I would like to thank you all for coming today. It is truly a unique connection CCV has, being able to bring people from all corners of the state together to celebrate the achievements of the Graduating class of 2013. I am indescribably honored to have been asked to represent my fellow classmates as this year’s commencement speaker. Thank you to all that nominated me.

After spending many restless nights thinking about what I wanted to share with you all today, I decided I would talk about the journey that led me to stand before you. My path to graduation has been one filled with both struggles and triumph. Before starting CCV, my life was, at best, a train wreck.

I had spent my teenage years bouncing around the foster care system. I spent more nights in a juvenile detention center than I care to count, and when I turned 18, life was no better. In my first semester, at age 19 just two years ago, I faced poverty and homelessness. I struggled with mental illness and a lot of instability in my life. CCV became my safe place, my home away from home. It started with several work study placements, first working for maintenance in the central office building in Montpelier, where I was weeding the gardens, and doing minor chores around the building. I look back on some of these memories and chuckle— I’ll never forget the odd request to vacuum out the boiler room. Then, I moved on to working in
the business office, and then the marketing department, where I made important social and professional connections.

In fall 2012, I finally made my way to the front desk of the Montpelier academic center, where I became an important resource for both the advising and administrative staff, and assumed a leadership role among my peers. I maintained high grades while working nearly full time. At the same time, I was able to obtain stable housing, purchase my first car, and gained the self-confidence I had been lacking for the majority of my life. Today, I want to share with you that CCV has been more than just my college; it’s where I learned my own self-worth. For the first time in a long time, I feel valuable, and I feel like I have a real chance.

My story is unique, but not uncommon; in my daily work at the Montpelier front desk I had the privilege to meet many students who share a deeper connection to CCV beyond a series of classrooms, instructors, and homework assignments. My story represents the struggles and success that all of us, the CCV graduating class of 2013, have shared on our journey through higher education.

In the midst of my journey, I learned a few things that I would like to share with you, as we leave here and continue on. Some of us will transfer to four year colleges, while others join or return to the workforce. First, never, ever be afraid to ask for help. I don’t just mean academically, (although that’s a good reason to ask for help too). Second, don’t stop at your limits; push through them. You’ll find that the more you move past them, the less power they will have over you. Challenge yourself. Take chances. Catch your dreams. Third, don’t let anyone tell you you’re anything less than what you are. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t; because
you can. You’ve made it here today, you’ve obtained a college degree, and many of you are the first ones in your family to do so. Don’t undervalue your own self-worth, and don’t let others undervalue you either.

I’d like to end with a quote by Arnold H. Glasow that has motivated me, and I hope you will find value in it too. “Success is not a result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire.”