

Student Commencement Speech

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Northern Essex Community College, Class of 2017

Good morning, Northern Essex Community College Graduating Class of 2017! (cheer) We all came to NECC with many dreams, and today we have the opportunity to celebrate our success. I hope we will continue to live out more of our dreams as we leave NECC.

I would like to share with you a quote that I grew up hearing, but it is now more meaningful than ever. Benito Juarez once stated that “Among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others, is peace” (Entre los individuos como entre las naciones, el respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz). Juarez was a man of pure indigenous blood. However, with his strength and courage, he became a successful lawyer and eventually a president of my beloved country. Many remember him as the Abraham Lincoln of Mexico for his incessant fight for human rights and justice. If we know anything about our history in America, it is those of us who continue to honor and respect humans rights, regardless of our role in society, who will push the culture towards one where we all can and should have a voice. In my opinion, what makes NECC a great institution, and is truly its

biggest strength, is its diversity. Among students, professors, advisors, and administrative staff, I love entering a classroom and see students of all ages, different races, ethnic backgrounds, different religions, sexual preferences, abilities, veteran status and returning students of all identities. I'm thankful to be part of a community working towards acceptance and understanding of differences, and who embraces what makes us unique. However, within our society, we unfortunately in the midst of difficult times due to misconceptions and a lack of tolerance. In 2016, a political figure referred to Mexicans that come to the United States as "rapists and criminals".

I'm Mexican and I am not a criminal.

What I am is a preschool teacher. I work in Lawrence with under-represented families, while I finished my degree at NECC as a full-time student. I participated in extracurricular activities as much as my busy schedule allows me, because I'm also a mother of 2 years old, Brianna. It takes lots of dedication, sacrifices and time management skills to balance all this responsibilities, but where there's a will, there's a way. My Hispanic community knows that our fight to defend the dignity of all our people has

not been an easy road. This is especially true in areas, like higher education, where we lack representation. We are a living testament that these stereotypes and generalizations are incorrect. This achievement represents an opportunity to create meaningful change. (say in Spanish)

My academic journey hasn't been a walk in the park, as matter of fact, I like to compare it to a rollercoaster ride. With many ups, and downs, and curves, and stops, and even times where I was going backwards. When I started this journey, I was an undocumented student. I registered at a community college in Arizona, paying out-of-state tuition, and only taking 1 or 2 classes at a time. At one point, I had to take a couple semesters off, and then I moved to Massachusetts where I registered at NECC. I unfortunately lost many credits in the transition. It took me 7 years to complete my associate degree. However, despite the many challenges I faced throughout this journey, one thing always remain consistent, my love and commitment for education.

Fellow grads, I would like to congratulate all of you for this achievement. Whether you are off to work on your field of study, you're taking a break, or you're transferring to a four year institution, I wish you nothing but success.

I applaud those of you who are graduating against many odds such as limited economic resources, a lack of support, immigration status, belonging to a community that may not be recognize as competitive as others. Also those who are caring for a family and those having to work to sustain your family.

Where are my Early Childhood Education grads? Ladies, although society underestimates the importance of our role, we know exactly how vital we are in our communities. We are responsible for the formation of our future generations. We are the ones who set the foundation for other teachers to build upon. Therefore, we must provide a safe, healthy, nurturing and responsive environment for every child. Ladies, thank you for your commitment to care for and educate children in our community.

I would like to thank a few people who in one way or another has supported me throughout my time at NECC, Kristen Arnold from the PACE program, Professor Lis Espinoza, my Early Childhood Education professors Deirdre, Gail, Jody. Thank you for your guidance and your commitment to the formation of great teachers.

I would like to thank my family for their love, support and patience, especially to the wonderful woman who not only gave me life, but also devoted her life to raise my three sisters and me all by herself.

“Amalia, eres la mujer mas fuerte y trabajadora que conosco, gracias por tus enseñanzas y por tu gran ejemplo, un dia te prometi que me verias aqui, asi que este exito y los que vengan son dedicados ti”

My mother is my role model, she provided me the life skills and tools that I needed to overcome every obstacles. My goal is to become my daughter’s role model as well. Brianna as you go through the terrible Two, (We all know what that means, endless tantrums) you my not understand that everything that mommy is doing is for you, but you’re already getting the message. The other day, she saw me doing homework, so she went and got her pink toy laptop, she sat next to me and said, “Mommy I do my homework and you do your homework, ok?” Tears came down my eyes, because I realized that all the sacrifices are worth it, because I’m creating in her a life long love for learning.

Lastly, to close, I would like to thank the committee of faculty and staff for giving me this amazing opportunity to be this year commencement

speaker. I want to once again recognize the achievement of the NECC 2017 graduating students. We have achieved our goals. For some this is a culmination of hard work and dedication. For others this is a step on a journey to bigger and greater things. Regardless, let us celebrate our success and persistence in this moment. We made it. We are here. What is next?