

Commencement 2018
Lower Columbia College
Max Anderson

Thank you, Chris. And good evening, everyone! It is great to be here tonight. I've enjoyed a long and significant relationship with Lower Columbia College that goes back almost 32 years, when I enrolled at the college as a Freshman. It was the perfect place for me to start college and I'll always be grateful for my year as a Red Devil student-athlete. Obviously, this is a great honor.

Things were just a little different in 1986. The campus, which is now so beautiful, functional, and well-planned, was kind of a hot mess. It mostly consisted of aging buildings; the only common architectural theme seemed to be "leaking roof". The current Student Center didn't exist. In its place was vacant land and part of the old fine arts instruction building. At that time, the student center, the athletic department offices, and I think even food services were all crammed into what is now the admissions building, which was a cozy arrangement. Obviously, there was no state of the art Health & Sciences building. Or fitness center. And where the Rose Center now stands, there was a McDonalds Restaurant and an old Masonic Temple, because those are things that belong on every college campus, right?

Campus life was also a little different. Cell phones were like unicorns. Except they weighed 10 lbs. and cost \$4,000. So definitely - there was more eye contact happening on campus. And fewer distractions. Which was key, given the many visual wonders of the mid-late '80's. Fanny packs were only just starting to gain traction, but anywhere you looked there was plenty to take in: mullets; mall-bangs; acid-wash denim; bulky walk-man devices; non-moms wearing mom jeans; mopeds; stirrup pants; and I'm sure plenty of other things I've forgotten.

Yes, it was truly a magical time, but I think that's enough reminiscing.

Again, I'm honored to be here. I have 3 messages for you. By no means are they profound or original. Some are ideas that have probably either already occurred to you, or been communicated by someone else. But I believe they are worthy of mention:

- 1) You made the right decision to attend LCC; (Congratulations)
- 2) You've helped make LCC a better place; (Thank You)
- 3) Give back to your community. (Call to Action)

You made the right decision to attend LCC.

Regardless of your personal circumstances, you all made the right decision to attend LCC. Tonight, whether you're earning a diploma, a certificate, or a degree, you're leaving with credentials and an education that will always be yours.

I'm told that approximately 10% of you either moved here or are commuting from outside the college's service area. I can only guess that the reasons would be to either pursue a specific program that LCC offers, or you were recruited as a student-athlete. But we're happy that you're here, and trust that it has been worth the inconvenience.

Of course, if you're a student-athlete, I'm not sure how you could possibly feel badly about your decision to attend LCC. In addition to graduating tonight, you people have been part of an incredible run. Athletic department just won its 2nd consecutive Directors Cup for total program excellence. The baseball team has now won back-back NWAC championships. The softball team were runners-up. Volleyball finished 5th. Women's basketball made the quarterfinals. Men's basketball advanced to the Sweet 16, and Women's soccer (a program near and dear to my heart) made a triumphant return to the playoffs after a bit of a hiatus. Having coached at LCC for 6 years, I know how competitive the NWAC is, and I'll never forget my player's satisfaction when we were able to put together a playoff run, so congratulations to you all.

For the 90% of you who live within the college's service area, surely you already know that the benefits of staying local go far beyond economics and the quality education that you received. In addition to the important relationships you've formed with other students and instructors, you've maintained tremendous continuity in your life, meaning your existing social network has remained intact. You've had the option of keeping the same job, attending the same church, and participating in the same activities that you did before college. Not only did you benefit from an immediate and familiar support system, you were also able to provide immediate support to the people you love. Don't underestimate how this has played a part in your success.

Looking ahead, many of you will continue to live here, work here, and raise families here. And by staying local for your education, you've established and strengthened important relationships and roots that will become part of the appreciation and perhaps even love that you have for the community.

I know some of you are transferring on to 4-year colleges and universities. And you're probably excited to be moving on. I get it. But please, don't forget that you too, have established strong roots in this community. And trust me on this: if someday you choose to return, those roots will make it that much easier to quickly and successfully re-integrate.

You've made LCC a better place.

To better meet the needs of its students, the college constantly assesses its effectiveness, identifies areas of improvement, and then carefully plans initiatives and strategies for improvement. Specifically, there are two targeted areas where you have helped move the needle:

1. Diversity

At least since the time that I attended LCC, the college has pretty much served the same types of students – members of the workforce seeking training, older students returning to school, traditional college students working toward baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate degrees, and individuals earning GEDs – but today, you're a much more diverse student body, meaning that the college is having even greater impact in our community.

- Over the past 10 years alone, the proportion of students of color has increased from 15% to 25% (1986 – less than 5%?)
- Hispanic students now comprise 12% of the student body
- Nearly 2/3 of you are female

Obviously, some of these statistics reflect shifting demographic trends, but they also validate the effort and commitment of the college to increase access and diversity in our community.

2. Completion

The other area where you've helped the college succeed is completion, which really became a focus toward the end of my time on the governing board. The concern was that while the college continued to do a good job providing access and opportunity for students, we were simply losing too many before they finished their program.

Addressing this issue required hard work and coordinated planning from the college administration, staff, and faculty, not to mention the persistence of our students. But the focus is absolutely paying off, as completion rates have increased 13% over the past 5 years, putting LCC near the top of all community colleges in Washington State. This just wouldn't have happened without your commitment to success.

Give back to your community.

Volunteer your time. Share your talents. Give to a worthy cause. Things like the LCC Food Pantry, a student-led effort to reduce hunger within the campus community. Many of you donated to this cause, and some of you may have benefitted from it. I can't think of a better example of selfless giving meeting up with pure gratitude.

The concept of community is all about people, helping one another and depending upon one another. Whether it's a college campus or an area like Cowlitz County, community is essential to everyday life. To some degree, we've all been helped by others, including some we've never even met, which is why it's so important that we return the favor. Giving back doesn't need to be a big gesture. And in fact, it's often the small ones that can make the biggest difference.

There you have it. Those are my three messages. So, the only things left to for me to say are congratulations, best wishes, and thank you for adding your names and lives to the rich legacy of Lower Columbia College.