

Thank you, Dr. Williams, for the introduction and for the commitment you display every day to our local and global community. Thank you to Community College of Denver and to the Colorado Community College System for the opportunities provided to me. I am humbled to have been selected to fulfill this distinct honor.

As we proceed with tonight's ceremony and celebration of our accomplishments, I would like to share with you a piece of wisdom that I feel is reflective of tonight's occasion... spoken by New York's 14th Congressional District House Representative, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez [**o'kasjo kor'tes**] ...

“We can be whatever we have the courage to see.”

As tonight progresses, think about how her quote pertains to you and indulge me, if you will, as you collect your thoughts over the next few minutes.

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What is it that you want to be? Your initial thought may be to think of what career you envision yourself in. I urge you to dig a little deeper in pursuit of the question, what does it mean to be? As in, to **be** human? To **be** alive?

Such questions represent the magnitude I faced in 2007, while hospitalized for a month after being diagnosed with a critical, potentially life-threatening illness. In fact, those questions continue to taunt me and are the driving force behind my every decision and every action.

To be human, according to my dear friend Dr. Daniel Raphael, is to possess seven innate human values. The first four, being the primary values, are life, equality, growth, and quality of life. We understand that life is valuable to all living beings due to their natural response to life-threatening stimuli which cause some level of pain. We have observed how mammals react to the concept of equality when faced with inequality.

Growth occurs in all forms, mostly physical at the macro level, but humans possess the capacity to take a leap from an “urge to grow” to “decide to grow.” The fourth value, quality of life, is typically distinguished by social comparisons. However, in agreeance with my friend Dr. Raphael, I support the belief that quality of life is fulfilled by a combination of the previous three values, life, equality, and growth.

What then, does equality look like? If not all living beings hold such a concept, what constitutes the basis that humans found such a value upon? The answer lies within the final three secondary values which Dr. Raphael presents, empathy, compassion, and love.

The notion of empathy is found in a human's tendency to place oneself in the place of another and sense what it is like to be that person, be in a place of anguish or joy.

With empathy comes compassion, where we as a species are motivated to "lean in" to others and offer our assistance. When empathy and compassion are joined, we understand the byproduct to resemble what we declare as "love," and when we feel that uniformly for all humankind, we discern that to represent a "love for humanity."

To "**be**," in my view, is to understand the role of these values and how the everyday decisions and actions we take as sentient beings are reflective of those values in the world around us. Humans exhibit the capacity to maintain a sense of community while equally holding an identity of our own manifestation. As a species, we hold the eerily intuitive ability to recognize and adapt to the consequences of our actions. What is the catalyst by which we forge our identities within a global community? Where does our ability as humans to understand the after effects of our conscious actions originate?

Courage...

Courage is what I believe to be secondary to the value of growth, thus, activates humankind's innate ability to "decide to grow." We "decide to grow" by consciously selecting actions which do not guarantee certainty of success or failure but nonetheless find the potential value worth the risk. To exhibit courage is to adapt to the consequences of those actions. Vincent Van Gogh said it best, "**What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?**"

All of the values I mentioned are what you hold within you which have taken you up to this point, on this night. Life. Equality. Growth. Quality of Life. Empathy. Compassion. Love. Courage...

Now think back to Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's sage wisdom. "We can be whatever we have the courage to see." How does that pertain to you? What do you have the courage to see yourself be?

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To be a Cityhawk is to be a complex thinker, an effective communicator, a numerical thinker, to be personally responsible, an effective and ethical user of technology and to be globally aware. With your indulgence, I've offered my own additions to Community College of Denver's institutional outcomes as part of what I believe entails to "be" and what it means to "be whatever we as Cityhawks have the courage to see."

Congratulations, Class of 2019. We did it!