

MAY 19, 2019

PRESIDENT'S COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Good morning! I am Jill Tiefenthaler and I have the honor of serving as Colorado College's 13th president. On behalf of our dedicated faculty, staff, and trustees, I welcome you to our 145th Commencement ceremony.

Thank you, Debbie Howell, for delivering the invocation and highlighting the significance of today's ceremony — the first time we gather together on Tava Quad. To mark this special day, and to acknowledge the Ute people and all indigenous nations, and the ancestral lands on which we sit and stand, I am pleased to introduce The Cozad Singers, members of the Kiowa Tribe who are renowned for performing honor songs at powwows nationwide.

Thank you. Your performance honors the ancestors of the various peoples, nations, tribes, and families whose struggles for justice on this land inspire us.

Welcome! — Proud parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends of our graduates. You have come from across the state, across the country, and

around the globe — from here in Colorado Springs to Evergreen to Durango, Oregon to Wisconsin to Pennsylvania, Peru to Sweden to China. Our graduates would not be where they're standing today without your ongoing commitment and support. Graduates, can you give them a big thank you round of applause?

Welcome and congratulations to our commencement speaker and honorary degree recipients. And — most importantly — welcome and congratulations to the Colorado College Class of 2019!

Can you believe it? It's finally here — your Commencement day! It seems like just yesterday I welcomed you to CC on an August afternoon in Shove Chapel. I vividly remember your sense of excitement — a palpable energy, much like you feel today. In my remarks, I encouraged you to push yourselves, to take risks, to capitalize on the opportunities that CC offered you. I also challenged you to do your part to make this great place even better.

Class of 2019, you rose to the challenge! You have embraced the opportunity of CC and made the most of your time here. You have rafted down rivers and stargazed at Baca, you have studied literature, art, ecology, language, and culture across the

country and around the globe. You have formed lasting bonds with faculty members and taken classes that made you question your beliefs. You've embarked on awe-inspiring adventures – together, you completed 103 Keller Venture grant projects, and 20 of you received Ritt Kellogg Expedition Grants. You joined, led, and founded clubs and organizations, launched startups, and explored your professional interests. 21 of you completed summer fellowships through the Public Interest Fellowship Program and 13 of you will go on to work as year-long PIFP fellows.

And you worked hard! You powered through final papers, presentations, and exams during 32 intense fourth weeks. Through the Block Plan, you have learned to focus, to immerse yourselves in a single subject, instilling the importance of being present as a means of solving complicated problems. You tried new things, took on disciplines and projects outside your comfort zones.

Sometimes you were wildly successful and sometimes you failed. And in failing, you built resilience, gaining the creative confidence to try again.

You were the second class to complete your senior theses in our renovated library. Hundreds of you holed yourselves up in Tutt's carrels, fueled by late night coffee from Susie B's. You

brought data to life in the GIS Lab and lost track of time brainstorming in group study rooms.

Your hard work and engagement have paid off. You are ready for your next adventure.

At CC, we are fortunate to attract remarkable young people like you from around the world: students who are creative, independent, thoughtful, and tenacious. Then, over your four years here, we provide you with opportunities, inside and outside the classroom, to build the knowledge, skills, and character to help you become lifelong learners, imaginative thinkers, and inspired leaders.

The liberal arts education you received at CC will equip you for both meaningful work and a meaningful life. The world in which you will live and lead requires flexibility in navigating diverse environments, multicultural understanding, and the ability to see things from various perspectives. In an age when AI is replacing humans, the future of the job market is uncertain. Yet, what is certain is that the skills you've gained through your CC education – a nimble mind, comfort with ambiguity, clear writing, and persuasive speaking – will be invaluable five, 10, and even 50 years from now.

Your CC education has also helped you to develop qualities that you will rely on throughout your lives — resilience, focus, humility, and creativity. Through co-curricular activities and half-block classes, you have embraced opportunities to build skills that complement your liberal arts education and will help you transition to the next chapter of your life.

Class of 2019, you took full advantage of your time here, but you also gave so much back to the college and the community.

You shared your stories and touched the community through SpeakEasy, CC's spoken word group, and Relations the Play. You elevated the conversation about art, design, and identity by bringing speakers like Chella Man and Danez Smith. You made the CC performance scene more inclusive, and brought to life the new LoCCal Festival. You elevated underrepresented musicians through B-Side Collective, and bonded around music of all kinds. You were avid participants in the CC orchestra and concert band, and played bluegrass at the Meltdown festival. With your voices, Ellement, Room 46, and the Back Row continued to wow audiences. You cheered for your friends at Battle of the Bands, Llamapalooza, and Dance Workshop.

The Fine Arts Center at Colorado College became part of your classroom, and you found new ways to engage in art and the community. You supported the FAC as student guides, interns, teachers, and performers.

You created and curated exhibits in the UnBlocked Gallery. Mellon artists-in-residence Melanie Yazzie and Virgil Ortiz inspired your creativity; hundreds of you joined Virgil's Revolution.

