Reflections Commencement Speech

Good morning distinguished faculty, friends and family, and fellow members of the Class of 2015 and congratulations. What a beautiful day for this ceremony to take place. I am sure I speak for all of us when I say thank you. Thank you to every person that has supported and pushed us to earn our undergraduate degrees. Thank you to my family, friends, my professors and mentors family who have given me an unbelievably wonderful experience these past four years and opportunity to be standing in front of you today. I would not be standing in front of you today if it wasn’t for your unconditional support.

So here we are, sometime between four and however many years it took, we’re leaving college. Not too long ago I had very mixed feelings about graduating. I was lying in bed staring at my ceiling asking, “What happens next?” Then I remembered that ceilings can’t talk. I did however find myself at a point of reflection. Looking back on these four years of college I have grown more than I ever expected. While I was writing this speech on the third floor of the library, awkwardly kicking the person in the cubby in front of me, I decided to define success. Socially, a 9-5 job with a comfortable salary and a 401k is the definition of success. This is a calculation. I think this is an incomplete definition.

So like many college students I decided to turn to... Wikipedia. Wikipedia defines success as: Attainment of higher social status; Achievement of a goal; The opposite of failure. That isn’t very helpful at all, but if there is anything I learned from attending CSU Chico it is that only you can define your success and no one else. Steve Jobs once said:

"Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition."  

Which leads me to an Ellen Degeneres quote. “Follow your passion. Stay true to yourself. Never follow someone else’s path unless you’re in the woods and you’re lost and you see a path. By all means, you should follow that.”

You all are each your own person and your own graduate. We have all had a wide spectrum of experiences. What we all have in common today is our hard work and perseverance. We all have had sleepless nights studying for an exam or finishing a project. We all have had those group projects that have driven us up a wall. We got through it all!

Whatever you have planned after we leave this place, whether it’s a full-time job, or an internship, traveling the world, or couch surfing, do what makes you happy. Most importantly I want you to look back and recognize what you’ve accomplished already. Class of 2015 you are successful! You are sitting in a robe at 10 in the morning and it’s not because you have given up! We are right at the edge of the world with its doors wide open to us. It’s okay to not know what the next step is!

I want you all to look back to when you were freshmen, taking on this giant university and living away from home for possibly the first time was intimidating. Think about what advice you would give yourself. Now take that advice and give it to yourself now! Don’t be afraid. Go try new things, meet new people, and discover what you love! Life is what you make of it. Keep learning and surprising yourself! Most importantly never give up, and congratulations!