audiences, to those supposedly ordinary people who are waiting for inspiration and something worth being passionate about. Public engagement is frowned upon in quite a few academic circles as being somehow less than academic, but isn't one mark of a good academic the ability to share our ideas with others? Some writers are already doing this—think of blogs like The Word Detective, LitHub, All Things Linguistic. Plenty of academics write for magazines and newspapers, too. Besides, there is hardly a better way to improve enrollment in literature and linguistics; more public interest means more future members of these fields.

Whatever we decide to next, let's remember that people rise to the expectations set for them. If the people around us set the bar low, like CEOs and policymakers who are dismissive of our non-STEM, non-business degrees and want us all to go corporate, then let's set our own expectations higher and create the lives we want for ourselves.

We should also remember that we all got here with the help of others, that we

could never have accomplished all of this on our own. Some of us grads have been incredibly fortunate, and others have struggled every step of the way even to get into school. But we're all on this stage today, aren't we? We might as well find ways to give back to the communities that helped us to get here, or to less fortunate communities which deserve a fair chance to enjoy the same opportunities we have. Many of us, no doubt, are worried about the direction our world is headed in, but perhaps with our critical thinking and our ability to understand other cultures we can help turn things around.

Plenty of grads leave school focused on getting paid, and worried about paying everything back, and understandably so, but we should also focus on paying it forward—we can still figure out the rest. It's natural to become self-centered, to worry what we have on our own islands, but I propose instead that we look out to the horizon and build bridges.

We can never thank you enough for everything you've done for us, and we hope you continue to support us, even with our slightly quirky interests and roundabout life courses. I, for one, am proud to be here among the Class of 2018, and I can't wait to see what we'll do next.

MAELYNN DICKSON *M.A. in Geography*

Thank you for the introduction. So, as you all just heard, I love to talk trash. I love telling people what bin it goes into, why it's significant, and how they can make a difference from one little piece of garbage. In many instances, during my dumpster audits, I would find great valuables – like binders, staplers, children's toys, and even wedding photos – just thrown out when there was plenty of other use for them; well maybe except for those wedding photos (Pause for laughs). I want everyone graduating today – and those of you in the audience who have either already graduated or are going to graduate – to not waste your degree and throw it out when there's plenty of use for it. Ya sure, maybe you made a mistake with the major you chose, but the degree that's about to be in your hands is something that no one can ever take away from you; so why would you toss it out like trash? Whenever you're job hunting or feeling discouraged, just remember you survived 300A, you made it past that first test in Spatial Data, you managed to finally understand Voeks's exams, and most importantly, you're a CSUF Geographer!

All the guests here today, you may still be confused as to what your son, daughter, granddaughter, or family member majored in. I'm here to tell you that it's okay, because I guarantee there's one or two of us up here that are still confused as well.

Let me shed some light on Geography. As a Geographer, we can study trash and sustainability. We can study the movement of vinyls across the US. We can study fires, because Geography is always lit (Pause for laughs). We can look at weather patterns and the debris signatures of tornados. We can study our grandfather's journal and his movements throughout the world. We can use GPS coordinates to map an invasive plant species and the impacts it has on a

small town in Mexico. And we can study how humans have negatively affected the environment.

When I first transferred into CSUF, I never thought I'd be embraced by such an amazing department. Every teacher who I ever had the pleasure of learning or taking advice from, I'd like to say thank you for helping me become the Geographer I am today. CSUF Geography is a place that I will always cherish and respect, no matter where my life or professional career takes me. The community that we hold within our department is rare to find, especially on a large campus. I'm sure many of us here share similar experiences of sitting in the Geography lounge and running into fellow students, faculty, and alumni whom you'd never get to see if that space didn't exist. The point is that we are a community and we will always support each other. So all my fellow geography graduates, let's never forget that we are Titans and Geographers, and we will always reach higher.

MARGARET DONOVAN *B.A. in Liberal Studies*

Good evening family, friends, and esteemed staff.

Today, we are here to celebrate!

Here to celebrate my friends, my peers. We did it! Let's celebrate!

Here to celebrate our professors. As much as we as students love to complain, you always had our backs whether it be someone to bounce ideas off of or an ear to lend in times of need, thank you for your extra credit opportunities, and especially in my case a last minute credential recommendation.. we thank all you for everything you have done for us.

We are here to celebrate all of you. Our loved ones who stuck by our sides throughout our journey and choose to be here today to support us. We thank you.

As I speak to you all today, I feel the complete array of human emotions. Proud, ecstatic and relieved like many of my peers. Honored- to even be able to stand in front of you all today. Grateful and lucky- to have received such an amazing education with the support of my family.

But I also must admit that I am experiencing this undeniable feeling of anxiety driven by the fact that a dreaded change is quickly approaching in my life.

When I first came to Cal State Fullerton I hated it. I was a transfer student who had no idea what she was getting into. The campus was bigger. I had no idea who my professors were or even what my classes were about. Hey! What is liberal studies anyway?