The southwest became your lab as you embarked on field study. You learned about water in the West and explored the geology of the Garden of the Gods. You studied the art and artifacts of the indigenous peoples who were here thousands of years before the first European stepped foot in Colorado. You learned about immigration policy along the U.S.-Mexico border, and worked with the Southern Poverty Law Center. You explored international climate policy at the UN Conference of the Parties in Germany and Poland. Members of your class led the Speech and Debate team to 2nd place in an international tournament in Berlin.

And you delved more deeply into subjects than you had ever thought possible, through summers spent doing collaborative

research with faculty mentors, some of you even co-authoring articles in academic journals.

You committed to community engagement through the Engaged Scholars Program. You collaborated with local organizations including TESSA, Pikes Peak Justice and Pro Bono Center, Concrete Couch, Service for Sight, and Memorial Hospital. You helped to restore our local waterway through the Good Idea Monument Creek Project. And, you gave back financially, with the vast majority of you contributing to your Senior Class Gift.

But, most importantly, you have impacted each other's lives and built supportive, inclusive communities. You mourned devastating losses together, and, in your grief, reached out and picked each other up. Members of the class of 2019 worked to develop the C\college's first Smudging and Pipe Ceremonies Policy and were instrumental in advocating for naming Tava Quad. This class has also been influential in making Outdoor Education trainings and trips more inclusive. You promoted multicultural understanding as you hosted annual celebrations of Diwali, Dia de los Muertos, Chinese New Year, and the NASU Powwow.

You advocated for respectful intimate relationships, as members of your class worked with our Title IX team and the Wellness Resource Center to incorporate peer support through START. At the beginning of the year, we were impressed to hear about seniors who were taking steps to set clear standards around consent for attendees at their off-campus events. And you spread campus awareness of the Department of Education's proposed changes to Title IX rules and organized comment writing.

You rooted for the Tigers, who won nine conference championships and 51 individual conference titles during your four years, including multiple wins for women's volleyball. Seniors led the hockey team in bringing the Gold Pan back to CC, and you sent 12 teams to NCAA tournament play, including multiple trips for women's lacrosse. You competed with your peers, faculty, and staff through our Intramural program, from ice broomball to inner-tube water polo. You were regional and national contenders in equestrian, Nordic skiing, climbing, rugby, road cycling, and Ultimate Frisbee. Members of your class founded CC's esports team, which won this year's SCAC conference championship!

You were proud of your classmates who won national recognition, including a first-place win at the University Physics Competition, four Fulbrights, a Watson fellowship, an I'm First fellowship, a Future Global Leaders fellowship, a Gilman scholarship, an NCAA postgraduate scholarship, an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, and awards from the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, the American Psychoanalytic Association, and Princeton in Asia.

You were impressed by each other's thesis presentations, senior recitals, films, art shows, and grad school acceptances. You applauded your friends in the productions of "DNA," "A Long Christmas Ride Home," "DanSix," and "Coriolanus or Helter Skelter." And, you laughed away the stress of fourth Monday watching TWIT's improv comedy.

Class of 2019 — you have been amazing!

While Shove Chapel was filled with excitement when you first assembled as a class back in 2015, there was also some trepidation. You felt a little lonely in that sea of other first-year students. You missed the comfort of your hometown relationships. You wondered who would be your friends, and if you were ready for this new challenge.

Today, you may feel some similar emotions. While it is clear that you are bubbling with excitement and anticipation for your futures, it is still hard to go. You are sad to leave your friends. The connections you made here are special. You are sad to leave your mentors. They challenged you in the classroom, on the playing field, and in your campus leadership roles, and they also guided you and cared for you.

I imagine that it is hard to leave this special place — with the beauty and opportunity of Colorado and our beloved mountain — but also this special place of learning, where you were immersed in the life of the mind with limited distraction. It's OK that it will be difficult to pack the car and drive away, because that means that good things happened for you at Colorado College.

Your class motto is a quote from political activist and academic Angela Davis: “You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time.” I hope that Davis’ words inspire you to continue pursuing change and advocating for justice.

When I look out at you, Class of 2019, I am optimistic about the future. The world needs changemakers like you — people who choose unity over divisiveness, love over hate, and hope over fear. I am eager to see how each of you leverage your CC education to

make a difference. You are a talented, kind, and courageous bunch, and I am confident that you will make us proud.

You will reminisce about this day, and the memories of your time here, for the rest of your life. As CC's president, I hope that the pride you feel as you walk across the stage today is rivaled only by the appreciation you feel for the education you received and the relationships you forged.

As you continue to learn and to grow, I encourage you to reflect on the times when you stumbled and even failed. Recall how caring faculty and staff and your classmates pushed you in the right direction and stretched your imagination and spirit. Keep in touch with each other and your mentors, and remember that CC will always welcome you home.

Congratulations Class of 2019! I look forward to celebrating with you and your families and friends following this ceremony.