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91st Connecticut College Commencement Class President's Address

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91st Commencement

Nicholas Downing, Senior Class President

To the members of the faculty, staff, and administration present today, thank you for your help during our time here at Connecticut College. To family, friends, and guests, thanks are due to you as well. You have given us the support and encouragement necessary to be here before you today. To the Class of 2009, thank you for bestowing upon me the honor to address you as your Class President.

I can't help but think about the first time I set foot on this campus as a junior in high school. It was a warm, sunny day in April, not a cloud in the sky. It was like a day that you assume college will always be like: great weather, people enjoying themselves outside on the green. I immediately felt a sense of belonging. I almost didn't need the tour. The following months were spent doing everything I needed to do in order to make sure I would get accepted. I polished up my high school activity sheet, wrote and re-wrote my college essay, and filled out the seemingly endless applications.

Waiting to hear whether or not I had been accepted seemed like an eternity. I both looked forward to and feared the mail arriving every afternoon, knowing that my future may be waiting for me in one of those envelopes. I was never sure if I wanted the mail to include a letter telling me I had been accepted more than I did not want to the mail to include a letter telling me I had not been accepted. It was a mixture of anticipation, nerves, and excitement, combined with my mind racing with all the different scenarios of what to do if I didn't get in.

I finally got my letter in December, and had considerable difficulty focusing on the remainder of my high school academic career. Those last months saw the range of emotions from pure joy to complete fear. I was eagerly expecting move-in day to come and at the same time never wanting to leave home. But I eventually got here, and spent four years learning not just academics, but also about myself. Who I was, who I might be in the future. I met friends I will have for the rest of my life. I found true love. I made decisions that will forever result in jokes made at my expense. There have been considerable ups and downs, but for better or for worse the experience has shaped me into the man I am today and will be in the future.

Today is just like the time between December and August. In recent weeks, there has been that same sense of anticipation, that something special is about to happen. For some of us the question "So, what are you doing after graduation?" has been an unavoidable, overly-asked reminder of all the responsibility about to be thrust upon us. But for me, the question is liberating. It is a reminder of how completely wide-open the opportunities we

have before us truly are. Our parents, friends, families, the faculty, staff and administration here at Connecticut College have done all they can do to prepare us to embrace those opportunities and overcome the inevitable challenges we will face along the way.

We have been given the privilege of an unmatched education, and we now have the responsibility to use that education to leave the world a little better than it was when we arrived. Adlai Stevenson once quipped to a group of graduates, “When you leave here, don’t forget why you came.” As we move forward, let us make sure we do not forget, that we embrace the opportunities before us, and that we always strive to provide those same opportunities to the countless generations to follow.

Thank you.