

Good evening, everyone! I want to start off by thanking everyone that came out to celebrate the graduates from the College of Business and College of Humanities and Fine Arts. My name is Alisha Sharma and I am graduating from the College of Business with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, emphasis in Project Management and with honors. I've had the privilege to give several speeches over my years at Chico State, but this is the most special one yet so I am humbled for this opportunity to speak to you all today.

Like many of you graduating today, I am first generation American. My mom left India when she was 24 years old and raised my little sister and I here as a single mother and worked multiple jobs to make sure we could have the opportunity to come to college one day. I share this accomplishment with her as I know each of you are sharing this day with your own families, friends, mentors and support systems because if it weren't for them, we would not be here today.

As I said, it's because of my mom that I was able to come to Chico State and have the true Chico Experience. When I came to Chico four years ago, I didn't have a clue about who I was and I never really felt like I belonged in a space or in a community. Somehow, however, I found mentors that believed in me when I never believed in myself and encouraged me to run for student government at the end of my first year... even though I had never been involved in a leadership position before. And I'm so glad they did because three years later, I stand here today with the honor to have been the first woman of color to serve as Associated Students President of Chico State.

As the student body President, I've not only had one of the most holistic Chico Experiences, but I have also had the privilege to interact with thousands of diverse students in ways that other students do not have the opportunity to do. Through my role, I have even gotten the chance to work with students at the other 22 CSUs across California. But that is why I know that Chico State students are so unique. And while all of us here have our own story, over the last few years I've learned that there are attributes that make Chico State students so special and connect us all.

- First, Chico State students are resilient. As we've been approaching graduation, people have been telling us that we're about to go off in into "the real world"- but we've already been living in the real world. We've been through things as a campus, community and nation that have tested our resilience. From navigating the aftermath of the Camp Fire to losing loved ones and classmates to our own struggles we've been through through our personal journeys. Some of us maybe even wanted to give up. Some of us were told we would never make it to this day. But no matter what we've all been through-- we made it, y'all. You all should be so proud of yourselves and I want you to remember it was the resilience that you all have within you that got you here today.

- Next, Chico State students are passionate. I want you all to take a moment and think about what you've done on this campus because of your own passion. What are you passionate about? What energizes you?  
Never let go of that. If you continue to fuel your passions and do what you love, you will have all the power to create positive change in your future spheres of influence.
- Chico State students are leaders. After the Camp Fire, it was dozens of nursing, anthropology, archaeology students, CAVE volunteers and more that were at the forefront of helping our community. After the DACA Program was rescinded, it was students from different areas and clubs across campus, that came together to support our undocumented community. And I know as Chico State students we will continue to be leaders and support each other in whatever we do next because that is what we learned to do at this University.
- And lastly, Chico State students are Wildcats. But what does it mean to be a Wildcat? In my experience, being a Wildcat means being a part of a family. And when I think about my own family here, I think of my boss who let me cry in her office (multiple times) or the staff at the Career Center who would call me before my interviews just to make sure I felt confident and prepared or all my mentors at the Associated Students that, in the moments when I doubted myself the most, they were the ones to lift me up and tell me my voice mattered.

None of us got here today alone... our Wildcat family has helped shape who we are and supported us along our journeys to get to where we are today. Whether that be our roommates, best friends, coaches, faculty or staff, we've relied on our Wildcat family to get through these past few years.

After all, a house is just a building until you fill it with the people you love- that's when it becomes a home. And Chico State was just a place with a lot of brick buildings and a whole lot of trees, until we discovered our own Wildcat family- then it became our home. So never forget that Chico State will be our home long after we graduate and into our alumni experience because we will always be a part of the Wildcat family.

I now want to give a final congratulations to my Wildcat family and the Class of 2019. Today is the beginning of the rest of our lives! Thank you!