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**Class of 2016**  
**Lehman College Honors Convocation Speech**

Good evening everyone. I want to start out by congratulating all my classmates and their families, because we all know getting to this point was a team effort. The word "success" comes from the Latin *succedo*, which means "to climb, to ascend, to advance." Keeping that in mind we should ask ourselves, "What does it mean to succeed in this day and age?" Obtaining a college diploma? Having a six-figure job? Building a family? And is success really only personal or is it communal? The answer is all of the above. Success is having the courage to climb, to ascend, to advance, and to help others do so. Look around this room, at all of these future graduates, there is an incredible amount of diversity in this room. Yet, as we move forward many of us will be faced with discrimination, or we will be witness to discrimination. The ability to move forward will be taken away, and with it our own success. Why do I say "our own success"? Because the human race moves forward by collecting ideas from individuals, synthesizing them, and birthing knowledge. But how can we move forward if the ideas of some are never allowed to flourish? How do we advance a society if entire groups are blocked from entering spheres because of the color of their skin, their background, their sexual orientation, their religious affiliation, and their identities? We don't. We as a society will remain stagnant. Personal success feeds communal success. It is our responsibility to ascend, but also to teach, to inspire, and to work to erase stereotypes. Many of us will do it by pushing into spheres where we will not be welcomed; others will do it by standing up for those being discriminated against. Success begins with me and with all of you, but none of us will truly advance until we, as a people, begin to appreciate diversity and the knowledge that comes from it. I know that what I am saying may sound impractical because many of us will begin at the bottom of the ladder at our new jobs, and let's face it: we cannot risk pink slips because we have families to feed. But we can look back and pull someone up with us; we can inspire future generations; we can teach them that diversity should be a source of celebration, not discrimination. We can educate others about why stereotypes and racism should not be tolerated. But, more than anything, every single person in this room should go out and teach others that the success of my neighbor does not mean my failure; that the success of my neighbor is beneficial to all; and, more importantly, that the success of my neighbor is my own success. So I ask that sometime tonight you shake the hand of another graduating student in this room, someone you don't know or did not get to know, and you say "Congratulations! Your success is mine and my success is yours."