I can now with confidence stand in front of you all today and tell you I think I may know a little bit about what this Liberal Studies is all about...

Liberal Studies is multidisciplinary major incorporating the art, the sciences, and the social sciences. Liberal coming from the latin root "liber" meaning free. We as liberal studies students were able to immerse ourselves in all aspects of civilized society, a method of learning that has been around for thousands of years practiced by great philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato.

Through our studies, we became connected through our unique experience as liberal studies students. One you can only understand if you have experienced it. Just as I started to become comfortable in my place here at Cal State Fullerton...BANG. Change happens as it does, and as much as the process may be grueling it is necessary.

Change as we have learned in our studies exists for a reason. Without it, we would still believe the earth is the center of the solar system, or that the world is flat, or live in a segregated society. All of these things are proof that change is necessary for progress.

Despite my anxiety, I have high expectations that our major has prepared us for this transition in our lives. "The function of education" as Martin Luther King Junior explains, "is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education." Liberal studies has equipped us with the greatest weapon of all. Thought. It taught us the power we as humans have when we think critically. Never stop valuing this precious gift of thought. while the days may grow long and you may find yourself in a dull cycle of mindless repetition. RESIST! Remember your education. Think critically and change the world.

Now get let's get on with this ceremony so we can celebrate.

CAROL GAUTHIER *B.A. in Anthropology*

Carol Gauthier is graduating magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with an emphasis in Evolutionary Anthropology and Primatology. She is a member of several organizations: Lambda Alpha National Anthropology Honors Society, Phi Beta Delta Honors Society for International Scholars, Alpha Sigma Lambda Honors Society for Returning Students, and Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society. She is the President of The Association of Primate Evolutionary Studies (APES) and was awarded a U-ACRE fellowship. She is the recipient for the Spring 2018 ASI Student-Parent Scholarship, and has been accepted into the Evolutionary Anthropology Masters Program here at California State University – Fullerton.

Good evening graduates, faculty, and loved ones. Thank you for the great honor and privilege of speaking here tonight.

I never thought I would ever graduate college, let alone be asked to speak at the commencement ceremony. I started college in 1986, and obviously... I had some setbacks.

The message I want to pass on to my fellow graduates is that we are all here graduating because we have all overcome our personal hurdles and obstacles... and we all made it!

Shortly after graduating high school in 1985, I discovered I was pregnant with my first child. While raising my daughter, I attempted to continue my education but having to work full time and care for a child—and eventually having two more children—I was overwhelmed and quit school to focus on building a career.

At the age of 41, I had obtained career success...but was miserable. I felt that my soul was dying because I was not following my dreams. Even though I did not yet know what those dreams were...I knew that getting an education would be a good place to start. I went back to community college as an art major, but after taking a physical anthropology class, I knew that anthropology was the path for me.

When I arrived at California State University-Fullerton, many of my professors were younger than me, my fellow classmates were mostly the same age as my kids, and I didn't know anyone... but I was so happy to be here. I never believed that I would make it this far.

To get to know others, I joined a club and reached out to my professors. I loved listening to my professors' talk about their fieldwork and dreamt of someday conducting fieldwork of my own.

Surprisingly, a class that I thought was going to be boring turned out to be the best thing ever... I was allowed to conduct research on chimpanzee behavior at the LA Zoo. It may not have been fieldwork in Africa, but it was truly an amazing experience that solidified my passion for primate research and conservation. Who would have thought that someday, I would joyfully tackle the traffic-packed 5 freeway on a weekly basis, for a whole semester, with a smile on my face, just to go hang out with some apes and document how they behave... I absolutely loved every minute of it!

At the age of 50, I am evidence that it is never too late to follow your dreams.

I am eternally grateful to all of my professors here. I especially want to acknowledge Dr. Sara Johnson for her continued guidance and inspiration,...Dr. Raffaella Commitante for solidifying my love for primates,...and Dr. John Patton for always being kind and supportive.

In addition, I want to acknowledge my family and friends...Thank you for having faith in me when I didn't have faith in myself...you have all held me up and supported me when I have struggled through this college experience and I love you all for it!

Lastly, what I would like to pass on to you, my fellow graduates, is that this education that we have all worked so hard for—it is all ours! No person or situation can ever take this away! It will always be with us! Be proud of what you have accomplished, as I am, and hold your head up high! You earned this! Now we are all college graduates! Let's go out there in the world and live those dreams!

ASHLEY HIGHTOWER *B.A. in Women's and Gender Studies*

Hello Graduates, Friends, Family, and Faculty. Thank you for the warm welcome. As mentioned, my name is Ashley Hightower, and I am the Class of 2018 Women's and Gender Studies Valedictorian.

