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President Higdon's 91st Commencement Address

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Connecticut College President Leo I. Higdon Jr.
2009 Commencement Address

Good morning. To all of our graduates, parents and families, trustees, faculty, staff and honored guests ... Welcome. Today's program includes remarks and performances by several of our graduating seniors, a presentation of the College medal to a special alumna and we will award an honorary degree to our commencement speaker Martha Nussbaum.

And now, I'd like to ask 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 show our appreciation. Thank you, you can be seated.

I'd like to add my own thanks to all of the parents and supporters here with us today. These graduating seniors are a very special group. You know that. I want to thank you for entrusting them to us. 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, very proud of.

And you, our seniors, you are graduating at an important point in Connecticut College's history.

You've witnessed improvements to this campus. You've seen new initiatives implemented to enhance academics and to increase support for students.

This class has excelled in academics and a variety of other areas, including athletics, arts, community service, environmental sustainability and much more. Your passion around equity and diversity is helping define this community. And the success of your class this year resulted in a very impressive number of post-graduate awards and honors.

I know that as alumni, your support for the College will be strong. As you transition into being graduates of Connecticut College, I want to thank you in advance for the time, talent and support I know you will give to this institution throughout your lives.

Together, as a class – and as individuals – you have impressed me with your intelligence and your talents. You have also shown me your compassion and your integrity.

Here at Connecticut College, you've been engaged in the world around you – through community service in New London and across the world. I encourage you to continue to pursue your passions in ways that help make the world a better place.

Here at Connecticut College, your liberal arts education has helped you see new connections across traditional disciplines, and challenged you to make new choices. I encourage you to continue to challenge yourselves. Forge new paths and make new connections.

Here at Connecticut College, you have been a vital part of a dynamic and increasingly diverse community. I encourage you to continue to be active citizens in whatever communities you call home. And continue to value equity and inclusiveness as important components of your life-long learning.

Here at Connecticut College, you have lived with an Honor Code that has guided your actions and given you a strong sense of control as you faced new situations and made new choices. I encourage you to keep the Honor Code with you as you move through life. When you face difficulty, reflect back on what the Honor Code has meant to you, what this community has meant to you. And draw strength from that.

Above all, I encourage you to stay connected to Connecticut College. Your adult life has taken shape here. You have carved out important relationships that will sustain you. And you will continue to develop new relationships within our network of more than 25,000 alumni across the globe. You all, we all, share a very important common bond in Connecticut College. This college is yours. Forever.

You are graduating at a pivotal time in US history – indeed, in the history of the world. In a global economic upheaval, traditional companies and organizations seek to redefine themselves and the work they do. Increasingly, they will look to your generation, and specifically to liberal arts graduates, for answers. With your comprehensive education, you have the qualities to succeed in this global arena: analytical thinking, effective communication and technology skills, an action-oriented approach, leadership and team-building aptitude, and, importantly, a developed sense of self. You have already used these qualities to make a difference here on campus. I am confident that now you have the capacity and experience to deal with unscripted problems, and you will make a meaningful impact on this rapidly changing world.

Congratulations to each and every one of you. On behalf of the entire College community, I wish you all the best. I will miss you.