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## Senior Class Speaker 94th Commencement Address

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# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

Senior Class Speaker Brenner Green  
94th Commencement Address  
May 20, 2012

Faculty, family, friends, and fellow classmates of 2012, it is my honor to speak today on behalf of this year's graduating class of Connecticut College.

My name is Brenner Green. You may know me or recognize me as your housefellow, your teammate, your classmate, your student, your son, brother, nephew, or your friend. Or perhaps you recognize me as the one whose birthday was on Floralia this year. I'm still recovering. Yes, I am all of these things, and Connecticut College has made me realize that I am so much more. I stand before you today to share my own unique journey as a student here. Every student has his/her own unique story here. Mine can be told in miles, for I have run somewhere between 12 and 14 thousand miles as an enrolled student here. I'd like to think those miles symbolize my own journey. I wish I kept count, because that 2,000-mile difference seems like a lot to be unsure about. Also, I've come to realize that the College's mission and values are a big part of my journey. Conn "seeks to support and nurture intellectual, emotional, spiritual, creative, and physical development of its student body." And that's just what it did for me.

My journey at Conn started during my first cross-country season. Right before then, I had just come out in high school to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, two-spirit loving community - otherwise known as the non-heterosexual folk. I hope I didn't leave anyone out. I came to college with a lot of internalized homophobia. I only knew how to be gay from Elton John and Richard Simmons, and while I have always enjoyed listening to "Tiny Dancer" and working out in bedazzled booty shorts, I just wasn't into the whole "gay" thing. I had no role model who was a gay athlete, and I did not know gay men could be out in sports. So, I was a bit anxious and unsure of myself when I decided to come out to my teammates freshman year. If you know Conn's values, you know that the College seeks to "make all students feel comfortable, respect each other's differences, and seek common ground." And this proved to be true. My teammates

respected me for coming out and made me comfortable being their teammate. They made sure that I was part of their conversations and even asked me about my sexual orientation and personal life. I'd like to recognize my teammates now and thank them for their friendship. During that first semester at Conn, I ran at least 1,000 miles with the cross-country team and also was involved with an award-winning documentary film called Out for the Long Run that chronicles the lives of openly gay and lesbian athletes. I was in the film and my coach, teammates and my family were also included. This involvement brought me closer to my teammates, coach, and my family, and most importantly, myself. This entire first semester nurtured my physical and emotional development - it made me comfortable with my identity as a gay male athlete.

As a sophomore, I developed my leadership and involvement on campus. Connecticut College encourages students to engage in a wide range of activities. And I did. I served as a tour guide, as a student adviser for freshmen, as a student coordinator of the LGBTQ Resource Center, and as co-chair of Spectrum, the College's student-run organization for gay culture and activism. However, I still struggled with internalized homophobia, partly because I did not know much about my identity, culture, and history as a gay man. I applied to the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy with a proposal to study psychosocial development of sexual minority youth. We are lucky to have these academic centers where students can make their education more meaningful and unique. By becoming a Holleran Center scholar, I immersed myself in learning about and understanding sexual minority youth. And in the process, I learned to better understand myself.

As a junior, I ran another 1,000 miles in the fall and then took to the bike that spring in Amsterdam to study abroad. The program allowed me to study international perspectives on sexuality and gender. While abroad, I conducted an integrative project on the psychosocial development of Dutch teenagers, tying into my Holleran Center interest.

Last summer, I ran another 1,000 miles as I interned at True Colors Inc. in Hartford, Connecticut, a non-profit organization that provides social services to sexual minority and transgender youth. The College generously funded this internship.

This year, senior year, I ran another 3,000 miles, to end my short but rewarding journey at Conn. As I ran these miles, I also served as housefellow of three residences on campus, as a Senior Admission Fellow, and as co-captain of the men's cross-country team. I wrote an honors thesis in psychology about friendships between gay male athletes and their straight teammates, inspired by my friendships with my own teammates. I applied and was accepted into Teach for America and will teach secondary special education in Las Vegas next year.

Today, I am a confident leader and man and have the College, my loving parents, family, and friends, to thank for that. This is my story. Each of today's graduates has an equally compelling story. And all of our unique stories share Connecticut College as the link that will bind us as we go forward in life. I encourage you all to share and to cherish your own stories. And know that while our years as students at Conn are over, our personal journeys continue. I won't stop running and I hope your journeys will bring you much satisfaction and fulfillment.

Thank you.