

Student Speaker Allen Lyon's Speech

Hello everyone. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. For those of you who are not too sure who I am, my name is Allen Lyon, and I have been the Student Government Vice President for the last academic year.

Today is about all of us and our accomplishments. Attending community college is rewarding but also not easy. Many of us are what people refer to as non-traditional students who come back and take classes in between our day jobs, our kids, and countless other responsibilities. We all should be extremely proud of ourselves for sticking through it and arriving at this day.

When I was thinking about going back to college, the idea of attending community college was not high on my list. I thought that it would not give me the "real" college experience. I no longer hold that belief. I have seen the countless opportunities students are offered from contributing to club life, participating in student government, and attending the many free events put together for undergraduates by the Student Programs Office. I have seen the relationships between peers blossom into what seems to be lifelong friendships, and I have seen faculty and staff offer all the mentoring a student could ever need. Granted, we do not get a dorm or a school football team, but give me a more affordable tuition and a smaller student to professor ratio, and I'm all in. Plus, sharing a room with someone half my age seemed more like baby sitting than a good time.

My college experience probably looks a lot like all of yours. I struggled, I studied relentlessly for Professor Dopirak's lab practicals, and I even missed out on some lunch dates with friends. But today we are graduating, and all those missed plans and late nights all seem worth it in this very moment.

Robin Williams says in *Good Will Hunting*, "You'll have bad times, but it'll always wake you up to the good stuff you weren't paying attention to." This quote is made even more apparent since Covid. The pandemic has challenged me in ways I could never imagine. It has challenged all of us. I went from seeing my Three Rivers friends and studying with them to being locked in my house doing it alone. I went from seeing my professors face to face to watching them glitch out on WebEx and missing important lectures because my computer decided to crash mid-PowerPoint. But this pandemic has also forced me to value many of the things I have taken for granted, and it made me grasp that I am capable of far more than I give myself credit for. I was so caught up with getting that paper in for Professor Marvin or thinking, "how will I ever learn these derivatives" in Professor Molkenhuth's class. Now I sit here reflecting on my semester and I can just as easily pick out the great times, laughing with friends I made within my major, planting vegetables in the spring to be donated in the summer with the Three Rivers Environmental Club, or the countless laughs in the zoom meetings for student government, and especially given the opportunity to take part in an internship with Kathy Dorion working with Dr. Khan-Bureau on her amazing diatom research.

We all hold these preconceived ideas of what we are capable of. I am here to say that those ideas need to be broken sometimes. We have our cap and gown, and I realize now if Covid cannot stop us from achieving our goals, nothing can. The time we have spent here has been predictable. We had a plan of study, we knew what we had to get done, and we were given a syllabus to keep us on track and now that all ends. You get a diploma, and you might enter the work force. The person sitting next to you might join the navy while, I and a few others head off to UConn. Even with how happy this day is for all of us, it's also a bit intimidating. But when it feels terrifying to leap, that's almost precisely when you do or else you end up stagnant and in the same place.

I wish you all tremendous success in everything that you do. I hope life brings you exactly where you need to be and just know that entire Covid class of 2021 is rooting for you. I would like to give a special thanks to Alycia, Diba, Kevin, Don, and Bruce because without your mentorship I don't think I would be standing here today. And with that, I thank you all and wish you, the entire class of 2021, the best of luck in every endeavor. Thank you.