

Louie Shi - Baccalaureate Welcome/Remarks Speech

President Tiefenthaler, Provost Townsend, Dean Wong, Dean Edmonds, Dean Mason, Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, families and friends, and my fellow Class of 2019. My name is Louie Shi. I double majored in Economics and Race, Ethnicity, & Migration Studies at Colorado College. Today, it is with great honor that I welcome you to the 2019 Colorado College Baccalaureate.

I would like to take a moment to recognize Philip Ooi, who would have been graduating this year, but sadly passed away in December 2017. Philip made many positive impacts on this campus and would have been a proud graduate of the Class of 2019.

Looking around this chapel, I see success, pride, fear, and a lot of hangover. I want to congratulate my fellow Class of 2019 on finishing this liberating and transformative journey at Colorado College. The diploma which we will receive tomorrow is a validation of our patience, hard work, and ethics.

It is a great privilege to receive the Colorado College education, and experience what this unique place has to offer. Our voyage to this destination inevitably comes with great responsibilities. We must be held accountable for this privileged educational experience and the opportunities it will bring. We must serve as agents who apply knowledge and ideas to bring tangible actions for self-examination, improvement, and change.

Our times at Colorado College should have gifted us more than just the mere will to use a Black Lives Matter hashtag, but to have the strength and courage to physically, and politically stop a white police officer from abusing Black and Brown bodies. The knowledge and skills we accumulated at Colorado College will guide us to our dream careers and a life of comfort, but comfort leads to complacency. Let's not forget, genocide happened right here before we defeated Nazi Germany, Trayvon still died after confederates surrendered – so did Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old, murdered by a Cleveland police officer for playing with a toy gun; Eric Garner, a father of six killed by the NYPD for selling loose cigarettes. Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Michael Brown, the list goes on and on. If the society had decided to treat every single one of us the same way as they treated this list of people, most of the Class of 2019 won't be able to make it to graduation.

Most of us are not special, we were just born lucky. What makes us special is not to receive the diploma tomorrow, but what we will accomplish with that diploma, and what we will build for others. To leave a legacy is to move beyond our selfish needs and wants of comfort, and ask, as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr once iterated, "life's most persistent and urgent question [], 'what are you doing for others?'" We shall not forget that Dr. King also said, "Whites, it must frankly be said, are not putting in a similar mass effort to re-educate themselves out of their racial ignorance. It is an aspect of their sense of superiority that the white people of America believe they have so little to learn."

Fundamentally, this diploma is a trust invested in us by our parents and loved ones, so we can have a better life, or have the mobility to be whom we wish to be. It is also a trust from the society, to challenge the status quo, to alleviate the consequences of crimes for which this country was built upon. It is time to hold ourselves accountable for the privilege and knowledge bestowed upon us. It is time for us to represent Colorado College as a catalyst for social progress. My plea for us is to stand as a force of betterment and not only fight for our right, but what is right.

I also have a message for my fellow graduates and students of color, in the words of Nipsey Hussle: "The game is gonna test you, never fold. Stay 10 toes down. It's not on you, it's in you. What is in you, they can't take away."

Again, congratulations to the Class of 2019 for this incredible accomplishment. Thank you all.

Seth Wilson - Introduction for Baccalaureate Speaker Professor Jane Hilberry

It is a great honor to introduce this year's Baccalaureate speaker. Professor Jane Hilberry graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Oberlin College with a bachelor's degree in English, then continued her education at Indiana University, where she earned master's degrees in literature and creative writing, as well as a Ph.D. in Medieval and Renaissance literature. She joined the Colorado College faculty in 1988.

Today, she is the Nancy Bryson and C. William Schlosser Professor in the Arts, professor of English, and professor of creativity and innovation. In addition to teaching at Colorado College, she served for a decade as a faculty member in the Art of the Executive Leader Program at Canada's Banff Centre. She has published three books of poetry, including "Still the Animals Enter," "Body Painting," which won the Colorado Book Award for Poetry, and "This Awkward Art" which was co-authored by her father Conrad Hilberry. In 2018, Professor Hilberry won the Cantor Award from Telluride Literary Arts for the best poem for a Colorado poet, and she has been published in a multitude of journals and anthologies. She has been featured in Art Exhibitions, collaborated and performed with dozens of people, read her work all over the country, and lead a variety of workshops. Honestly, I don't know how she does it all.

