President Toro’s introduction of Troy McMullen:

With us today is a CCSU alumnus who knows a little something about thriving amid crises and deadlines.

Our commencement speaker is an Emmy-award-winning journalist and executive editor at ABC Network News in New York.

Over the past three decades, Troy McMullen has covered some of the most important stories of his generation, including the war in Iraq and elections in Europe and the U.S.

Despite his daily deadlines at ABC, he still finds time to occasionally contribute writing to such venerable publications as the Washington Post, the Financial Times, the Wall Street Journal, and Architectural Digest - where his work has won several prestigious awards.

Troy’s career journey originated in New York City. As a fifth- and sixth-grader, he delivered some of the newspapers he would later write for.

Arriving at CCSU on an athletic scholarship, he developed his passion for journalism by working for the radio station and student newspaper.

He admits that action on the football field sometimes outweighed anything in the classroom – I can tell you that he is still very proud of his game-winning interception against the University of New Haven right here on Arute Field!

Today, this veteran reporter and news editor is still inspired by a curiosity about the world. And he is forever grounded by a sense of service and responsibility. He knows that millions of people rely on the accuracy and relevance of the news he and his colleagues provide. And in an era when many find the news distressing, he remains optimistic, believing that journalism has the power, not only to inform, but also to engage the public for the greater benefit of our society.

Please join me in welcoming our commencement speaker, Troy McMullen!

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Troy McMullen’s speech begins here:

Thank you for that introduction Dr. Toro, and thank you for extending this invitation to speak today. I’m honored to be here.

That introduction was pretty impressive. I think I can safely say I’m probably the most successful C student to ever graduate from Central Connecticut State University.

In preparing for this speech, I watched a bunch of commencement addresses to get some tips on how prepare for this day. Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Elon Musk, Barack Obama — they all delivered inspiring commencement speeches at one time or another.

But George W. Bush’s resonated with me the most. The former president is well-known for being a C student at Yale University, so when he addressed the commencement there he said “to all the honor students out there who worked hard and got straight A’s I say congratulations on a job well done.”

“But to all you C students, I just want to say: One day you, too, can be president of the United States.”
I kind of feel that way today. To all you C students out there, one day you, too, can be executive editor at ABC News.

It is true that my grades weren’t great — mostly C’s and B’s.

But it’s also true that something special happened to me on this campus back then that I wasn’t entirely sure of at the time.

My world began expanding here. Exposure to different people meant that I began discovering things that I paid little attention to growing up as a kid in New York City. Art, music, books — and that most of your education didn’t take place inside the classroom.

But that’s why it’s really an incredible honor as a graduate of Central Connecticut to be invited back here to address the class of 2022.

It’s hard to believe but 33 years ago I was sitting out there where you are today — probably a little nervous back then like I am today.

But I remember what an incredible sense of accomplishment I felt that day.

It’s not an exaggeration to say that this graduating class has endured more challenges and hurdles getting to this day than any we’ve seen in a long, long time.

The pandemic changed so many things for us, but those campus lockdowns upended your college experience, sending most of you home for months to sit in front of your computers to enjoy endless Zoom lectures. But you adapted, and today is a real testament to your perseverance. Congratulations.

It’s also not an exaggeration to say that you are graduating at a time when your ideas and influence have never been greater or more important. The past few years have seen a real reckoning in our society — politically, socially, culturally — and much of that has been fueled by your generation.

And as a result, today your influence is more important than ever: In boardrooms and newsrooms across this country, Americans are listening to you.

As I mentioned earlier, I was honored to get a chance to address you today. But I was also a little nervous.

I went into journalism in part because I wanted to tell other people’s stories. Journalists love examining others in our society — the politicians, the athletes, the newsmakers — so we rarely reflect on our own lives.

In other words, we’re pretty shallow.

So I thought to myself: What ideas and lessons could I deliver to graduates that would actually make a difference in their lives? What could I possibly say today that would stick with you in the weeks, months, and even years ahead?

Then I began thinking about my own graduation here 33 years ago and realized just how little I remembered about the commencement address that day.

In fact, I couldn’t recall a single thing.
And the truth is, most of you won’t remember much of this address either. And if we’re honest, in a few years, you probably won’t remember much of what you learned inside the classrooms here either.

But what you will remember — I can assure you — is the feeling you have today. The feeling of great accomplishment, of course, but also the feelings you have toward the people you met here. The feelings about the relationships you’ve fostered here. Both among your friends and fellow students, but also the faculty and administrators who have helped you along the way.

The fact is your most cherished memories of your time here won’t come from anything you learned inside the classroom. They will come from the personal connections you made here.

I know this to be true, because 33 years after graduating from Central Connecticut I still have those feelings today.

As you heard in the introduction, I’ve spent most of my professional life dedicated to journalism. I viewed a career in journalism back then as I view it today: as a public service.

It sounds cliché, but in my view, there is nothing more rewarding than dedicating your livelihood to informing the public.

