

5-19-2013

President Higdon's 95th Commencement Address

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Connecticut College

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Recommended Citation

Higdon, Jr., Leo I., "President Higdon's 95th Commencement Address" (2013). *Commencement Addresses*. Paper 32.
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CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

President Leo I. Higdon, Jr.
Commencement Address 2013
May 19, 2013

Good morning. Graduating students, parents and families, trustees, faculty, staff and honored guests, I welcome you to Connecticut College's 95th Commencement. Today, our program includes remarks by the senior class speaker and awards for two exemplary graduates. We will confer an honorary degree on our distinguished keynote speaker, and present the College Medal to an alumna and to a parent, each of whom has demonstrated distinction – in their fields and in their leadership at Connecticut College.

And, of course, in the highlight of today's ceremony, our graduates will receive their very well-earned diplomas.

I have a tradition first that I'd like to share. It's something I've done with every graduating class since I first became a dean and then college president 20 years ago. I'd like to ask all of the graduates to stand now. Stand and recognize those whose support made it possible for you to be here today – your parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends. Graduates, let's stand, and show our appreciation. OK, please be seated.

When you first arrived here in that late summer of 2009 – and moved into your residences during one of the worst rainstorms of the year – I told you that you were an exceptional group of young people. And that much would be expected of you here. Today, I believe we can all agree that both were true. You have proven yourselves through your academics, your citizenship, and the ways in which you have engaged yourselves in the world. I can say without hesitation that you have been challenged here as well.

Today's ceremony indicates that you have met those challenges. You have become leaders on this campus – relied upon by students, faculty and staff for your opinions, your expertise and your involvement.

And you have been students here during an important time in Connecticut College's history. You were here when we cut the ribbon on our new fitness center, and when we opened our new science center. You were the first class to benefit from our Residential Education Fellows program – professors working with students to enhance intellectual programming in the residences. You were here to mark the College's Centennial, a year-long celebration that brought the community together to embrace our history... and our future. And, you were the first class to

include POSSE scholars – student leaders who have contributed to this community *and* helped Connecticut College become a more welcoming community for people from all backgrounds.

The College confers your degrees today confident that you have mastered the academic content of your coursework – and the sophistication of a four-year liberal arts education. But when you carefully pack away your diploma with the contents of your room and leave campus, you start afresh. You become, in many ways, beginners. And beginning again is tough. With your education, you are equipped to meet the challenges you will face. But before you do, I challenge *you*. I challenge you to welcome all that comes with beginning again. Take on those seemingly menial responsibilities – for example, if asked: work all weekend, volunteer to do the task no one else will take. Soak in all you can from the more experienced people around you.

That’s what I did. And I’ll tell you, you will earn respect. You will learn. And you will advance. As you advance, you will continue to learn. Until before you know it, *you* will be the one, as they say, “calling the shots.”

You and I share something today: This is our last official Commencement ceremony at Connecticut College. Oh, sure, a number of you will be back on Tempel Green watching friends graduate – or, one day you may be here as parents, watching your own children graduate. And some of you could be here as professors, or staff members, or trustees... or maybe one day one of you will be standing here, as president of this great College.

When I spoke at *my* inauguration as president, I said that Connecticut College prepares students for a complex world by teaching them to be active, engaged citizens. Our students develop a respect for knowledge, an ability to think and communicate clearly, to lead with intelligence and integrity, and to be socially responsible and globally focused. As I look at your faces today, I see the embodiment of this vision. And I couldn’t be more proud. Proud of all that you have accomplished. And humbled, yes, humbled thinking of all that you will become.

Because you have your entire future ahead of you. I hope in that future, you continue to embrace learning in all its forms. Continue to cross boundaries and to make connections that others don’t see. Continue to live the values of the Honor Code and to respect and value equity and inclusiveness as part of your life-long learning. Above all, please stay connected to Connecticut College.

Thank you.