I first wish to congratulate all who have attended this ceremony in celebration of the graduates today. Family and friends, congratulations on supporting this stellar achievement; without your love and encouragement, this may not have been possible. Faculty, congratulations on pushing (and passing) this group; your sharing of knowledge and experience allowed for these individuals to graduate with a more expanded worldview than when they started – and isn't that the point of college? And finally, graduates, congratulations on doing the damn thing! Your perseverance and motivation is certainly something to be admired. I hope you leave today feeling undoubtedly proud of yourself – you definitely deserve it.

When I was told that I would be speaking to you all today, I was overjoyed for about a minute – then I was overwhelmed with ohmygoodness, what do I say?? How do I put into words how wonderful this achievement is? A few Google searches told me that graduation speeches should be inspirational, and that makes sense right? But I thought about it a lot, and I realized that you are all inspirational enough. I can tell you some of the things that make me seem like I deserve to be up here, or I can say that every single one of you deserves to be up here making this commencement address. You all accomplished something that so few people have done.

So when you're listening to these speakers today, remember that they are not here to inspire you – they are here to congratulate you. YOU, the graduating class of 2018, are inspiration enough. Everyone else is here (either in person

or in spirit) to celebrate you and your astounding feat. We each have our own stories of defeat, strength and triumph. Today, I hope, is one of your stories of triumph.

As you're walking away from this graduation, reflect on all that has propelled you to this peak moment of receiving your degree. The late-night papers, the popping-cough-drops-as-you're-taking-a-final-sickness, the is-that-my-stomach-sounding-like-a-whale-as-we're-taking-notes hunger, the 5AM Starbucks or Coffee Bean runs, and the oh-my-god-i-missed-my-alarm-please-traffic-let-me-through days. There are so many of those moments that reminded us that we are college students. We had a common mindset; we shared common experiences and goals. All of which made us college students. As of today, you are no longer college students – you are college graduates. Whether you're moving on to further your education with a graduate degree or entering the post-graduate workforce, you have now officially ended your #collegelife.

So take that – elementary school teacher who told you your cursive wouldn't be good enough for college. You made it!

If I could take these last 20 seconds to selfishly thank some people without which, I would not have been able to make it to this podium today. Mom, you built me to be responsible; Dad, you built me to have fun; Ralphie, you built me to recognize my own strengths; And finally, to my sisters: thank you for being the most wonderful three best friends ever.

Fellow graduates, I read a Twitter page the other day that asked what is the craziest thing you've ever done for money. Well graduates, you're looking at it! Congratulations, Class of 2018! You should be so proud of yourselves. I know I am. Thank you.

QUANISHA JUDEH *M.A. in History*

Quanisha Judeh is graduating with a Master of Arts in History. She is an Instructor of History at Long Beach City College, Long Beach, CA. and is a member of Phi Alpha Theta, Biola University Chapter.

What is a dream? I don't mean the dreams you have in sleep, but rather the dreams of your consciousness. What is it? It is everything and it is nothing. But perhaps no abstract thought, save love, has the power to motivate the human spirit more than a dream.

We are all here because of a dream, maybe even for some of us the dream is not our own but our family and perhaps friends, but we all dreamed of this moment. Yet from far off a dream is nothing more than a blurry vision, the image of which seems at times impossible to grasp. For me, the dream

of getting a Master's degree never included the sleepless nights, the excruciating pressure of constant deadlines, and the stacks of books that clogged my mental and physical steps. I could not see from the couch I lived on the fellow students I would meet nor the memories I would create here on this campus that are now etched into the wrinkles of my brain. I could not see in this dream the beautiful minds of the giants we call professors whose shoulders would support me, who encouraged me, who cried with and for me, and to whom I will forever be grateful.

And yet here I am, and here you are. We all chased a dream and what did we get? Well, again, everything and nothing. We got these cloaks, these tassles, these mortarboard hats which are a physical representation of our dreams realized. And a dream realized can be a frightful moment. For the first

thought we have is, "What's next?" While those thoughts are important, they are not for today. Fight those thoughts for today is a celebration. A celebration that the once distant image is now clear as day. It is as clear as the face of the people around you, of the ones you love and the ones who love you in the

stands, as clear as my voice sent out from here to there. You've done it and for that I congratulate you. (clap so they clap)

But in reality the dream is nothing. It did not transmute itself from abstraction into our garments, nor should you expect it to be a philosopher's stone and transmute itself into gold. No, though we celebrate today, the dream will not continue to work for us. The real value of the dream is what it plants deep in our hearts and in our spirits: efficacy, endurance, confidence, and most of all, the assurance that if we dare dream again, we can reach further, and further, and further...

Thank you

SARAH KUANG *B.A. in Psychology*

Good morning,

First, I would like to start off by beating everyone else to the punch and tell the graduating students:

I am proud of you.

I am so proud that you persevered and we are all graduating today.

But what does this all mean?

Like the answer to most questions in psychology,

“It depends.”

For me, it means:

I have to make this speech.

And it’s frightening.

Who knew the Psychology department would decide to throw me a curve ball at the very end of my undergraduate career?

