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90th Commencement Class Speaker's Address:The Connecticut College Footprint

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The Connecticut College Footprint By Katherine Serafin '08, Senior Class Speaker, 90th Commencement May 18, 2008

Now that I stand before you at this podium, there's a quote from *Inherit the Wind* that reminds me of how I'm feeling. Henry Drummond says, "It's the loneliest feeling in the world—to find yourself standing up when everybody else is sitting down."

Well, graduates, faculty, staff, parents, guests and friends, as you sit there in YOUR shoes and I stand here in MY shoes I would like you to reflect on your footwear. What are you wearing to Connecticut College's 90th commencement? While foot coverings were first worn to protect the feet, today we wear shoes not only for function, comfort and style, but to characterize ourselves. Are you comfortable in your shoes this morning?

Remember college shopping? Four years ago we were consumed with college applications, acceptances and determining the right fit. We examined the size, cost and style offered at different colleges just as we would have shopped for the perfect pair of shoes. We purchased Connecticut College, walking in with hope that we had made the right choice — that breaking in our new shoes would not be too uncomfortable. Today we walk the 290 steps from Palmer with the expectation that our experiences here will help us create lasting footprints on the world of tomorrow.

The Connecticut College footprint is unique composed of many individual footprints. I arrived in flip-flops with basketball sneakers packed in my bags and saw others wearing Crocs, sandals, moccasins, running sneakers and more. Our class is comprised of extremely diverse individuals; students from the north, south, east and west of the United States as well as different continents have taught us to accept diversity. We learned about students and some incredible stories of family sacrifice, which provided the dream of a college education. A variety of students taught us to appreciate those with different backgrounds who had traveled so far from their own home countries to attend Conn. In addition, study away programs like SATA Peru or Vietnam have left lasting imprints on students who brought their newly learned cultural awareness back to those of us who have not ourselves studied abroad. Meeting new people or leaving the country may have made us uncomfortable at first but we learned to accept these differences. We broke in

our shoes together, walking the same steps around campus on familiar paths, searching for our own.

We've been offered a liberal arts education that has allowed us, and at times forced us, to investigate an astonishing range of subjects. We tested different majors bringing us outside the comforts of familiar study. I, like many, came to Conn pursuing a different major from the one I eventually chose. I stumbled around the sciences until I realized I could incorporate all of them into an environmental studies major. Conn has continuously tested us by stressing the importance of interdisciplinary coursework outside our major by offering centers like CISLA, CAT, PICA, and CCBES.

In our coursework, professors have excited us with knowledge. They have empowered us to study our passions by combining learning with the opportunity to create our own majors, study abroad, or apply to a certificate center. They have encouraged us to "run" with our questions and ideas by helping to model our research or internships. I was encouraged to pursue an internship with a Storm and Hurricane Impact Group in Florida last summer. Not only did this opportunity test my independence, it helped me learn more about coastal processes for my honors thesis and provided me with insight about how I could continue research to protect our fragile beaches from over-development and rising sea level. Conn's rich academic environment has helped us slowly find our own new path to walk.

Many of you have already taken a stand by making a difference on this campus. How many petitions have we signed to express our views and beliefs? We've signed to support SPROUT! to have local and organic food on campus and also to contest FDA restrictions on homosexuals giving blood. We've asked for divestment from companies doing business in Sudan to condemn genocide in Darfur. We've supported Conn's switch to offset electricity 100% with green power. Connecticut College is a leader in the growing movement to boost environmental literacy, ethics, and renewable energy. Conn has been a model for reducing our carbon footprints. It is up to us to continue to take the steps on our own green paths.

Students from our class have already taken a step in the right direction and left their mark at Conn and around the world. One of our classmates helped collaborate with others to develop the Earth Tubs, which are used to turn some of our food waste into compost. Another student designed a preschool program and built affordable, hurricane-safe homes for rural families in the Dominican Republic. She then raised \$13,000 in order to go back to the Dominican Republic to continue her project. A majority of us have shared our love for sports and dedication to team building with our underclassman and the youth of New London with programs like KBA. We have all made an impact in one way or another on lives outside and on Conn's campus.

Conn has also taught us to face controversy. Whether it was standing up for what you believe, even if you were alone, losing an important NESCAC game on the fields or courts Conn offers, or arguing with a campus safety officer when he wanted to see your ID, these events have shaped us. They've helped us to be poised when unaided, courageous in defeat, and maybe a little more humble when dealing with authority. Whatever the case, these experiences have helped us to stand alone and step out into new, risky territory.

Let us now measure the steps we have taken: The Connecticut College footprint is our next step to collectively creating a new path for others to follow. Conn has taught us diversity, academic freedom and scholarship, social consciousness, change, and willingness to take action. It is now up to us to make use of these tools. If we can appreciate diversity, we can reduce hatred and war. If we believe that decreasing our carbon footprints will make a difference, we can fight the environmental crisis. If we continue to research, discuss and appreciate the arts, we can innovate and redesign our world.

We will leave Conn with our new shoes shining and ready to be broken in... about twenty years ago many of our families prodded and pushed us to take our first baby steps. Thank you for encouraging us and now for celebrating our next giant step... Class of 2008, you and I stand not alone but together as we walk out onto a new path to share our Connecticut College footprint with the world!