

2016

Senior Class Speaker 98th Commencement Address

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Up in the Air

Remarks to the Class of 2016
by Senior Class Speaker Mia Haas-Goldberg '16
98th Commencement Sunday
May 22, 2016

I've never been cliff jumping, but I expect it's much like graduating from college. There's the unsettled stomach, nervous sweating, and your grandma cheering you on. The sound of waves breaking below your toes promises a difficult landing, and the height tinges your vision with fear. While the cliff's edge is sharp and your own resolve, fading, you are more than ready for the jump ahead.

This uncertainty, this discomfort, is what gives each of us so much potential to succeed. Today, our lives are incredibly open to change and possibility in a way they may never be again--there's no telling who we will meet, where we will be or what we will have accomplished one year from now. While the cliff may appear more daunting to some than to others, I do not doubt each of us has the ability to embrace the uncertainty before us. During our four years at Conn, there has been drastic administrative, academic, and social transformation—and there's no denying the impact it has had on us all.

Under two presidents, our class embraced the challenge of a school in transition and voiced our hopes and concerns for an inclusive community. When faced with adversity, we led the charge to inform, to educate, and to build. While we may never experience the effects of this reform, or even the institutional change that our collective voice inspired, Conn's imperfections set the stage for our greatest moments of learning and creativity.

For each of us, Conn has meant something different; Conn is discomfort, opportunity, and friendship. It is sleepless nights, 1:00am mozz sticks, and leaving your personal belongings in public places. It is questioning authority, questioning the camel van, and engaging in meaningful dorm room chats. It is arbo sledding and dancing on tables. It's not perfect, it's not polished, but Conn, with both its strengths and shortcomings, has helped us become comfortable with discomfort. And to me, this is one of the greatest gifts.

Not many universities allow students to take control, to fix the flaws we see and craft the community we want. But here, we are encouraged to question, to go beyond the textbooks and the facts. Our discomfort helps us identify injustice in the everyday and recognize the possibilities that lie beyond the borders we set for ourselves. We have learned to take risks in decision-making and engage in meaningful dialogue. Whether the future appears clear and exciting or jumbled and daunting, we know how to bring meaning to our lives and inspire change for those around us.

Today, we each make our own jump, but none of us is alone. We carry our professors, families, and friends with us, in ways that can't be seen by the naked eye. And just as their lessons remain

a part of us, we also leave a legacy here at Conn. Our sustainability campaigns, human rights activism, and open dialogues have made this place better for our friends who watch us leave today. While we may never share a campus with the class of 2020, they will know us well, by the work we have done and the changes we brought to Conn. Soon, they too will face this cliff. With our success at the back of their minds, our classmates, old and new, will take the leap as we choose to do today.

The class of 2016 — our class — is many things. We are athletes, artists, and activists. We are trailblazers, innovators, and motivators. We are scholars, we are dreamers, we are leaders. And now, we are cliff jumpers.

(Remarks as prepared by Mia Haas-Goldberg '16.)