But if I think about it, this is rather consistent with my journey here at Cal State Fullerton and I am beyond grateful for this terrifyingly wonderful opportunity.

I started off my undergraduate career as an extremely unstable bundle of nerves, fresh out of high school. I was that kid in the back of the classroom who would not talk to anyone, because if I did, I might implode. (Not explode, because that would be too troublesome and bother other people.)

Over the years, I was thrown—and eventually threw myself—at opportunities to

advance my academic career.

Joining research labs: scary.

Presenting at conferences: scary.

Taking advanced courses and confronting how much I don't know: scary.

Applying to graduate schools: Exhausting. And scary.

All of these experiences have led me to pursue a doctoral degree this coming fall and -- contrary to what I may say on my statements -- I attribute my achievements and everything I am today to faculty, friends, and family.

Faculty: For their amazing instruction in courses.

I especially want to thank Dr. Nguyen, Dr. Sy, and Dr. Preston,

for going out of their way to work with students to help them reach higher.

Whether it's revising statements of purpose over break or responding to my unending stream of questions through emails and office hours, thank you for your dedication and commitment to your students.

Friends: Thank you for breaking me out of my shell and encouraging me when I express the most self-deprecating of thoughts (which is always).

It is a pleasure getting to know all of you brilliant people on the 6th floor of Humanities as I wander from lab to lab like a tiny blanket ghost.

I will never forget the panic group texts and memes at the wee hours of the night before stats homework is due. Thank you for making me feel extremely loved and I am concerned for you amigos: Please get some sleep.

爸, 媽: Thank you for your courageous decision to uproot our family from Taiwan to America for the sake of education. We never use the word "love", but thank you for your love and support that comes in the form of carpools, daily Bible verses, and home remedies.

You are the reason why I made it here today.

I know my experiences are not representative of all students here, but to some extent, we have all come across this scary abyss of the unknown.

And we might have to face it again.

And again.

And again.

But it will be okay, because it is through these experiences of uncertainty that we grow and transform into the best versions of ourselves.

Thank you.

BRIANA LOSCHIAVO *B.A. in Liberal Studies*

Briana LoSchiavo is a Fall 2017 graduate. She finished her undergraduate with a Major in Liberal Studies with an emphasis in Special Education and a Minor in Natural Science. Briana is currently continuing her education in Cal State Fullerton's Multiple Subject Credential Program.

Hello everyone! I promise to keep this short and sweet.

First and foremost, I would like to say what an honor it is to be here with all of you.

Can you believe it? We have completed our undergrad! I don't know about all of you, but I thought it would never end. Now that it is over though, I have had time to reflect on my educational career and all I have to say is THANK YOU. Thank you to the amazing professors who challenged my abilities, thank you to my classmates who helped me through stressful times, and thank you to my family who always believed in me. Each one of you has made me stronger and more confident.

It may not have been an easy journey, but we did it! We overcame obstacles and sleepless nights. We persevered and grew. Go ahead and give yourself a pat on the back, you deserve it. I may not know each and every one of you personally, but I honestly believe that each of you has such a bright future ahead! I wish you all nothing but success.

I promised I would keep it short and sweet so, on a final note, Congrats on this amazing accomplishment class of Fall 2017 and Spring 2018! We did it!

BIANCA QUIROZ *B.A. in Spanish*

Bianca Quiroz is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. They actively advocate for civil rights.

Hello fellow graduates and loved ones. I am honored to be here today with all of you to celebrate this stepping stone in life. Different paths have brought us here, and different paths we will each follow. However, in this moment we come together to reflect upon the impact we've all had in each other's lives and how we hope to impact the future.

My journey at CSUF began with a sense of thrill and of trepidation. Attending a university has always been a lifelong dream. As the eldest of three, I was glad for the opportunity to set a positive example for my siblings. However, as the eldest, I had no seasoned warrior in the family to bestow upon me words of wisdom on navigating university life.

Fortunately, the faculty of this department kindly took on the role of guide. Our professors have proven their dedication to our success through the time and effort they have invested in us. I know that if a student cannot make it to regular office hours, our professors will work with them to make an appointment that is accommodating. I know this because 1) I've done it, and 2) it says so on the syllabus.

Their encouragement and belief in our education, personal growth, success, and triumph has inspired me – and I'm sure all of you as well – to reach higher and push harder in all areas of life. Here at CSUF, with the support of our professors and loved ones, we have gained new tools and learned from our experiences, new ways to take on even greater challenges in life. As we all know, life is full of them.

A major personal challenge I faced was my health. My body working against me has been a reality since childhood, though that hasn't made it any easier.

Each graduate here has faced their own set of challenges. We have applied ourselves to our studies, kept up, and advanced. None of us sat around with our arms crossed when the going got tough. We knew our education was priceless and pushed onward. Degrees aren't given, they're earned. We've earned ours through hard work, smarts, and perseverance. These three traits plus the knowledge we've accumulated and is symbolized by our respective degrees, will help us fulfill our goals in life if we approach them with the wisdom and understanding the Humanities are renowned for.

