Hello, and thank you all for being here this afternoon. My name is Miah Crockett and my story might be a bit different than most of you here today. I’m speaking to you as the only female African American student to ever graduate from the Sonoma State Electrical Engineering program. My journey here at Sonoma state started in 2011. Now it’s hard to fit the last 6 years into 7 minutes, but to give you an idea, imagine yourself going on a roller coaster for the first time. You’re excited to start the ride but you are also anxious and wonder if you really want to do this. The ride takes off and you’re thrilled, but then you see the first loop approaching and that thrill turns to worry. You make it out of the loop and you realize you’re fine and that was just a small obstacle that was necessary to overcome in order to reach the end. That’s sort of how my time here has been spent.

In high school, I was a successful tri-sport varsity athlete and my main focus was basketball. This paid off, because I was recruited by Sonoma State. Once I took a tour of SSU, I knew I was home and the next thing I had to do was to apply and choose a major. With over 40 different majors to choose from and my sports-driven brain, I was dead set on anything that involved sports. But for some reason, I thought “Well what if I pick something like engineering as a major, it sounds pretty fun and interesting. I mean how hard could it really be?”

I was in for a surprise. My first day in an engineering course I noticed that I was the only girl in the whole entire class. I felt alone and scared and all I could think about was getting out of there and never going back. I remember calling my mom right after class telling her that I was the only girl and that I felt like I should switch my major. She told me to give it another couple of classes and see if anything changed. As time passed I found myself stuck in the same situation over and over again. I was still the only girl in all of my engineering courses and still felt little to no confidence that I would even make it out. All of my days were close to identical. I would go to class, I would sit in the back, usually alone, I would hope to not get called on to answer a question in front of everyone, and I would keep to myself. I didn’t feel like I fit in or even like I was taken seriously. I was so fragile and wanted to give up so badly, but my parents were my main support system that got me through this. They got me to a point where I was able to build my confidence up and feel the thrill of the ride and remember that this whole journey was going to be hard and scary, but everything that got in my path was just a small obstacle that I had to overcome to see the end of the roller coaster.

Being the only female in 90% of my engineering courses has not been easy by any means. I felt that I had to work twice as hard just to be taken seriously. I found that I was exerting more effort than the typical student would, because I always felt like I needed to prove myself. People have heard the stigma before: ‘Engineering is for men.’ At times I felt discluded, especially during group projects. It’s hard to find your place in a group full of men that seem like they have been friends for years. These guys already had a bond together and it seemed like there was no more room for one more. Hence, I felt like I had no one to go to, I felt isolated. Nationally, only 18% of women graduate with a degree in Electrical Engineering. In our department, we currently have 12% females enrolled in our undergraduate program. Interestingly enough, only 14% of the women in the U.S. who graduate end up in a career as an engineer. It makes me wonder: where will I continue on from here?

Completing this degree was a challenge for me, and although I experienced some obstacles along the way, there were many positive attributes that I experienced. Our professors cared about us students and wanted us to succeed. Our housing was excellent, nicer than some of the places we grew up in. Our student clubs were inviting and included all students and every type of interest. Our student body, my peers, are deep rooted with a sense of high integrity, deep respect, excellence in education, and responsibility towards each other. Most of all we all followed and laid the groundwork for the Seawolf Commitment. I am very proud to have been a peer among all these students.
One of the biggest benefits of being one of the few females in the engineering program has been the confidence that I have developed in myself. This enabled me to persist in my studies and strive to complete my engineering degree. This helped me to toughen up and grow a thick skin to endure any situation, even criticism. This also helped me to develop critical skills to better help me understand and communicate with any person better than I have ever been able to before.

I have a message I want to share with you today: I am a female and I completed this Electrical Engineering degree, not just for myself, but I also did it for all of the women out there who are told they can not do something because it is only for men. I did it for all of women out there who do not get a chance to have a voice. I did it for every young girl who thinks she isn’t capable of becoming anything she has dreamt of. I am standing here today and I am living proof that anyone is capable and anyone can do anything when they set their mind to it.

I wanted to acknowledge and thank those who supported me throughout my journey. I couldn’t have done this without the help my boss, Gina Geck. As well as the various scholarships I received from the United Negro College Fund, paralyzed veterans of American, and Sandisk. I would also like to thank Sara Kassis for taking me under her wing and seeing the potential in me. And last, but certainly not least, my parents. None of this would have been possible without you guys. Thank you for pushing me to finish my journey and thank you for always taking my side no matter what.

