

**Text of MCC 2018 Co-Valedictorian Address**  
**Robert Bailey**  
**May 24, 2018**

Hi, I'm Rob. We haven't known each other very long, so I hope you won't think it's too rude if I start by asking a favor – please bear with me while I take a moment to thank a few members of my family without whom I probably wouldn't be graduating today, let alone standing on a stage and bothering strangers.

I wouldn't be here without my amazing wife Danielle, who has unfailingly supported me emotionally, mentally, and financially, both allowing me to study full-time and fulfilling the enviable dream of spending her mid-thirties married to a broke college student. I have to thank my dad, who's one of the most creative people I know, and who has always supported me in every endeavor I've pursued, almost none of which turned out this well. I want to thank my mom because when I was younger, old enough to know what was happening but not old enough to appreciate its significance, I got to watch her go back to school in her thirties, completing first a bachelor's degree and eventually a master's. Whenever there was something I had to do here that I was afraid I couldn't, I reminded myself that perhaps I could succeed, because I'd seen her succeed, and she had to do it with a son as annoying as me.

I wanted to start with expressing gratitude because I don't really feel comfortable with offering unsolicited life advice, or charging you with some grand mission, an existential homework assignment to be carried out over the next several decades. The professors and people who work here at MCC who deserve thanks are too numerous to name, though I'd like to point out that my old boss, Director Brian Cleary of our Academic Support Center, specifically instructed me not to thank him. When he was teaching me how to be a tutor, Brian said that the point of the job wasn't to show a student that I knew how to solve a given problem, it was to show them that they knew how to solve it.

On at least one level, that's what MCC does – it has helped each of us understand how capable we are of taking on the challenges that we face. Four years ago, I didn't look good on paper, but MCC accepted me, not because of anything I was, but because of what it is – simply, a place that accepts people, that will give essentially anyone a chance to prove themselves worthy of the tasks to be faced here. It's such a simple concept that it's easy, perhaps inevitable, to overlook the power behind it, though it's apparent in the transformations that we've undergone

as students here, especially when viewed collectively on a day like today. Giving anyone an opportunity to demonstrate their greatness, because one makes a policy of giving such opportunities freely, seems plainly to be such a worthy endeavor that I can think of no greater way to honor the time I've spent here than by pursuing it in my own life.

I told you earlier that there would be no unsolicited advice, and no homework assignments. That was a cunning ruse; you have been deceived. The assignment is to remember the best things that have happened to you here, and make it more likely that more people experience them. Be someone who helps people solve the problems they face, who gives people a chance to prove themselves worthy of a challenge, not because you believe that a single person has earned such treatment, but because you know that everyone deserves it. Find institutions that serve these ideals and support them. Find institutions that fail to meet these standards and change them. Find institutions that actively oppose these goals and dismantle them.

What I've proposed isn't easy; if it was, then by this point it would be laughably unnecessary to stand on a stage and advocate a minimum threshold of decency. But we're here today because we have worked hard, and we did so hoping that the hard work we do going forward will matter more. I don't imagine that I'll always succeed at this assignment. I'll try, though, and I argue that you should too – not because doing so would make us better people, or make the world a better place, but because as time passes, I suspect more and more that the things we do can be neatly sorted into two categories. Either you're doing something that makes someone else's life a little more bearable, or you're wasting your time. And at perhaps its most basic level, this world is a machine that will invariably take from you everything that you have, except that which you've already had the good sense to give away.

Thank you.