What I look forward to as a graduate of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences here at Cal State Fullerton is making a living and making a difference. For each of us here, that may mean something different. Nevertheless, it is a goal and a hope I have heard often, and one that I share. For me that means making enough for all of my bills and some of my wants. It also means expanding my scope of the world, to reach others and be reached by others through writing and advocacy.

So today, as we transition from one goal to another, let us remember the classmates, the faculty, and the campus that have made up our collective experience here at Cal State Fullerton. Take a moment to reflect upon who you've been, who you are, and who you'd like to be. Congratulations everyone.

DENIA RAMOS *M.A. in Spanish*

Friends, family, faculty and esteemed graduates it is an honor to stand before you today.

Fourteen years ago, on the day of my high school graduation, I felt sad. I had been accepted to a four year college, but I couldn't go because I could not afford to. It has been many years since that day and there has been many obstacles to overcome. Today, my graduation feels very different. For some of us, it took way longer than others, because we had no other choice than to take the long road around the wall. In other words, we had to be resilient. We had to learn to navigate in a system that was not created for us. Despite our background, socioeconomic and/or immigration status, we are here today, setting the example for the younger generation, *sí se puede*.

It was only after graduating high school that my immigration status became a burden. I suddenly found myself unable to afford college or get a job. My future seemed unclear, but I was determined to get a higher education. I figure out a way to work, getting paid under the table, and was able to afford one to two classes per semester. One way or another, I did not let my immigration status get in my way. I, like many others here today, am a dreamer. It has not been an easy road, I assure you, but it has been a road worth migrating through.

The Spanish program at Cal State Fullerton taught me the importance of studying the literatures, language and cultures of our people. I identified myself with Gabo's words and Tula's verses. And through learning the history of the Spanish language I was able to understand the importance of having an authentic voice. Our stories are worth telling, they represent us and give us a platform to understand our struggles. I can honestly say that the most important lesson I learned throughout my college years, is resiliency. This word

truly embodies my entire academic endeavors. From a young undocumented woman who graduated high school while barely being able to speak English to the adult woman that got to spend a summer in Harvard University, there were many tears shed and multiple breakdowns. Despite of it all, I was resilient.

But, behind every resilient graduate, there is an incredible amount of people that offered support and love throughout the process. I personally, would not be here today if it hadn't been for my dad, Daniel Ramos, my husband, Nathan Wensko and all of my friends. Gracias por todo su apoyo, los quiero mucho. I would also like to thank all of my professors for their guidance and for sharing their knowledge with me. I am a better person because of you, gracias. I would be remiss if I didn't give a special thanks to my study group, Cindy, Alex, Juan and Anabel, El club de la neurona intranquila.

EMILY SOTO *B.A. in Anthropology and English*

Emily Soto is graduating with a Bachelors in Arts in both Anthropology and English. She is currently working in Applied Behavioral Analysis Therapy for children with special needs, and hopes to apply these skills volunteering internationally for the Peace Corps in the near future.

Before I begin, I would like to extend my gratitude to those attending this event. As family members, friends, and faculty, you have a key role in the lives of this graduating class, and I speak for all of us when I say we could not have gotten this far without your support.

To my own family, I cannot put into words what your love has done for me, not just in these past four years, but for my entire life. You created the most fertile soil for a curious young girl to grow in and for that, I thank you.

As most of us have experienced, what you think you want at 18 doesn't usually age very gracefully. When I applied to Cal state Fullerton, I started as a biology major because as those close to me know, I have a love of everything concerning criminal investigations. I was convinced studying DNA technology was the way to go. This was before I realized that chemistry was not and would never be my friend. I had created a path for myself, agonizing over my future. This is the type of planning we do when we realize that we want a lot out of life but aren't exactly sure what that means.

The first time I stepped on campus it was empty. I was following my cousin, who had been attending CSUF for two years already. Trailing along for his review session opened a new window for me, one that I never could have predicted.

We stepped into the elevator in Langsdorf Hall, and my wandering eyes settled on a poster. "ANTHROPOLOGY" was printed boldly upon its surface.

As you might have guessed, I had no idea what that word entailed. Little did I know would be explaining it to friends, acquaintances, and family members over and over- again for four years.

After I read the first definition tacked onto the wall of an elevator, I changed my major to anthropology before I had attended orientation. How's that for destiny?

Well, what is anthropology? In the simplest of terms, it's the study of humans.

In the most complicated of terms, it is all the information and assumptions that involve being a person. It is the study of similarities and differences. It is the study of reason and emotion, hormones and thoughts. And yes, there are monkeys.

In today's social and political climate it is important to hold tightly to our humanity and constantly examine and reexamine what we see as truth. As anthropology graduates, we have a unique responsibility to recognize humanity in ourselves and others.

Some of us will be going on to graduate school, some will teach, and some will find jobs where others will question why they decided to get this degree at all.