It is exciting to note that the Class of 2017 is the first graduating class to successfully graduate under the leadership of President Sakaki. The Class of 2017 is the first graduating class to receive a degree in the Green Music Center. The best part about all of this is that no one can take away all of the hard work you put in to get to this very moment. Thank you all, and congratulations Class of 2017!

—Miah Crockett (Electrical Engineering, B.S.)
Well, we made it: through numerous hair-pulling finals weeks and nights full of coffee, research, and paper writing. We’re leaving college, whether it took us four years or forty; whether we’re seniors, super-seniors, super-super-seniors, or close to retirement. We’ve made rockets in physics labs, distilled wine in chemistry labs, simulated the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow in computer science, and looked at relations between puzzle completion times and lab rat caffeine intake in statistics. We have worked long and hard to be where we are today.

And I believe most of us have grown since freshman year: learned some valuable lessons about time management, developing a good work ethic; but most importantly, I learned to fail or failed to learn. No matter how difficult Dr. Jones’ homework problems might be, or how impossible a Dr. Fukuto test seems, or whether Dr. Newman decides to assign the 2-page long probability problem again this year, we persevered through to get to where we are today. As the old saying goes: "when you trip, get right back up again." Failure is inherent in nature, and we are all doomed to fail sometimes; what we have is the freedom to react to this failure in a positive way, turn it flip on it’s side, push onward and solve the problem we are faced with. Failure forces us to think in different ways, to discover new and enlightening ideas that had we not been face to face with a brick wall, we would never have unearthed. Failure, ladies and gentleman, is counterintuitively the key to success.

But I digress. Where do we go from here? Many of us claim to know the exact next step to make, whether it be an internship, graduate school, a full-time job, or a backpacking trip through Europe. Others, such as myself, will tell you we have no idea: the most important task we are faced with in college is learning about ourselves, our passions, and what we truly believe in and are willing to work towards. And as we stand at the entrance to what is sometimes called "real life," we waver, a tad intimidated, and prepare ourselves for the amazing things to come: a manager whose harsh criticism seems fruitless, the daunting half-decade of research ahead of us - no matter what situation we are put in, there will always be someone who will tell us we can’t; what we’ve got to do is turn around and say "watch me." We know what will make us happy and we must follow our nose to obtain those dreams.

What's beautiful is the answer to such a question as "what do I do with my life" is different for all of us; there is no right answer, only some useful guidelines that help kickstart your imagination into answering the question for yourselves. What has worked for me is traveling, discovering the world and what is has to offer: this opens up a whole new realm of possibilities that can add to the alphabet soup of plans we have been concocting to prepare ourselves for this very moment. For example, throughout my time in Switzerland last summer, I had become more aware of who I was as a person than ever before. The cultural awareness gained from such an experience is priceless and leaves the mind open to new and useful ways of thinking and problem-solving. As a plus, I was heavily introduced to a topic I had not dabbled in prior: computer science and it’s applications to mathematics and physics. While I could spend some time telling all of you how cool and interesting this topic is, what’s paramount is that I found something I loved and something I want to pursue. My discovery has put new rails on the train tracks ahead of me, given me fresh coal for fuel, has allowed for a couple new stops along the way yielding newfound friendships and lifelong connections, and has given my life a turn for the best. So get out there, experience the world and all it has to offer, and spread the knowledge you have obtained in this quaint college. "Lux mentis, lux orbis."

To everyone who influenced our lives, we say thank you: to parents who stood by us no matter what, to professors who instilled in us a passion for learning, to administrators who made our college experiences as amazing as possible, to advisors who helped us decide what path to take, to friends and club members who were there for pizza parties, study sessions, and everything in between. Without you (and without each other) we never could have accomplished such a feat. Thank you to all the loving, kind people I’ve met during my time at Sonoma State.
And so, Sonoma State University's Science and Technology graduating class of 2017, congratulations! It’s certainly a huge milestone. I’m sure most of us will remember this day as the beginning of a new future, one we are proud to call our own.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you all.

—Michael Dobbs (Mathematics, B.S. and Physics, B.S.)
Hello, Sonoma State School of Science and Technology, graduating class of 2017. I would like to start first, by congratulating each of you on an outstanding accomplishment. It was not easy to arrive at the place where you are sitting today and I am honored to be here and to address such an incredible group of people on such a special day.

