

Student Commencement Speech
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Good morning, Northern Essex Community College Graduating Class of 2018! Believe it or not-WE DID IT! This is the moment we have dreamed of when we sat uncomfortably in our first class, wondering **when** and **how** or- on days before exams-**if** we will ever graduate. Today we turned those dreams into reality.

I, too, remember vividly that first college class, although that moment took place 17 years ago, in Romania, my native country. Little did I know back then that, in a matter of a year, I was going to drop out of college, start a family and immigrate to Italy. I left my country thinking that I was going to continue my college education in Italy right away. But then, life happened: jobs, kids, and immigration struggles which, my fellow graduates, I am sure many of you find familiar. For a long time, my dream of going back to college seemed like a distant memory.

After 13 years, my husband and I decided to move to the US because of the economic opportunities here. We, along with our two kids, came here on December 24th, 2012. And while we regarded that day as our own Christmas miracle, we couldn't stop ourselves from feeling all the conflicting emotions: fear, excitement, relief and...fear again.

A lot of that fear dissipated once I enrolled at NECC. Yes, I went back to college at 32, expecting to see in my classes peers that were much younger than me. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised to encounter people from all walks of life, and from all backgrounds, not only among the students but among the professors, advisors and

campus leadership as well. It was precisely this striking diversity that allowed me to feel accepted and supported in my dream of pursuing a college degree.

My fellow grads, I applaud you for your amazing achievement. Many of you had to face obstacles that might have seemed insurmountable, challenges such as poverty, problems with your immigration status, limited English proficiency, or lack of support. However, you all rose to the occasion, every single time, even if this sometimes meant studying after 9 pm (because that's when your kids went to sleep) until 2 o'clock in the morning, sleeping 4 hours, going to your full-time job and repeating this cycle the next day. You are the real heroes of this day and I feel honored and privileged to have known so many of you.

To my fellow Engineering Grads-Where are you, guys? I can't hear you! While it's well known that knowledge means power, I think that all of us in Engineering interpret power as current times voltage or, also, change in work over a period of time. Truth be told, folks in Engineering think in very concrete terms but I think we got it right this time! So, my advice to you is this: just like voltage, you need to put your hard work in and you'll reap the results-don't be concerned with how long it takes to be where you want to be. Engineers know the current will take you there, sooner or later, and this lesson is something all of today's graduates have learned.

I found this to be true in my case, when I came to the States. To be honest, I did not choose Engineering- Engineering chose me. From the multitude of jobs I applied for when I came to this country, the first job I got an answer from was an assembler position for an electronics company. I did not think much about it at that time-but after a while I became very interested in the field and, when I applied to NECC, I decided not to pursue my original major from my Romanian university and, instead, I enrolled in the

Technology and Engineering program. And, while there, an amazing thing happened-I decided to stick with it. Suddenly, I did not allow myself to find any excuse not to finish it- not the fact that I had a family; not the fact that I had a full-time job; not the economic constraints; and certainly, not the fact that I was in a new country whose language I had yet to master. And that's when I knew that Engineering was my call. Well, of course, all this might have been a bit different if Macy's had offered me that sales floor position...

You see, in life, sometimes you need to be open to what comes your way, embrace the unexpected and get ready to fight for dreams that might seem impossible. As the great Romanian historian and politician Nicolae Iorga said: "Never say it can't be done but begin with "let's try." ("Nu spune niciodata nu se poate ci incepe cu sa vedem.")

Fellow grads, I am sure that all of us have someone who helped us get where we are today. As we are all thinking about those who have impacted our lives, I would like to take a moment to thank a few people whose tremendous support made me continue my academic journey, especially when thoughts of giving up would make me question my call. To Professor Habib Maagoul -you revealed a whole different math universe for me and made me truly believe in my mathematical abilities, even if all my life prior to taking your courses I considered myself a mediocre math student. To Professor Paul Chanley- you never let me give up in your Circuits and Physics I courses although sometimes I questioned what I was even doing there. To my advisor, Stephanie Wares- you guided me along each step of the way with your extraordinary patience and kindness. To all staff and faculty members at NECC- thank you for your commitment to the students and your continuous support. And of course... to all the "Electrical

Engineering Secret Society” colleagues for all the “enlightenment moments” we shared together.

I would also like to thank my family for their unconditional love and encouragement. To my husband, Florin, and our kids, Emma and Marcello- what I feel for you cannot even be described in words. You made me want to be the best version of myself and I can only hope that one day I can repay you for all the sacrifices you made for me, for all the countless times in which instead of hugging and holding you as you slept, I had to stay up studying.

To my mother, Marica- you were an educator for almost 40 years but more importantly than that, you are the person who made me believe learning is possible at any age, in any circumstances. You left your home in Romania and came to live with us in the US six months a year, every year (and sometimes twice a year) to help me achieve my dream. Multumesc, draga mama.

To my sister, Nicoleta-you are my personal hero. Thank you for all the times you helped me push through, for all the times you transformed my tears into smiles, for all the times you told me: “Come on, Malina, I think you can do better than that!” You made a promise to our dad years ago that one day I, too, will graduate from college. Well, not only you kept your promise-you exceeded it. My only regret is that our dad, who passed away 6 years ago is not here today.

And above all, I would like to thank God for bringing all these amazing people in my life, for giving me, through them, the strength to carry on and for allowing me to experience this moment. I hope I am worthy of it.

Lastly, I would like to thank the committee of faculty and staff for the extraordinary honor of being this year's commencement speaker. My final thoughts are for the NECC 2018 graduates whose tremendous achievement I want to recognize once again. Let us celebrate this remarkable accomplishment, which encompasses determination, courage and sacrifice. And let us seize the amazing opportunities that life has in store for us with a Julius Caesar-inspired attitude: "Veni, vidi, vici"- "I came, I saw, I conquered."

Thank you!