I say this in the most humble way possible: as anthropologists, we are qualified for practically everything. Anthropology is everywhere, and our perspectives are not limited to this campus. They follow us and are nestled into our consciousness, just waiting to be shared.

Earning a degree in anthropology has fulfilled my curiosity but it has also given me hope. I've had the pleasure of learning from enthusiastic professors, and interacting with thoughtful peers. I have witnessed change occurring through new insights and ideas. I don't intend to sound cliché or speak about how anthropology graduates are key players in constructing the future, because that's an obvious statement about the nature of time. I find that it is our place in the present that is the most valuable.

As Ruth Benedict so insightfully told us, "The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences."

Contrary to popular belief, I believe the world becomes safer every day.

Thank you.

JILLIAN STEPHENS *M.S. in Environmental Studies*

Oh, California! Thank you for leading the way in environmental regulations, programs, education, and advocacy. After these past two years in the Environmental Studies master's program, I feel very proud to be a citizen of California. But I also feel an immense pressure to make a difference having learned about the issues we are facing as a country, as a society, as a species living on planet earth. Here is why:

- I learned that California contains a floristic province and a biodiversity hotspot, one of only 34 in the world! But you would never know it. Look around, what you see is concrete, pavement, and introduced plants which cost \$120 billion each year due to damage and management.
- I learned that Nature Deficit Disorder is affecting people all over Southern California. The fact is that we are spending less and less time outdoors which is physically and psychologically harmful to us.
- I learned that in the majority of schools in the United States, environmental education is not institutionalized, meaning, it does not exist.
- I learned that there are roughly 8.7 million species on earth, and the extinction rate is so unnaturally high that we are losing at least 8,700 species per year. This past March the world lost the last male northern white rhino. And a few months before that, the Eastern puma was declared extinct.

What is the point of saving mountain lions, removing dams, avoiding plastics, biking to work, or being vegan? What are we after? We do a pretty good job of wrapping our hearts and minds around these lifestyle choices, all of which bind us to a single thing: a rapidly changing planet.

The environment does not have a voice. It speaks in different ways. We rely on it to support us endlessly, but we rarely return that support. And the fact is, fresh water, clean air, and healthy ecosystems are things that we cannot live without. It up to us to learn the language of the environment, and speak up and advocate for it. Because urbanization is going to continue. Oil drilling is going to continue. And we cannot stop it, we cannot turn back. We need to go to work, make money, take care of our families. But it is our responsibility to make this development happen in the best way possible, with a priority of leaving the planet in a functional, healthy state.

So thank you to all the professors who shared their knowledge and helped get us here today, and good luck to all you brilliant students embarking on a career. Please, go make a difference. The world needs all the help it can get.

KRYSTAL SUH *M.S. in TESOL*

It has been an honor to be a part of the TESOL community—I was taken back when they asked me to speak on behalf of our class, because I couldn't have done it without all of you. From the very first CATESOL conference I attended, I was in awe at the type of people that make up the TESOL community—and at the willingness to volunteer and help build up one's colleagues. That atmosphere has continued to manifest itself in the CSUF TESOL program. Anytime a classmate is struggling with a lesson plan or a student they have, we all pitch in to give ideas and advice.

Then, in the past year, our graduating class supported each other through personal life events as well as the grueling process of preparing for the 7-hour test that was our comprehensive exams. During which—as we battled sleepless nights, nightmares and heartburn from the stress of it all—Dr. Carr would always assure us with, “Calm down. This is not the most significant day of your life; the birth of your firstborn child will undoubtedly surpass it.” Well, Sally and I can attest to that after 17 hours of labor... and we can't thank you all enough for the support you offered your two very pregnant classmates!! I am pretty sure 2017 marks the first double baby shower in TESOL history at CSUF.

That said, I should get down to business...and we are in the business of learning and inspiration.

I still remember my first semester with Dr. Eyring—she always encouraged us to push our boundaries and sometimes we would fail, but we always learned and above all, we learned to believe in ourselves and in our students. Many of us were drawn to aspire to greater things because of her example and encouragement—materials design, doctor's degrees, CATESOL membership and scholarship applications to name a few.

Then between Dr. Zimmerman and Dr. Ruekert's SLA instruction, we were taught to push the boundaries of societal concepts with "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and World Englishes.

And we all remember Julie!! Also known as a constant reminder not to limit ourselves or our students, but rather, provide them with the optimal learning environment and communicative instruction to allow them to reach their full potential. Professor Moore taught by this principle and we learned a great deal by watching her example.

The merit of such instruction would be immeasurable, however, without the proper tests—which is why Dr. Carr taught us to push the boundaries of typical textbook testing procedures.

Then of course, in the practicum, the glue that held it all together, Dr. Gallego helped usher us into the reality of it all.

