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President Higdon's 2007 Commencement Address

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Connecticut College

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Connecticut College President Leo I. Higdon, Jr.
2007 Commencement Address

Good morning.

To all of our graduates, parents and families, trustees, faculty, staff and our honored guests. Welcome. We have a wonderful program today that includes performances and speeches by several of our graduating seniors, a special presentation of the College medal to an alumna who has made Connecticut College a priority in her life, the presentation of two honorary degrees - one to deep-sea explorer Dr. Robert Ballard, today's keynote speaker, and one to Richard Kennedy from the Smithsonian.

Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to make an announcement. As many of you know, Connecticut College lost a very special faculty member this past winter. Harold Juli, professor of Anthropology, was a beloved teacher and scholar. Today, I am pleased to announce a new award, established in memory of Professor Juli by administrators and faculty members who share his passion for teaching. The Harold D. Juli Memorial Award will be given to a student in any department for exemplary joint research with a faculty member. It will become part of the College's Annual Honors and Awards event, and will be presented the first time next spring.

And now, I'd like to ask all of the graduates to stand and recognize those whose support made it possible for them to be here today. Parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. So graduates, let's stand now and show our appreciation. Thank you, you may be seated.

I'd like to add my own thanks to all of the parents and supporters here today. These graduating seniors are a very special group. I want to thank you for entrusting them to us. I truly believe that a liberal arts education is the best preparation for life and career. And Connecticut College provides a liberal arts education that is distinctive, personal and far-reaching. Your students are leaving here today with an education they can be very proud of.

And you, my seniors - I'm going to have to get used to referring to you as alumni. You are graduating at a pivotal point in Connecticut College's history.

We have a centennial celebration ahead of us, a celebration that will involve and engage you and all our communities. It will honor our past as it looks ahead to our future.

We have made an important decision to invest well over \$50 million in this lovely campus, and several new buildings are planned as well. It ensures that future generations of graduates, just like you, will be able to experience this campus - its historic integrity and its profound beauty.

We have prioritized our strategic plan and are working to advance this institution and earn for Connecticut College the recognition it so richly deserves as one of the best liberal arts colleges in the land.

This year the College saw successes on a number of important fronts. And you - as individuals and as a class - were an integral part of every achievement.

I look at the Inauguration last fall as the event that launched the year and brought all of our communities together with a shared sense of purpose. Many of you took part in those events, and you helped me see more clearly the heart and character of this institution.

Our applications for next year's freshman class were at an all-time high.

We had a record number of Fulbright Scholars this year.

The recognition the College received this year was outstanding - with many of you featured in publications from your hometown papers to the New York Times and USA Today.

We pushed the needle with respect to diversity in many ways, including increasing our commitment to financial aid that enables us to reach out directly to more economically, racially and culturally diverse prospective students. We renewed the LGBTQ space, helping turn it into a vibrant "center" and named its director. Our Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity has led many important teaching and learning moments around issues of diversity and inclusiveness. And there is even more ahead.

Financial support for the College is very strong. Your participation in the College's Senior Giving Program has been, on the one hand extraordinary, and on the other hand exactly what I knew you could achieve by working together as a class. You have taken the senior giving program to a whole new level and raised the bar for every class who comes after you.

Of course, I had high expectations for you all along. I knew that by coming to Connecticut College, I would join a community of people who would be the very best - no matter what their aspirations. And you - and all the people I now know through Connecticut College - have proved that to be true.

I wasn't planning to stand up here and give you a lot of advice. But I do want to take a moment to give you some final thoughts that, perhaps, can help make a tremendous difference in your lives. And that is:

Use your words well. Think about how your behaviors, your actions and your words can affect others. Live by the Honor Code. And if you find yourself faltering, or in a difficult situation, reflect back on what the Honor Code has meant to you, what this community has meant to you. And draw strength from that.

The only other bit of advice I will give you is one you have heard me mention often. And that is, stay connected to this College. You are our newest class of alumni. And that means this College is yours. Forever. Continue to be a part of this community.

I've gotten to know many of you personally over the course of this year and I know my concept of Connecticut College will be forever tied to you. You are special to me because you are my

first class. You impressed me with your intelligence and your talents. You also showed me your compassion and your integrity. And from Inauguration to Camelympics and your participation in senior giving, athletics, community service and artistic performances, you have shown your pride and your spirit.

And so, once again, I thank you. Thank you for making this College all I dreamed it could be. And more importantly, thank you for making this College all you dreamed it could be.

Congratulations. On behalf of the entire College community, I wish you all the best. I will miss you.