From Professor Hilberry's numerous accomplishments, we can all see that she is committed to the adventure that is living as a human being. Her passion for the arts in one of mythic proportions, as is her dedication to her students. She is a professor who shows up to change lives, to foster independent thinking, and above all, inspire students to believe they are capable of anything. My voice alone could not possibly capture the impact she has had on students here, so here is something a recent student of hers had to say:

Maya Day, Class of 2020, says "To her, poetry is the creative process, and through her teaching I've learned to loosen the grip of my mind's reins and enjoy works in progress. She makes writing free and full of joy."

Professor Hilberry helped make my education at CC one of joy. She has been my advisor since I arrived here, turned professor, turned mentor, and next year I will be working with her as a paraprofessional. Without her constant support, I would not be standing here today. She has showed me what it means to open myself to others through various arts, to let in my obsessions, to treasure minutia, and greet what is in front of me.

The original reason I came to CC was to pursue a degree in poetry, which I will receive tomorrow, and I remember thinking how amazing it was to have a real poet like her leading me through this journey. But one of my favorite things about her is that she acknowledges it is often as important to let the universe lead us, or for us to lead ourselves. Professor Hilberry has this huge basket overflowing with collaged cards in her home. The cards vary in size and colors, and on each there are images and words, some that make sense, and others that make none. She encourages people to ask the basket a question, draw a card, and see where the response takes them.

College is no doubt a place that will move you, that will change you. And it can be terrifying, because what if the world brings you to a situation you are unsure how to handle? Professor Hilberry inspires me to not live in fear that I will fail, but to live knowing I will fail. Failure is impossible to avoid, so I must embrace and create from it to succeed. Only then will I become my best self.

I'd like to end this introduction with the words of Ross Gay, a poet that Professor Hilberry taught in my last class with her. I didn't truly understand these words until she came into my life. I have always been stuck on the age old question: where does meaning come from? I wanted to understand everything around me. I wanted a presentation to tell me why I am here, why any of us are here. Professor Hilberry instead taught me how to accept the obscurity of the world, and instead enjoy questions. From his poem "Spoon," Ross Gay writes:

"I wish one single thing made sense.

To which I say: Oh get over yourself.
That's not the point."

Please join me in welcoming, Professor Jane Hilberry.

Baccalaureate Speaker, Professor Jane Hilberry

Friends and family members of the Class of 2019, distinguished colleagues, Dean Wong and Provost Townsend, President Tiefenthaler, members of the Board of Trustees, I am deeply honored to be here to speak with you today. I would like to begin by recognizing each of you for all you have done to bring our seniors to the point of graduating — tomorrow!— from college. And to the seniors, congratulations on all YOU have done to reach this momentous point, when you bring your years at Colorado College to a close and begin creating what comes next.

I'm so happy we're all here together.

Thank you, Seth, for that generous introduction. I also want to thank all the students who are contributing to the Baccalaureate service today. And I want to express my special gratitude to my senior poets. Working with you has been an inspiration and a lot of fun.

My subject today is creativity. Just as a starting point for thinking about creativity, I'd like to ask you to think of the LAST time you did something creative. Just see if you can identify that time.

That's good, thanks. Just keep that in mind as we start to think about what constitutes creativity.

We often think of creativity as being the domain of artists — and it is, of course, in profoundly important ways. Artists have a very deep and exacting relationship to the creative process. But I want to ask you to think today about creativity more broadly to think of it as an everyday phenomenon that touches every aspect of life.

I did a little crowdsourcing for this talk. I got curious about the creativity of this senior class. I invited the seniors to tell me what they have created during their years at Colorado College. I gave them cards with the words "I created" at the top and asked them to complete the sentence.

Here are some of the responses:

I created apple and pumpkin pie...from scratch!
I created a novel synthesis reaction using reactive benzenes
I created space for more indigenous and first-generation students
I created a lot of really great Spotify playlists while procrastinating!
I created a small business.

Other items on the list of what you seniors created include:

A love of insects. A more inclusive space at the climbing gym. The best cover band in rock-n-roll history. A thesis I'm proud of. Some marches. Belief in my own strength. A championship-

winning esports program. A hell of a lot of trouble. Space for B-Side. A club for women in STEM. A strong habit of playing the Shove piano late at night.

And:

The best friends I could have ever had

I'm so impressed with this list (and there are many more wonderful responses—too many to include here). I'm taken especially by the quality of joyfulness I feel in these answers, and your sense of satisfaction with what you have made. In all of these cases, where something didn't exist before, one of you seniors saw a possibility and brought it into being. The college you are leaving is not the same college you entered four years ago because, in ways large and small, you have recreated it.

