Good afternoon! My name is Brandon Durkin, and I have been chosen to give this year's student reflection speech.

Before I get into what I have to say, I’d like to start by giving a shout out to each of the colleges that are participating in today's ceremony. So when I call out the college that you belong to, please stand up and represent your department with a nice yell.

Sound easy enough?

Okay, first up: The College of Behavioral & Social Sciences!

Second up: The College of Engineering, Computer Science, & Construction Management!

Finally, my personal favorite: The College of Business!

(Pick some unofficial winner)

But, really, congratulations to everyone who has made it this far.

Today I will be sharing with you my story. Giving you a glimpse into my life and my experiences while I attended Chico State, in the hopes that maybe each of you is able to take away something that you can relate to and possibly use going forward in your life.

Not too long ago I heard a quote from the author J.K. Rowling, also known as the Harry Potter lady. It goes:

“It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well have not lived at all – in which case you’ve failed by default.”

That quote stuck out to me because she was describing exactly the kind of person who I was before Chico State – someone who was scared of failing. But the thing is, is that I know that I am not the only person who falls into this category. Obviously, no one wants to be considered a failure. But we have to also be careful not to waste our life never reaching our full potential, simply because we are afraid of possibly being wrong.

There was a time when I was content being unknown. Why? Well, because it’s easier to be that person in class who shows up, but doesn’t really apply themselves – and this trend is applicable to life. I know this, because I used to be that person. It’s a little more difficult to be the person who comes prepared and answers questions. Why? Because this not only requires effort, but you also must have the confidence to stand out amongst the crowd, and sometimes give the wrong answer. But standing out can have the benefit of recognition. I know this, because I am that person.

Confidence, however, doesn’t come easy to a lot of people. It didn’t with me. To this day I struggle to overcome an irrational fear of interacting with strangers. What does that mean, exactly? Well, when I was a kid, I refused to go into the grocery store by myself because I was scared of having to talk to the checkout lady. If my mom wanted me to run in and grab milk or something, there was no way I was leaving the car unless she went with me.

Sounds silly, right? Well, it is. But at the time, it was a big deal to me. We all have similar internal struggles that we face, to varying degrees, but it is important to overcome those insecurities and be confident in who you are.
When I first came to Chico State I had the mindset that I didn’t need to put myself out there to succeed. I believed that I didn’t need to volunteer, to join clubs, or even put any importance on meeting new people. Looking back, I realize now that I was a teenager who thought he knew everything. And only with time, did I learn how clueless I was.

I figured that if I just tried harder in my classes and was able to achieve a decent GPA then I wouldn’t have any trouble getting that job after college that we all pray materializes. While I still think that grades are important and can get you in the door, connections made from meeting new people can be the equivalent of busting down not only that door, but countless others.

I know now that at Chico State, as in life, you get what you put in. I learned that by trying hard at academics and putting in actual study time at the library, I was able to earn a grade that I could be proud of. By volunteering, I learned that giving back to the community, helping those who are less fortunate, and being a part of something that is larger than myself is one of the best feelings in the world. I learned that you never know what friendships may arise from simply talking to new people and that I would never have met a lot of people I consider friends had I continued to be too scared to talk to strangers.

I can say that I gave Chico my all, and put everything that I had to offer into the 5 years that I’ve spent here as a student, and I wasn’t disappointed with what I got back. Chico eventually became my home, and I a member of the community, concerned with the well-being of the city and those who live here. Chico introduced me to friends who I’ll know the rest of my life and who I owe a lot of my success to. Chico paid me back for my hard work with 5 years of unforgettable memories, a wealth of knowledge, and lessons learned in life that have made me a stronger and well-rounded individual.

I learned that by exposing myself to what Chico had to offer, I grew up. I no longer wish to sit on the sidelines for fear of failing because Chico has taught me that failure is only a temporary setback to being successful. That if you pick yourself back up, learn from your mistakes, and try again there is no limit to what you can achieve. Chico State has made me the confident man that I am today. Because of Chico State I now know who I am and who I’m not, I have found my voice, I have found my drive, and I have dreams of accomplishing great things.

So my advice to you, my fellow classmates, is to live life to the fullest without fear of failure. Speak up, take chances, and be the driving force of the change that you want to see. Do this, and I promise that you will find success in life.

Thank you, and good luck Class of 2014!