

2019

Senior Class Speaker 101st Commencement Address

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Remarks to the Class of 2019
by Senior Class Speaker Issraa Faiz '19
101st Commencement Sunday
May 19, 2019

Class of 2019, esteemed guests, faculty and staff, friends and family, it is with absolute pleasure that I stand here and welcome you to Connecticut College's 101st Commencement!

It feels surreal to be here, looking at the faces I have grown to know and cherish. I urge you all to take time today to reflect on your experiences at our alma mater. I know I for one will miss buying the mozzarella sticks at Oasis, taking long walks in the Arboretum, rushing to grab a latte from the Coffee Closet before dreadful 9 a.m. classes, cramming into Olin for an N20 show, and planning my Florialia outfit with my friends way too early.

Our class has gone through our undergraduate experience during a unique and troubling time for this country. Political divides continue to tear our nation apart as people focus more on our differences than our similarities. At Connecticut College, however, this was not the case. We were determined to speak out, take care of each other, and most of all maintain the sense of unity we had all been promised on our college tours five—or even six—years ago. As our nation became more divided, our community at Conn made a grander effort to maintain respect, tolerance, and love for each other.

As a visible Muslim American woman, I have often been targeted by the hate in our country. During those times, I have drawn on the love of the community at Conn.

I'd like to clarify what I mean when I say love. I don't mean love as a form of interpersonal happiness—although we do have plenty of that here too. I mean: *love as a state of being*. The type of love James Baldwin talks about in his book *The Fire Next Time*—a Conn favorite. He writes, “Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within.” To me, love as a state of being means you are willing to have conversations, attend events, and show up for change, even if you are uncomfortable in the process. Not because you owe anything. Not because of personal interest. But for the betterment of humanity.

It is radical love. Love as a response to pain. Love as a response to adversity. Love in the face of hate. Operating in a state love is the greatest gift the Connecticut College education gives its students. We are taught this love so subtly through our everyday experiences that I'm sure many of you did not even realize you were living this way.

I've experienced this form of love throughout my time at Conn—and I'm certain you have as well. I've seen it in the efforts of student activists fighting for progress, in the intellectual debates held by our clubs and organizations, in the heart-to-hearts on Tempel Green, in the senior projects of students in our Centers, in the generosity of alumni guiding us toward our careers, and most of all in the unwavering and unconditional support of professors, coaches, and staff. This love is what makes the Honor Code thrive and what makes students say, “Hello” to each

other as they cross paths even if they've never met. This love is what makes this College feel like more than a school, but like a community, and our home.

For that, I thank you, Connecticut College. Thank you for loving each one of us and for teaching us how to find love in the face of hardship. Through this nurturing, we have grown into strong, intelligent and compassionate change-makers.

Class of 2019, we are ready. Regardless of how nervous you may feel right now, I know you will make a difference in this world. Today, celebrate your growth here and then to step into this next phase of your life with kindness, courage, and most of all with love—radical love. So, all my love to you Class of 2019 and good luck!!