In the next few minutes, I hope to achieve 2 very hard tasks: to encapsulate the accomplishment of all the graduates, and to extend my gratitude to a group of people who made my success story possible.

But first, I want to tell you a bit about myself: I immigrated to this country illegally at the age of 6 with my mother and sister from a small ranchito in Mexico. We came here to meet with my father who had moved up some years prior to work and send money back to us in Mexico. I don't remember much from before I was 6, but the memories of crossing the border are some of the most vivid I have. Those first years, as many of you can probably attest, were rough—to say the least. New home, new language, new culture, and no money. My father, like many of yours, worked in the fields to earn the money that sustained my family. Many times, he would go to work before I woke up and would return after I had already gone to sleep—sometimes I wouldn't see him for weeks even though we lived in the same house.

Even when we had so little, my sister and I were never in need of anything. To this day, my parents give me much more than I deserve, often at their own expense. It's now been over 15 years since we arrived in Oregon, and now my parents have their very own business. I could not be more grateful and proud of them: my parents set a foundation for my sisters and I to build our monuments, so any accomplishment in my life is just as much theirs as it is mine.

I know many of us have a similar story: we come from humble beginnings. So, I feel very honored and privileged to be able to graduate and celebrate with you all. I've known several of you since our first year, back when we were scared and timid. But look at us now. As we go forward, I encourage us all to cherish all of the experiences we've had at this university—both the good and the not so good. They were all necessary to get us to this point. We did not have it easy: we had to work little a harder, we had to prove ourselves, and we had to break the mold. But we did it; so, let us take pride in our achievements. Now we're all here, eager and ready to keep showing the world what more we can do.

I also want to thank everyone at CMAE, for I truly don't believe that my college career would have gone as it did if it were not for your help. To all the administrators and advisors who they themselves had to struggle their way through academia; and now they are here making the road less bumpy for us.

In specific, I'd like to thank Stephanie Tabibian. I remember sitting in my room in Bean and getting an email saying that I had to meet with my assigned advisor, Stephanie, the Native
American Retention Specialists. I was pretty sure someone had made a mistake. I knew Mexicans have some native American ancestry, but I wasn't sure this was it. Little did I know, that they had actually gotten it very right. We went for mandatory meetings to casual chats. She was there when I needed advice in school and in life; and also, to give me a good reganada whenever I needed it. So Stephanie, aishen (eh-shun).

Graduates, back to you. I also want to extend my gratitude to all of you, for allowing me to speak and for all the memories we've shared—no matter how small. We all traveled different paths to get here and now we go on to pave our own roads for others to follow. No matter the direction, I know great things are in store for us.

I want to leave you off with two pieces of advice: first is to aim as high as you can and never sell yourself short. Know your worth even when others cannot see it. Back in January, I felt like a failure: multiple universities had discouraged me from applying to their programs, for I would be automatically rejected. All the doors were being shut in my face; yet a short month later, I had been accepted to 3 ivy league universities including the top ranked program in the nation. Second, I want to remind us, that while we are in times of celebration, to not allow ourselves to forget that there are families and children at the southern border yearning and waiting for safety and for their opportunity to succeed. I wish you all the best, and congratulations Class of 2019!