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Senior Class Speaker 100th Commencement Address

Nayla Tohme
Connecticut College

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Remarks to the Class of 2018
by Senior Class Speaker Nayla Tohme '18
100th Commencement Sunday
May 20, 2018

Class of 2018, esteemed guests, faculty, staff, alumni, parents and friends, welcome to the Connecticut College 100th Commencement!!

I stand here today in utter disbelief, feeling immense gratitude to you, Connecticut College. At a time when political tensions are rife and the world is challenged by a wave of xenophobia, I have found in you a haven of liberalism and inclusion that allows an Arab woman, not only to be, but also to thrive.

The power of education was drummed in me by the wisest woman in the world, my grandmother, who is here today. She was made a refugee at the age of six, but flourished in her host country thanks to her father's education as a medical doctor. Because of her experience and the continued turmoil in the Middle East, I will be holding my Conn degree extra close to my heart.

It's alarming and endearing to think how different we were back in our first year. Since then, some of our many individual accomplishments have included promoting reproductive health, living adventure-filled semesters abroad, starting a clothing line and managing a band. As a group, we have been active locally, organizing for social change. We have acted globally, addressing pressing environmental issues around the world, and tackling the refugee crisis in the Middle East, Europe and Latin America. In all our efforts, such as our recent collection of aid for hurricane victims, we have embodied Conn's values of collaboration, justice and respect for nature.

Indeed, Connecticut College has equipped the Class of 2018 with the skills to think critically across disciplines, and with the tools to build communities that work together with integrity and compassion. We have the confidence to challenge what we cannot accept, and the creativity to imagine a different world. Conn has prepared us to be responsible citizens and the global leaders of tomorrow.

Nobel Prize novelist Toni Morrison, advises us: "When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that because you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else."

So, fellow camels let's carry Conn's Honor Code outside its walls starting tomorrow. Let's remain committed to acting with integrity, courage and empathy as we strive to empower those who have no voice. Let's hold on to our cultural curiosity and remember how interconnected and interdependent we all are. Let us not reduce a complex situation to a single narrative of "good or evil", of "with us or against us", but continue instead to be well informed and impartial as we advocate for social justice and equity.

I will miss everything about this place. I will miss its rigorous academics that have pushed me farther than I thought I could go. I will miss the caring and dedicated human beings that make our college such a nurturing environment. I will miss the colorful spirit of our brother Anique that is in every fiber of this campus. I will miss the company of my brilliant friends and their unfailing support - which often took the form of a bowl of hummus as a cure for all my ills. I will miss my mother's overflowing pride, who often repeats: "Oh my daughter? She's studying at Connecticut College. One major and two minors!" It looks like I will have to get used to her toning it down to: "Oh my daughter? She's unemployed and living at home." But seriously, what I will miss the most is breathtaking Tempel Green. Throughout my four years at Conn, I have criss-crossed Tempel Green at (literally) all hours of the day and night, running to class, heading to Cro, building a snowman, sunbathing, supporting sports games and stargazing. It is the first sight that caught my eye when I first set foot on this campus, and it will be the last sight I take in as I leave this afternoon...

Well now, the time has come for us to step out into world we are inheriting. I have faith in us all. We are young, we are resilient and we are change makers.

To paraphrase the 13th century Persian poet Rumi: We are not a drop in the ocean, we are the entire ocean in a drop. We are Conn's class of 2018!

Congratulations habibis, we did it!