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Commencement Address May 28, 2015
Manchester Community College
Pamela Trotman Reid, President, University of Saint Joseph

Good evening! President Glickman, trustees, faculty, staff, distinguished guests, families, and most of all, graduates of the class of 2015!

I am delighted to be with you tonight on the occasion of your graduation from Manchester Community College — an event that marks a significant change in the course of your lives. To be witness to and participant in this celebration is an honor and I thank you for inviting me to be your speaker.

I have to tell you that I am especially delighted to be here at MCC since President Glickman and I have known each other for over ten years; we were each provosts at institutions that partnered in Chicago before we moved here, just as MCC now partners with the University of Saint Joseph.

I also feel a special affinity to your institution, since my very first academic position as an instructor of psychology was at the community college of Philadelphia; it was there I began to develop my teaching skills with my newly earned master's degree and as I pursued my doctorate.

I have to tell you that I learned as much from the students at CCP as they learned from me, in fact, I am certain that I learned more from them. The diversity of students there, just like here, was phenomenal – not only ethnic diversity, but students who were young and old, veterans and homemakers, able-bodied and physically challenged, immigrants and native-born. Intermixed among those who had been under-prepared in high school were those who were already academically talented. They, like you, were all wonderful students, motivated and sincere in their aspirations, it was a terrifying responsibility for a young instructor, and a challenge that I would never have to the same extent in the rest of my career at four-year institutions.

I taught at CCP for several years, and although it was almost 30 years ago, I still remember many of my students, the experiences I had there, and the lessons my students taught me. Probably my number one lesson was humility --

I learned that it was not all about me, but about my students and meeting their needs. Probably my most memorable lesson came in my first year of teaching; an elderly woman who was in my class came up to me at the end of the term and told me that she had really enjoyed my intro to psych class. Just as I was starting to feel rather pleased with myself she deflated me by adding that she was surprised my class was so interesting, she had only enrolled in it because the ceramics class was full. Competing with ceramics was not the challenge I had hoped for, but, still, she did feel that her time and efforts were well spent -- so I chalked it up as a success.

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Throughout my career I have been repeatedly humbled and proud as I saw students who were able to surmount incredible odds of managing jobs, family, and classes; those who surpassed the low expectations of past teachers and the labels of inadequacy that had been imposed on them; and those who had little or no moral support from friends and family. I remember the distress of one woman who had been married for more than 25 years and was taunted by friends because she dared to return to school. They thought that she should stay at home, because, as they told her, "your husband can support you." I remember being very moved by the 57 year-old man who quit his job as a manager in an exterminating company to become a teacher and mentor in a program for teenage boys; and the 32-year old widow with two young children, who moved past her depression to realize that she now was the head of her family and the only role model her children would have. I was so impressed by the young woman challenged with total hearing loss, the result of childhood measles, by the veteran struggling with PTSD, and I was very concerned about the young man who had to choose between paying for his classes and getting the car that his girlfriend wanted him to have. I remember the girl who was the only one from her high school to go to college who now felt she no longer fit into her community, and the immigrant student dealing with loneliness along with learning in a totally new culture. I remember them all, along with so many others over the years.

I have been humbled by their searing motivation to succeed and make a better life through education. They, like you, sought to become more engaged and responsible citizens and to use their education to build a future for themselves and their children. I continue to be awed by the strength that students such as you have shown in reaching out for higher and greater successes. I recognize what you have done to get to this point.

It has been a long road and you've overcome many obstacles to get here: you have juggled schedules, balanced work and family responsibilities. You have struggled with public transportation or traffic; you have survived too much fast food, long nights of cramming, and New England winters. You have completed requirements in mathematics, science and literature. You have overcome final exams, mastered term projects, and pushed yourselves in ways that exceeded even your own expectations.

Class of 2015, I commend you on your perseverance and congratulate you on your success. It may have taken you two years? three years? four years? Five, six? However many years, the result is the same -- access to enhanced opportunities at work, new careers that await you, and your own broadened skills and capabilities -- that is the power and potential of education.

In the process of learning about MCC, I have grown to appreciate its values and goals and I admire the dedicated faculty and staff who serve this institution. This is a special place where students from Manchester and the surrounding towns come together to study, develop career skills, grow and achieve their dreams. If education is the route to a better life, MCC has provided you with the road map and the traveling shoes. If

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education is a door to opportunity, MCC has provided you the key as it delivers “life-changing knowledge.”

This is the good news, graduates, this is the exciting news... you have the road map, the key, and the shoes to take you where you want to go.... But you need more. Yes, more. These years were just the beginning and if your professors have been successful you have learned how much more there is to learn. If you have been successful, you recognize how much more you have ahead of you to reach the heights of which you are capable.

Tonight you stand at a decision point. The knowledge you have acquired has moved you to a different station in life. From here you can stop, fold up that map and say “far enough” or you can recognize that there is more to discover about yourself and about your life.

Graduates, I encourage you to be thoughtful and deliberate as you weigh your options. Determine what is really important in your life; what goals will you regret **not** pursuing?

Please don't believe those who question the value of your educational choices. Analyses in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal among others, continue to find with certainty that those with more education fare better than those with less. It is not only about money, but we do know from longstanding research that over the course of a lifetime, those with a bachelor's degree earn on average significantly more per year than those with an associate's degree, just as you will earn more than those without this credential. Indeed, research suggests those with more education also live longer and healthier lives, as do their children.

Graduates of the class of 2015, I encourage you to celebrate the accomplishments of your journey thus far, but then continue to travel a bit farther down the path. Set your sights on a baccalaureate degree and beyond. Continue to invest in yourself and your career; the payback is well worth it.

Tonight we celebrate the end of your tenure here at Manchester Community College. As you lace up your traveling shoes and walk out the door to your future...I urge you to keep learning, keep striving, and keep up the courage and determination that brought you this far.

I wish you God speed, Class of 2015! And heartfelt congratulations! We are all eager to see what your next victory will be.