Dr. Toro outlined the bullet points of my journalism career, but I wanted to explain how my college years helped build the foundation to reach some of those goals.

When I entered CCSU I was recruited to play football right here on Arute Field. We didn’t win every game, of course. And I’m sure I directly contributed to some of our losses, as some of my old teammates here today will happily point out.

But sports played an important role during my time here, helping me cultivate a relentless ambition that still pushes me to this day.

And while I remember the deep friendships I made playing on those teams, I also remember the important role that the teachers and administrators played in helping me grow and mature during those college years.

I remember Scott Olsen, my professor of journalism and communications. Scott knew I was on the football team but never dismissed me as just another dumb jock. Even on the days when I acted like one. He not only understood that my interests and curiosities went well beyond the football field, he helped expand them.

While I don’t remember every assignment in his classroom, I do remember coming away from those classroom discussions feeling challenged — energized — both intellectually and creatively.

Feelings that have stuck with me to this day.

We hear a lot of talk these days about the soaring financial costs of a college education with some pretty smart people questioning if attending college is even worth it.

But I think I stand here today as a testament to why attending and graduating college is still important and how a degree from Central Connecticut — the state’s oldest publicly funded university — still offers remarkable value.
In gathering research for this address, I came across some pretty good examples of that value and alumni success.

A few months ago, a graduate of Central — Maryam Kahn, class of 2019 — became the first Muslim elected to the Connecticut House of Representatives. At just 33 years old.

And earlier this year two Central alums — Christopher Griffin, class of 2007, and Ramona Espinoza, class of 1983 — were nominated by the governor of Connecticut to be judges on the State Superior Court bench.

And earlier you heard about another graduate of Central — Miguel Cardona, class of 1997 — was named Secretary of Education in the Biden Administration last year. So that means a Central graduate is now advising the President of the United States.

These career successes all took root right here on this campus.

But we all measure success differently, of course, and I’m here to tell you that you don’t have to be a cabinet secretary or a state judge to be viewed as a success.

Some of you might want to follow a dream and open a bar or restaurant. Or become a builder or contractor.

The point is: A college degree shouldn’t be viewed as just some kind of jobs program. Yes, it’s an important cog in the employment wheel. But a degree from college — a degree from this college — means more.

As Thomas Jefferson said, it means that you are now, more than ever, an active member of our society. A participant in our democracy.

Which brings me to the ideas I wanted to leave you with today.

I don’t like giving advice. Mostly because when I was your age, I rarely followed any.

The truth is any wisdom I’ve gained comes from the inspiring people I’ve had the privilege of working with and the news events I’ve had the privilege of covering.

But there are a couple of meaningful ideas I’d like to share:

First: Sustain your friendships: We live in a connected world, but you’ll be surprised just how easy it will be in the years ahead to lose connections with the friends you made here.

Don’t let that happen. Make it a priority to stay in touch with college friends. Without question, some of the most lasting and rewarding friendships I’ve made in my life are with the people I was lucky enough to go to college with.

Second: Stay optimistic: The news is flooded with examples of just how awful the world can be, but it is important to keep seeing the glass as half full — even on the days when it feels half empty.

One of my first news editors had a sign outside her office that read: “Optimism doesn’t wait on facts. Pessimism is a waste of time.” I always thought that was sound advice.

And finally: Stay engaged with the world around you:
I can’t think of a time when following the news could be more important. We live in an era of rampant misinformation and disinformation. It fills our social media feeds every day. But those tactics only work when we’re not engaged in following actual news events. It’s very easy to become disillusioned by fake news and conspiracy theories when we stop seeking genuine information and real journalism for ourselves.

But staying engaged with the world starts at the local level.

It’s a noble idea to follow global events: wars in Europe, famine in Africa, earthquakes in Asia. But don’t lose sight of the importance of staying engaged locally.

Your town, your city, your state. That’s the real lesson from those alumni successes I cited earlier. Being a good global citizen first requires being a good local citizen.

I’ve been fortunate to work for global news organizations that have allowed me to travel and report from around the world. But I started my journalism career at the local level — as a news writer covering local news at WTNH in New Haven.

I walked into the newsroom for the first time — I was looking for a job — but I found a calling.

I heard the sound of clicking and clacking of computer keyboards. I saw people rushing around on deadlines, doing interviews over the phone, shouting at each other on deadlines.

And I knew then as I know now that this is where I wanted to be.

And today, when I draw a line from that local newsroom to where I am now: It’s become clearer than ever that staying engaged locally is a far more effective way of bringing about the kind of real change your generation demands.

So that means the expanding space you’ll soon be occupying outside of this campus not only comes with challenges, it also comes with responsibilities.

It’s no longer just a nice idea to stay informed: As young people armed with freshly minted college degrees, I’m here to remind you that it is now your responsibility to stay engaged with your community.

Read your local papers, listen to your local radio, and stay active in local events.

Because the only way that this generation of graduates becomes the next generation of leaders is by being active participants in that ever-expanding world right outside our front doors.

Thank you, and once again congratulations to the class of 2022!