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Senior Class Speaker 96th Commencement Address

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Like children let us color outside the lines

Let us look at the pictures and create our own story, knowing that there is more than what’s written on the pages

Let us imagine the world as we wish it to be

Let us see that we are indeed the very change the world is yearning for

Let us see the dirty canvas and make a masterpiece

As a child you most likely had a very bizarre response to the question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” For me, the answer was always “a Lion.” But I could only get away with that one until 7th grade when I was told to set more realistic goals. What I needed was more adult aspirations void of childlike imagination.

Up until today, it seems as though our lives have been shaped by institutions and systems that have implicitly told us to stop dreaming for the sake of being realistic, to put our imagination to the side so that we can grow up. Our younger selves have been told that we know little about life, that our fantasies are misguided practicality. And so, here we are, at a crossroads, on the brink of the abstract point of adulthood, realizing that we don’t feel very grown up at all. It can make us feel overwhelmed and powerless, as though we are insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Our imaginations are potentially shattered by the loneliness of expectation.

We anxiously await being thrown into what everyone calls the real world, where our achievements here will go unnoticed, as if they were the peak of our lives.

As the class of 2014, we are in a position to change the world, but not in the most conventional way. We have the opportunity to be historic. We can impact the trajectory of humanity as long as we do one thing: stay true to the genius within us.

It may come as a surprise to you that you could, in fact, be a genius. I’m here to tell you that you are. It isn’t an exclusive trait, it isn’t reserved for the one in a million. It is yours for the exploring.
Now, it is our responsibility to figure out exactly what our genius is, how it looks and what its purpose is. It is now in our hands to nurture that genius.

When we consider the great thinkers and the leading innovators who dramatically changed the course of humanity, we see a consistent pattern: We know they never allowed anyone or anything to box them in. They were without a label, unable to be defined or classified. They were free dreamers.

As we launch into the future, we should all be as free. Don’t let your major confine you. Don’t let what you’ve been told about your career options cripple you. Instead be innovative, pioneer new ways to be human with your genius. Let our generation be the one that breaks the chains of false limitations that bind us.

Today, be honest with yourself. Ask yourself questions that will scare you, don’t let yourself off the hook simply because someone told you to aim only but so high. This may mean a few career changes. This may mean being without money for a while. It may mean leaving the place you call home to start a new one. Whatever it may be, we – as Connecticut College graduates – are equipped to face it.

Yes it will be scary, yes it will come with opposition, but as we endure, we will be made stronger. Friends, fear not the future, fear not where you will be or how everything will work out. Instead, recognize that the possibilities are endless.

We are not graduating from Connecticut College to be ordinary. We are unique individuals that the world has never seen before. So we must diverge from the linear path and venture away from the scripted journey in order to offer the world what has been given to us. We can’t let the burdens of generations before us suffocate our dreams and constrain our imagination. Don’t let their fears immobilize our creative power to transform the lives around us. Let us leave here today and promise ourselves – and each other – that we will only surround ourselves with what will nurture us, what will make us better.

Understand that, like ships, we are all out to sea, sometimes with an unclear destination, sometimes tossed by raging storms. But there will always be anchors to ground us along the way. This College will forever be one of those anchors. Our families, our friends, our professors… the people, moments and precious milestones that help us reach our greatness, that define us as innovators.

After we go our separate ways, take some time to look at yourself in the mirror, ignite the flame that will jumpstart you to your genius. We must regain the childlike ingenuity that once made us so invincible. So, close your eyes, dream your wildest dream and be bold. Bold enough to see its manifestation.
Refuse to be thrown into the real world. Gladly jump with your arms held high, and a smile on your face, knowing that you can fly. Connecticut College Class of 2014, it’s about time we stopped treading the ground when we know we have wings.

So I encourage you -- I encourage us all to:

Like children, color outside the lines

Look at the pictures and create our own story, knowing that there is more than what’s written on the pages

Imagine the world as we hope it to be

Recognize that we are, indeed, the very change the world is yearning for

Let us all see the dirty canvas and make a masterpiece.

May 18, 2014