Which is important, because we are also in the business of building bridges and breaking barriers

Recently, my father-in-law approached me and asked me to do him a favor—he wanted me to make him fluent in English. Of course, my first thought was, a favor is helping you with your taxes—this is a lifetime commitment! Then I realized he wasn't joking—he desperately wanted to communicate thoroughly with his colleagues and gain their mutual respect. He just wanted an even playing field. In that moment I realized how important our jobs are. People come to us because they have something to say... because they want to belong... because there is a hurdle in between them and the thing that they most want—whether it is the ability to communicate with their grandchildren or to advance in their career.

In our program we were taught to empower our students—we are more than just English teachers; we are counselors, we are ambassadors. We have to ensure that our students learn to exercise their right to speak. We have to remember why we became English teachers—when we are discouraged or not seeing the results we want, we have to lean on the TESOL community and when our colleagues are discouraged, we need to be that community, because it takes a village...

ALEXXANDRA VILLEGAS *B.A. in Women's and Gender Studies*

Good evening to everyone in attendance tonight.

Today many of us come together from unique backgrounds to celebrate a momentous occasion in our own lives or a loved one's life. To truly take in this serendipitous moment in time, I am going to invite everyone to take a calming and unifying breathe on the count of three. Although this is a yoga technique, I promise you do not have to be flexible; all you have to do is simply take a deep breathe in through your nose and then take a big exhale out through your mouth. So, here we go...1, 2, 3... *take a long inhale & exhale* Thank you and congratulations, WE ARE HERE!

Just as we have all been lucky enough to be here in this moment in time, I have been lucky enough to attend California State University, Fullerton and graduate with the Class of 2018. It has been an absolute honor and privilege to be amongst these brilliant-minded peers. Beyond their clever, the rowdy students in this department have a unique vigor for creating tangible change in the communities around them. Becoming well versed in theory is the simplest piece in this complex life puzzle that we will encounter. We have realized that moments are fleeting, and we cannot wait a moment longer to use our time to improve the world. However, graduates, do not forget to make use of calming breathes while doing so.

Upon reflecting on my path to university, I realized it has been paved with many lucky moments and immense support. I have an amazing mother who instilled a lust for knowledge and creativity, -while stressing the importance of actually reading books! My self-less grandparents worked tirelessly to give their children, and their children's children a better chance of higher education. I had an entire community of friends who reminded me to breathe, dance, and giggle

throughout the stress. I also realize my simple luck in having been born in an era where I, as a minority female, had the opportunity at all to receive a degree. I am humbled and eternally grateful.

Graduates, I hope we are all similarly reflective and grateful for our moments with the committed leaders in the Women & Gender Studies department. The instructors are not only dedicated to delivering meaningful instruction, but they seek to empower their students as well. As a sophomore, I eagerly enrolled in "Queer Theory", W-G-S-T 420. This was a graduate style course I decided to take early. After a few reading assignments I found myself panicked and asked Doctor Ketchum if I should stay in the course. Dr. K assured me that the new insights gained through queer theory outweigh the cost of reading something over and over...and over again. She was absolutely correct, my fear quickly faded away and was replaced with an eagerness to deconstruct everything I thought I knew. By the end of that course I had gained an entire new way of interacting with the world and I was certain I wanted to pick up the Queer Studies minor. When I encountered difficult circumstances, I was appreciative when my instructors only saw a student capable of overcoming each of those challenges. Thank you to the entire department for relentlessly reminding us that academia is a space for critical thinking, growth, and empowerment. I am leaving here confident in my abilities to heal and queer the world! Now I know that is a huge undertaking, so I promise to continuously remind myself to take some deep breathes.

At this moment in history it has become clear that utopia is not a reality. However, what is a reality is that, with passion, knowledge, and joining together as a community we can heal the world around us. We can make our moments matter. Class of 2018, we have no small feat ahead of us with changing the world and all—but I know it is a task this group of remarkably motivated folx will not shy away from. Just like our opening breathe has faded into the past, our time spent working on these degrees will be just a memory. Given the brevity of time, it is my hope for all us to remain grateful and humble to the opportunity for all the new moments we will be given. And when those moments are overwhelming and many, do not forget to stop and take a deep breathe. We've got this!

Thank you.

SHAWN WIEDRICK *M.S. in Environmental Studies*

Since the age of 5, I have had an extreme passion, curiosity and fascination for shells. What most people don't know is that this hobby quickly progressed into an addiction, with long nights of researching molluscan literature, collecting trips abroad, and studying these organisms in a more professional and ambitious manner. My entire life I had never imagined it would be possible to study mollusks as my profession. You see, 10 years ago I was hired as a Case Manager working with transitional aged foster youth by mentoring, educating and guiding these youth through life, while employing independent living skills never taught to them as children. My transitioning role from being a life coach, quickly progressed to promotions, resulting in a more parental role. Counseling youth, interfacing with county officials and managing staff under the organizations foster care contract, was the most stressful job I have ever experienced. Raising teenagers can be rewarding, but in their prime of rebellion and experimentation, it was a challenging job to say the least. Seven years into this career, I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life, to follow a dream. In doing so, I would choose to leave and abandon my children who accepted me as family. After great consideration, I committed to the graduate program at Cal State Fullerton. I hadn't a clue how much I had influenced the youth I worked with, until the day I informed them of my resignation, their tears and stories still live with me today. Despite the constant staff calls in the middle of the night describing defiant behaviors, late curfew violations, prohibited drug use and adolescent curiosities of the opposite sex, I knew I would miss them immensely, and I do.

