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92nd Commencement Senior Class Speaker's Address

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Riordan Frost '10
Senior Class Speaker
92nd Commencement
May 23, 2010

Good morning. I would like to thank my fellow classmates for all of their support for having student speakers at this commencement. I would also like to thank the administration for listening to the student voice. It is an incredible honor to be here today.

Fellow classmates. We are here at last, at a culmination of the past four years of our lives. We have learned much here, in the tender embrace of this institution. It will be strange to leave, where so many great and aspiring minds are in such close proximity. Leaving will mean that we shall be able to refer to Connecticut College as our *alma mater*, as we sip wine in our luxurious studies. Or, rather, the rooms we pretend to be our studies as we eke out a living in a small apartment. In all likelihood, we shall have to work a variety of jobs as we enter the anonymous stage of the recently graduated. Luckily, the liberal arts have taught us how to do everything, so we can become the mercenaries of the workplace.

We shall be out in the world, scattered like seeds to the wind, each trying to find out what to do and how to do it. What we must not do, however, is ignore the 'why.' Think about why you are doing something, both for direction in life, and for figuring out your reasons for living. Careers change, jobs come and go, and mid-life crises do happen. If you figure out what your goals are for life, however, the careers never need to be-all and end-all. I have some suggestions and advice for these goals.

Live passionately. In our generation, marriage and a family aren't so rigorously expected of us, which allows for some freedom. Figure out who you are before you enter a situation that depends on exactly that. Love those you are close to. As William Shakespeare said through Polonius in *Hamlet*, "The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried, / Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel". As I see it, life is too short to choose a miserable but well-paying job over a network of friends and family.

Necessity, however, has a burdensome presence in our lives. Life is not always easy, and the world is a tough place, especially today. It is essential that you find something to believe in, because it is easy to get lost in the complexity of modernity. We'll have to make it through a lot of difficult times, but if there is one impressive facet of humanity, it is our ability to survive. As Jack Gilbert wrote in his poem 'Horses at Midnight Without a Moon', "Our spirit persists like a man struggling / through the frozen valley / who suddenly smells flowers / and realizes the snow is melting / out of sight on top of the mountain, / knows that spring has begun." Spring has appropriately begun here, as we graduate and prepare to persist but also to thrive.

Never forget to appreciate the people around you. Whether they are CEOs, custodians, baristas, distant family, each is an individual playing some role in your life. Never take any help or appreciation for granted, and you will never be taken for granted.

I have argued for moral relativism in a classroom, but I believe that there is goodness in the world, and that it cannot be suppressed. I agree with Gary Snyder, who said, "Find your place on the planet. Dig in, and take responsibility from there." Always give back to your community. The best cities are founded on a sense of civic responsibility, from ancient times to today.

Self-knowledge is one of the most important things in the world. People, as much as you should show them appreciation, can be just as transient as jobs. At the end of the day, the only person you really need to live with is yourself. So know who you are, and don't be afraid to take time to figure that out. Being able to be alone is an invaluable skill to have.

Not a day goes by when I don't think about the fact that life is transient. Life can slip by, and at any point in time, anything can go terribly wrong. At first, I was kind of angry at the constant philosopher in my head bringing this up all the time. Then it was pointed out to me that having a limit to life is exactly what gives it meaning. We need to be wary of entering a numbing routine that causes us to wake up twenty years later and wonder what has happened. We need to consciously live in each moment. My friends, live with a fierce, determined strive, and love the ones that strive alongside you. As the contemporary poet and musician Michael Franti said, "Love like your life depends on it. Because it does."