

Lisa Pham

Chico State CNS Reflections Speech

May 19th, 2017

Good evening friends and family, faculty and staff, and most importantly, good evening and congratulations to the graduates of the College of Natural Sciences and the College of Communication and Education!

I am humbled and honored to be standing in front of you today; not only as the first female physicist student reflection speaker in Chico State history, but also as a college dropout.

Dropping out of school was one of the hardest decisions of my life, yet without it I would not be in front of you today. When I think about my journey, I am often amazed by how every little thing came together to get me to where I am, even the unexpected things. All of the decisions I made, all of the people I met, all of my experiences added up to the person you see here.

What parts added up to get **you** to the very seat you are in now? Maybe it was your family--blood-related or those who earned the title by sticking by your side. Maybe it was the professor who was so passionate about their subject, they inspired you to switch majors before the semester was over. Maybe it was that person who saw potential in you and wouldn't stop bugging you about getting a degree. Maybe some of these influential people are even sitting in the stands today.

All of us come from a community and unique path that got us to this very spot: the Chico State Stadium this evening of May 19th, 2017. We all come from different backgrounds and have had different obstacles and yet we are here. Now. Together. Who could have imagined the universe would unfold in such a way?

In my life, there were a number of major players and defining moments. For instance my grandmothers, both who had to drop out of school before they reached the 6th grade to take care of their families after their mothers died. My parents, who had the courage to flee everything they knew as unaccompanied teenagers, banking on being able to seek refuge and be welcomed in a more stable country. My foster grandparents, who were there to pick me up when I hit bottom and support me with unconditional love. My former boss, who took me under her wing when I had embarrassingly little experience and encouraged me to enroll at Chico State and finally finish my degree. My friends, family, and loved ones, who believed in me when I could not believe in myself.

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And of course, my beloved Chico community...The classmates that kept me going during way too many all nighters. The professors that opened their doors and put up with my tears of frustration, meeting them with nurturing mentorship. The friends that encouraged me to leave the windowless lab rooms in the Physical Sciences Building every now and then and have some fun...(but of course, not too much fun mom!) I will never forget the time I've had here at Chico, blessed with a great college and a more supportive department than I could have ever imagined.

Now we embark on our next journey. And although we will always be part of the Chico State family, we are entering a greater community--one where we are no longer defined by our majors or colleges. One where we are rather defined by our contributions to society. If we are unsatisfied with the current state of our world or even local community, it is up to us to change it, because it is now **our** time. Our time to stand up and create the world we want to live in. Our time to break down barriers and connect people of all backgrounds and beliefs for a better tomorrow. Our time to pay it forward and support others in the way we have been supported. So as you walk out today, I hope you always remember the community you come from and I challenge you to help us all create a better community for tomorrow. Thank you.