Being advised in the Biology Department was a challenging task, as my undergraduate work was in Art and I had never taken a biology course. Other colleagues graciously assisted me with learning general biology and lab

techniques, for that I am indebted. While here, I was also fortunate enough to collaborate with two well-known malacologists and was honored to submit a manuscript describing new species and genera to science. I was funded and visited 6 Natural History Museums in this country, and the Natural History Museum in Paris, France. Through this, I worked alongside, and met, some of the top scientists in the world. There was also that horrible time our lab had to go to La Paz, Mexico, where my advisor forced me snorkel in a beautiful coral reef with colorful fish and invertebrates.

Being able to pursue my dream of studying shells for a career has come true with my opportunity here at Cal State Fullerton. I was a part of a great cohort of individuals that are genuinely concerned with environmental impacts from our modern day of living, as a result of industrial innovations. Our disciplines are diverse, but we all seem to align with the current, growing knowledge of anthropogenic influence we have on the world we live in. We continue to work on combating these issues for the betterment of mankind, and our local communities. As steadfast ambassadors of our environment, I am honored to say I have been a part of this cohort. Go Titans!

MONICA ZEPEDA *B.A. in Women and Gender Studies*

Monica Zepeda is graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Women and Gender Studies and a Minor in Human Communication. She is a proud activist, feminist, Chicana, aunt, and daughter of first-generation immigrants.

To all my fellow graduating Women and Gender Studies peers, we did it! Congratulations on reaching the end of this wild ride. I am so honored to be graduating alongside all of you talented and brilliant individuals. Thank you to all the parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, and friends, who are here supporting all of us in such a huge moment. Your support to all of us means more than you could ever know. And most importantly, before I continue, there are not enough words to thank every single member of the department faculty. There is no doubt in my mind when I say there are no greater professors than the ones in the Women and Gender Studies department. Thank you for sharing your wisdom with all of us, for allowing us to be unique individuals, for allowing us to have a voice and for teaching us how to be powerful. Without your guidance, knowledge, and support we never would have made it here.

I have had the pleasure of knowing many of you personally, I have had the chance to get to know you, to discuss never ending theory with you, and to complain with you about the 20 page reading one of our great professors assigned the week before. Some of you I've only met in passing, in the famous department office, where the couches are so well used, I mean loved, that your bottom begins to hurt after a while. And some of you I've never had the chance to meet until today, but regardless of whether I know you personally or not, I am so inspired by each and every single one of you. I learned that I would be speaking to you all today about a month ago, and the only feeling I have felt about this very moment is panic. While I was so honored and surprised to be asked to speak today, I could not for the life of me figure out what I was going to say to you all. Because what do you say to a group of people who you admire so much, a group of people who are your heroes? Being who we

are is not easy. We are individuals who are critical of the world around us and who work every single day to make this world a better place for everyone, regardless of their race, gender, social class, religion, or who they love. And for the work that you all do every single day, I am so eternally grateful. I am so excited to see the change you are going to bring in this world. You have all fought so hard to get here, to this very moment and you deserve it and so much more. I know that for me personally the injustices of the world and our own society are sometimes too much to handle. Especially in our current political climate, some days I wake up and wonder how I am going to fight against it. So thank you for fighting every single day, thank you for never giving up, and thank you for pushing me to continue in this fight.

We all know the struggle that comes with being a part of the Women and Gender Studies department. The constant hearing of “what are you going to do with that?” Constantly having to defend who we are and what we believe in. But we know who we are and we are going to take everything we have learned and bring change to the world. We believe in equality, in a more just world and the truth is, we’re going to change the world for the better, and I believe in you all. The great Gloria Steinem is attributed in saying “The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off.” So be angry, be motivated, and use your brilliance to make the world a better place for future generations.

Before I end here today I have a few personal shout outs to give. To Danielle, Destinee, and Samantha, my three intelligent and beautiful nieces please know that I do this all for you. So you can go out into the world and never be afraid. To not be afraid to be exactly who you are and to strive for your wildest dreams. The powerful Hillary Clinton said it best, “Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.” To my mom and dad, I owe this all to you. You gave me and my siblings everything you had and I will never be able to repay you. You left behind the familiar and immigrated to a new country, a country that constantly fights back against you, to give your children opportunities you never had. I cannot even begin to comprehend what you have sacrificed and I can only hope I have made you proud. I love you more than anything in the world.

And finally, one final congratulations to my fellow graduates. We freaking did it.
