Good afternoon

I want to begin by thanking CMAE for inviting me to participate in this important event. I am honored and humbled to be able to speak to each of you. I hope over the next few minutes to share some words that inform, perhaps inspire but most of all celebrate you, particularly those that are graduating this year. The accomplishment of earning a college degree is indeed one to be celebrated so to you I say congratulations! Your hard work, perseverance and commitment to achieve your goals has brought you to this day and positioned you for a future filled with promise and opportunity.

But as you turn your focus to the future, take one more look back on this place from which you are about to depart. Take another look at the faces you see here in this room and even those you’ll encounter over the next few days. I would contend that what you will see is the foundation of your accomplishments, of your success. Each of you connected to CMAE at some point during your journey of getting your degree. Whether it was for tutoring assistance, academic guidance, a quiet place to hang out for a few minutes or one of Mrs’ Marbury’s
famous “momma hugs”, each of you found a home base at CMAE. I believe that a critical component in the successes that we experience in life is due in large part to our ability to connect to one another, to find a home base. It is that home base that helps you stay on track and through your connections with others helps to prevent you from falling behind. It’s that home that base that provides the helping hand when you were down and unsure of how you were going to get back up. It the place that has taught you the value of partnerships while adding the reassurance that you were never traveling on this journey alone.

So today I want to take a few moments to expand on this idea of finding a home base. I believe that none of us get where we want to go completely on our own. While it is true that your hard work, focused effort and personal commitment were absolutely necessary to your realization of this important step in your lives, you still didn’t do it all alone. At different points in my own life, I’ve needed to seek out help. Sometimes that help came in the form of a person on whom I could lean on for a moment to catch my breath or to give me a push when I was discouraged and considering whether to just give up and accept defeat. (You’re not the only ones that know
the power of the “momma hug”. Sometimes it came in the form of a place where I could just be me for a while or a place in which I could recharge my mind, my spirit or my body. On occasion, it came from within as I was able to just ground myself and refocus or recalibrate my thoughts. What I have come to realize after all of these years is that I have been most successful when I sought out and connected to a home base.

For those of you that are leaving us to find your place in the world, let me give you a suggestion or two as you look for a new home base.

Start by looking within. What are your strengths? What are you comfortable with spending less time in developing that will allow you to focus more of your time and effort elsewhere? More importantly, where can you be stronger? What is that thing (or things) that need attention? Be honest with yourself and acknowledge what all of should know by now, none of us is perfect. Part of the reason you came to the UO was to gain new knowledge and/or to further develop the amount of knowledge you already had. You accepted that in order to grow you had to open your mind to receive that knowledge. As you head out, continue to be willing to open your mind. While you may feel it’s pretty full after
four years of steady learning there is much learning still to do. As you open your mind going forward, you’ll need to move some of the stuff that already in there a bit, to clear space make room for a different perspective. It means that you don’t rush to judgement based on your own preconceived notions, values or beliefs. An open mind doesn’t turn from the truth nor does it manipulate information to support a position that disadvantages others. But most importantly, an open mind is a clear mind and a clear mind allows you to think at a deeper level. The beauty of the college experience, this place you are soon to leave, is that it provided you with the space and then encouraged you to think more broadly about the variety of things you encountered. This place challenged you to think differently and then tested your approach on how you thought about that variety of subjects.

Continue to take this approach with you as you enter the world outside of the UO. It’s pretty unlikely that you’ll find a single home base as effective and comprehensive as what you found here with CMAE. In fact, you will likely be looking for a number of home bases. Use the skills you learned here to help you locate those home bases. Use the skill of observation to see those
opportunities. They sometimes show up in the most unlikely of places. Use the skill of critical thinking to determine what that potential home base has to offer and how you can take advantage of the resources contained within. Use the skill of discipline to prioritize your time and your energy. It will help you better understand when to speed up or when to slow down.

Finally, plan on taking your turn in being a home base for others. You will encounter many who have not had the blessings you have experienced while being a student here at the UO. You may encounter others that have had a different kind of home base that lacked some of the components of what you experienced here. Share the compassion and empathy you received during your experiences here with others.

So today, CMAE thank you for being the home base for these students that are leaving as well as those that will return. It is comforting to know that those that are coming back will be able to come return to a home base that feels safe and is filled with warmth, support and love. You are the foundation from which so many of our students have gained and subsequently were able to try out their wings. And students, it is my hope that each of
you will find the success that is yours to claim!
Congratulations, GOD Bless and Go Ducks! Thank you!