It's clear that you have the power to move through the world creatively and to change the environments you inhabit. And even so it can seem overwhelming to leave the space of a small college and move into something entirely different after graduation. I'm sure that you seniors know, in a visceral way, that you are in a big moment of transition.

I believe that you are stepping into a powerfully creative moment, a time when all that creative energy you have already demonstrated can take on even larger dimensions. It is, in a structural sense, a creative moment. To suggest why this moment is structurally creative, I need to talk a little bit more about creativity and how it works.

When I tell people that I teach creativity, they often ask, can you TEACH creativity? I say, I don't have to.

People are already creative.

You're creative when you can't find the hammer so you take off your shoe and pound the nail in with the heel. The other day I was at Creative Mondays with Seth, who just introduced me, and he wanted to sew something but didn't have a needle, so he used a nail and a paperclip, and it worked! Being creative is essentially about seeing multiple ways to accomplish something. To do this requires the ability to generate possibilities. In fact, I believe that the very heart of creativity lies in being able to generate possibilities.

This ability is crucial, because if we CANNOT generate new ways to do things, we are stuck with the status quo. As long as we CAN see possibilities, we are never stuck.

You might well ask, if everyone is already creative, what do I DO when I teach creativity?

It's true that we are all creative, we can all generate possibilities, and go on to execute those novel ideas, but at times that creativity is hard to access.

What I can do for students is to use WHAT I KNOW ABOUT CREATIVE PROCESS AND HOW THE IMAGINATION WORKS to set up conditions in which their creativity will thrive.

Above all else, I need to establish a space in which students can set aside the pressure to perform so they can just enjoy exploring something they are curious about. Students need a space in which they can be kind to themselves and each other and to their seedlings of ideas. That, for me, is the essential ingredient in fostering creativity.

But there are also some specific tactics that I use to help students access their own creative natures. I want to talk today about one particular strategy, and this is a shortcut you yourselves can use at moments when you find it difficult to see the alternatives in a situation. Or just at a moment when you want to bring something new into the world.

I want to suggest that you can see new possibilities by bringing two unlike things together. In the gap between those unlike things, your imagination will generate ideas and insights. Unlike things, gap, insights.

I discovered the power of this creative gap through writing poems. I grew up in a literary family. My father was a poet and my mother was an avid reader of fiction. Both of them cared a lot about words, both of them were teachers. (My decision to become a creative writing teacher was not the most creative thing I ever did!)

When I was fourteen, I began writing poems myself. One of the most thrilling parts of writing, I found, is the surprise that happens when you stumble upon a metaphor that leads somewhere unexpected.

When I write, I don't know ahead of time what the poem will be about. I write and I see what happens.

Just to give one example, one time as I was writing, a poem emerged that was all about keeping the heart protected. Then, for some reason the image arose of a red wagon, those red Radio Flyer wagons we played with when we were little, the kind with those awkward handles. Incidentally, we lived on a street with a big hill. I wrote:

*When she was a girl, she had a red wagon.
Her heart's like that, something she can pull
with a handle, but hard to steer
if it gets going downhill.*

I was surprised by the way the seemingly random image of the red wagon led me to something that is true about the heart — once it builds up momentum, you're not going to control it.

There is no inherent similarity between a human heart and a child's wagon. Those are two very different things. Here's a heart. Here's a red wagon. But when you bring those two unlike things together, surprising insights can arise. In fact, it is the gap between the two things — the heart

and the wagon — that gives rise to the fresh, creative thought — a thought that surprised me, and reflected a deeper truth about the subject.

When you bring unlike things together, it shocks you out of your customary way of seeing and invites novel possibilities.

I recently watched a TEDx talk by David Sturt that demonstrated how bringing unlike things together can yield novel ideas when it comes to solving real-world problems. There was a medical group in London that had had several deaths at the moment when patients were being transferred from the operating room to the hospital rooms where they would stay overnight. By chance, a doctor was watching a Formula One race and was taken by how quickly and accurately the pit crews worked during races.

In his mind he brought these two unlike things together. He thought, why not see if the Formula One pit crews have something to teach us about our transfer process? He actually contacted a racing team in Italy. When the pit crews watched a video of the hospital transfers, they said, “this is chaos! we’re surprised you don’t have more deaths.” They helped the hospital workers refine their practices, and the mortality rates went way down.

