

Maikhou Thao
Student Reflections Speaker
Sociology
College of Behavioral & Social Sciences
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Good evening.

My name is Maikhou Thao. I am graduating with my bachelor's degree in Sociology from the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences. I want to thank every one of you who are here today to celebrate the accomplishments of the Chico State graduating class of 2018.

Without the family, friends, peers, faculty, and staff of Chico State that work every day to keep our university student centered, many of us would not be here.

I am so honored to have been chosen to speak on behalf of the class of 2018 because it is not every day that we get to hear the story of a proud Hmong American woman. For those of you who do not know, the Hmong are a Southeast Asian ethnic minority who often feel invisible and left out of American history even though our people lost their lives while fighting in the Vietnam War as American allies.

Like many of my peers, my identity and experiences has truly shaped me into the person I am today.

Sociology taught me to open my eyes to everything that occurs around me and the terminology to explain much of my own personal struggles in understanding that I am not alone.

My two years working at the Cross-Cultural Leadership Center challenged me to engage in experiences that made me into the leader I am today by understanding the world of diversity and how it affects us all.

My involvement with the Hmong Student Association for three years helped me become a proud Hmong woman as I was surrounded by other students who shared the same struggles and supported me into becoming a culturally empowered person who can be proud of my heritage and be the voice for the voiceless.

With the skills I gained through Chico State, I landed an internship with the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in Washington, D.C., learning about advocacy for underrepresented groups at the national level.

I am thankful to Chico State for always being there to support me in my journey as there was always someone willing to help and give me advice on what the next step should be.

Much of today will be spent celebrating the happiness of our journey as alumni of Chico State, but reflecting on our time here it would not be adequate without mentioning the struggles that many of us faced in getting here today

My parents came to the United States as political refugees in the '80s shortly after the end of the Vietnam War and settled into the small town of Oroville, California.

Barely speaking any English, they literally came with nothing but the clothes on their backs and a dream that their children would have a chance at a better life.

I grew up in a three-bedroom home with 13 other people. As a low-income, first generation college student who collected cans out on the street as a kid for recycling money, shopping in thrift stores, and getting hand me downs from my older siblings, I did not know what luxury was until I came to college.

I remember thinking about how much I must have progressed in life when I finally had a TV in my own room.

Standing here on graduation day, I know my father would be proud.

Exactly one year ago from today, my father, one of the biggest motivators for my education, passed away from cancer. While he is no longer with us any more, his legacy lives through the morals and ethics he taught me in which I hope to share with all of you.

He taught me never to give up on myself and to become a resilient person with any obstacles and challenges that come my way.

I thank him every day for those words because speaking on behalf of my classmates you can bet many of us wanted to give up at one point during our academic journey.

So, whoever and whatever it is that helped you get to where you are today, as you come across that stage to receive your diploma, don't forget to thank those who supported you and certainly do not forget about the hard work you put into that college degree.

If there's anything that our time at Chico State has prepared us for, it is that we can change the world together.

If we can all understand how important it is to work hard, value each other's story and history, that is how we will change the world as graduates from the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Once again, congratulations to the class of 2018.

Today, is the beginning of the rest of our lives so let's make the most of what we learned here at Chico State and leave our legacies for those who will come after us.

Thank you!