

## **2021 Student Commencement Speech**

### **Health Professions Ceremony at 5 pm**

**Paola M. Sierra De Valerio of Lawrence: AA: General Studies: Health**

#### **Specialization**

Thank you, President Glenn and the committee of faculty.

Good afternoon, Northern Essex Community College Graduating Classes of 2020 and 2021.

My name is Paola m sierra de Valerio, and It is such an honor to be here and represent the center of health professions. Congratulations to all of the graduates and to your families who are celebrating this day with you.

I want to share a quote that has traveled with me over the years.

Paolo Coelho stated in one of his books, "When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve It."

Many people around the world have opportunities to make their dreams come true. However, others need to work harder and invest the double effort to make their dreams come true, and I am one of them. That is why I moved from Spain to the United States, where dreams come true.

I was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, where I had a poor but happy childhood. At the age of 16, I moved to Spain with my mother, where I took English classes while working to help support my family. I always wanted to live in the United States , and 7 years ago it happend, with just a suitcase, a dream and one friend in this country.

While living in New York, I had an appointment, and they asked me to fill out a form; I couldn't do it alone, so I ask the staff for help, but no one could help me. I had to call a friend to help me translate the form. I felt useless at the time, and it was that day that I promised myself that I would learn English no matter what.

Being an immigrant in this country without family, working 6 days a week, and going to English classes was not easy, but it was definitely worth it.

Soon after arriving in Lawrence, I decided to attend Northern Essex Community College. Imagine me on the first day of college classes, years after graduating from high school. I was so excited that I cried in class that day. I would compare it to the exact emotion your feel right now, knowing that we have already completed this journey.

However, being a college student, it wasn't all flowers and sweets. I was one of you, when I had to work two jobs and take 3 classes while completing my Community Health Worker certificate. Then, repeating the same long journeys of work, housework, evening classes, and homework while completing my associate degree, it was overwhelming but that didn't stop me from working on my dreams.

Like me, I think many of you had to face different challenges to complete this journey. Problems with immigration status, poverty, limited English proficiency, and lack of time for your children; were some of the issues we went through. But today, we are here, and we learned to be stronger and persevere.

In like manner, NECC taught me that success is achieved with determination and effort. Thanks to what I've learned, I am an Outstanding student and part of 2 honors societies. Also, NECC motivates me to keep pursuing my career by working toward a bachelor's degree in Health Psychology.

In closing, I would like to thank few people that supported me through my academic journey. To Professor Steven Mathis for showing me the GRIT I had in me. To all the advisors at the PACE program. To my Advisor Kathy Hudson and all staff and faculty members at NECC. Thank you for the opportunity to be the student speaker of this year.

Thanks to my family, who always supported me all these years. Above all, Thanks to God for letting me live this fantastic moment.

Fellow grads, we did it! Let's celebrate this day today and keep pursuing our dreams and believing in ourselves. Remember , the only way to conquer is with passion and GRIT.

Thank you.