Sociologist Ronald Burt talks about this phenomenon of the creative gap in slightly different terms. He describes the gaps between social groups — for example, between doctors and formula one racers — as structural holes. He says that the most creative people are actually not the ones who are most deeply embedded within their peer groups, such as those who are squarely at the center of their disciplines. The people who, as he puts it, are most “susceptible” to good ideas are those at the edges of their fields, because they are more likely to connect with others across structural holes and to import and adapt their practices. That’s the doctor who also happens to watch Formula One racing — and who revolutionizes medical care because his mind is working to bridge structural holes.

So, remember I said at the beginning of this talk that you seniors are at a structurally creative moment in your lives? You are, in Ronald Burt’s terms, at the edge of a big structural hole. You have your social ties within your CC communities, you have the disciplinary knowledge of your major area of study, you have cultivated certain ways of seeing and being. And now, you are embarking on a time when you will inevitably encounter people in new contexts, new communities, with backgrounds and forms of expertise different from your own. This is the greatest creative gap ever!! It’s a magnificent structural hole!

When you bring your experience and expertise into the new communities you are moving into, both you and those communities will be “susceptible,” to new perceptions and good, new ideas. Both you and those communities will be transformed.

One last note on this subject of the creative power of gaps. Research demonstrates that cities with significant diversity, cities that bring together people who are unlike in terms of ethnicity

and sexual orientation, for example, have the most thriving creative cultures. The same can be said for countries.

A colleague of mine reminded me that Baccalaureate is traditionally a time for spiritual reflection. I told him that for me, creativity and spirituality are connected. In fact, as I think about it, my belief in the power of creativity is a form of faith for me. I have faith that no matter how dark or uncertain things around us may seem — and I don't have to itemize the ways things seem dark and uncertain at this historical moment — that we still have the power to respond, because we can see the possibility of a different world and we can generate strategies for how to create it. Maybe this time of collision between radically unlike views in our country is actually a call to radical creativity.

I want to assure you seniors when you leave the chapel today that as you face the big, intimidating gap between college and what comes next, you are stepping into an incredibly fertile and creative moment, and that you have, already, the imagination and the skills and the substance to navigate that gap and to enter into the world of possibilities it affords.

This isn't to say that it's easy. Moving into a creative space is scary. It requires a lot of nerve, because by definition creating something new means stepping beyond what you know. Whether you have a job all lined up or whether you don't know what you will do the moment after you graduate tomorrow — either way, you can't know what's next. You have to create it as you go.

So embrace the chance to put yourself in proximity with difference. Work with people whose minds and mindsets are different from yours. Collaborate with others in areas you know nothing about. In those gaps, your creativity will come to your aid. It will actually help to take care of you in this transition.

Our Commencement speaker, Oprah Winfrey, has repeatedly asked herself and invited others to ask of themselves, "What do I know for sure?" We live in a time of great uncertainty, and I don't claim to know much for sure. But I do know for sure that we are creating our way forward.

I know for sure that what happens next — in our lives, our communities, our culture, and on our planet, will happen because we create it.

BIG PAUSE

At this moment I want to invite all of us — including the faculty and staff, parents, friends, and our seniors — to take a minute to ask ourselves, "What will we create next?"

I don't just mean this rhetorically — I want to ask you, literally, to think about something you would like to create next.

Maybe you, too, would like to make an apple pie from scratch. Maybe you want to organize a march or play piano in a chapel at night. Maybe you want to crochet a coat for a tree. I don't know what it will be, but some part of you does know.

PAUSE

In a minute, the musicians will come on stage and offer you a beautiful rendition of "Amazing Grace." But in this little gap of time, after I finish speaking and before they begin playing, I want to invite you to pick up the card that was in your program that says at the top, "What Will We Create Next?" (you should have pens in your pews as well)

Write down an idea, maybe a crazy idea, maybe a secret, long-held aspiration or a forgotten hope — write down something that you'd love to create next.

Even if it seems impossible, just write it down. There are no tests at CC anymore for this senior class, no one will check your work!

If you choose to share your idea, you can do that after the service. If you don't want to share your idea, you can tuck it into your robe or your jacket and keep it to yourself — at least for now.

So in a minute, take advantage of this creative gap between speech and music to write down something you'd love to create. And think of it! There are 1,000 of us here in this chapel. If all 1,000 of us went out and created something, even something small, think about how much we could change. And think how much joy would that bring into the world!

Have fun with your ideas — and thank you so much for sharing this space with me today.