Family: Thank you for inspiring us to declare majors in the ever-changing and highly technical fields of science and technology and importantly, for believing in us all along the way. Your steady support (financial, too!) and encouragement has been the foundation for our successes at Sonoma State University.

Friends and Peers: Thank you for your consistent willingness to collaborate and work together. Our teamwork made it possible for us to deliver top-notch projects, consistently answer seemingly impossible exam questions, and in turn, even introduce our professors to new ideas and concepts. Specifically, I thank my fellow computer science graduates today for motivating one another to never give up in the pursuit of the correct answer on Ravi’s exams, to spend just one more hour in the Darwin basement, and to always check for missing semicolons. We became a family, that struggled together, laughed together, and succeeded together.

Faculty: Thank you for giving us both the technical and practical knowledge we need to succeed in our respective fields. Thank you for challenging us with a demanding workload complete with unique and relevant problems to solve forcing us to think creatively, sometimes quickly, and always thoughtfully. You have prepared a graduating class that is ambitious, innovative, and empowered to develop software that propels our society, to better understand and protect earth’s natural resources, and to care for one another in hospitals and medical facilities.

Family, friends and peers, and faculty, it was with you, we completed this journey, and therefore rightfully so, it is with you, we celebrate today.

I entered Sonoma State as a business major with an open mind, eager to learn. I soon found myself in CS 101, Introduction to Computer Science, a course required for my business degree, where shortly after an elementary introduction to programming, I knew that this was the right fit for me. With tremendous support, I entered a predominately male field with minimal experience. However, at Sonoma State University, I never felt out of place. I always felt welcomed, accepted, and encouraged.

As president of the Women in Computer Science club, I have had an opportunity to be a part of an outstanding minority community. In this community, I have connected with a diverse population of women and heard their stories and struggles to feel accepted and recognized in this male dominated field. And I am fortunate enough to say that I didn’t face those barriers of entry into computer science during my time here at Sonoma State University. Faculty and fellow students consistently provided a learning environment encouraging of everyone. It is schools like Sonoma State University that are going to continue to foster and accept diversity in all disciplines and lead progressive change, a cornerstone of successful innovation.

As scientists, mathematicians, and engineers, we are all inspired by change. Advancements in science and technology require an acceptance and fostering of change. So while we are saddened to leave behind this chapter of our lives, I am excited to see what comes next. I trust that our future will be in good hands with my fellow graduates.

Congratulations, Class of 2017!

—Brooke Borges (Computer Science, B.S.)
Greetings family, friends, faculty and graduating class of 2017! I am honored to be standing on this stage as your commencement speaker for the School of Science and Technology. I stand before you representing the all nighters, mid-day cramming sessions, and those endless cups of coffee that were consumed every day to get the class of 2017 to this day. The graduates here today should be proud of their perseverance. We might all have different majors, but we are all connected by our goal to succeed. The lessons we all have learned through our rough days in the hardest classes will stay with us forever.

Similarly to many students, I succeeded in my major due to the supportive community around me. When I became a Biochemistry major, I discovered the importance of being involved and accepting leadership opportunities; I did not find my major of Biochemistry immediately, but when I did find it, I knew I had to get involved and meet people in order to do my best. I became involved in the Chemistry club; I met teachers and other students. Together, we studied for tests and worked on homework until a bond was formed; a bond common in every STEM major that requires discussion among peers and mutual support. This sense of community helped me along a difficult path of study. Like other students here, my community reassured me that yes, the classes are hard and it takes a lot of work to do well, but it can be achievable. Office hours became a common occurrence; all of the faculty in the Science and Tech School were willing to meet with me for hours at a time so that I could fully understand concepts like integral calculus, quantum theory, enzyme kinetics, and many others. I remembered the first couple of office hours I attended, I was terrified. For whatever reason, my professors all looked really intimidating, a sentiment shared by many other students. Thankfully, much like everyone else, I soon realized that my professors wanted to see me succeed. They appreciated when students showed up to office hours to ask questions on difficult and confusing material, or sometimes, even to ask for career advice.

It was soon clear that it was almost as important to understand concepts myself as it was to help others understand them. People say that the best way to know you know something is to explain it to someone else. As such, I focused on teaching subjects to fellow classmates, and listened when it was their turn to teach. Every major has that class with the hardest reputation, for us, organic chemistry has that kind of reputation. It is a class which is not only important for Chemistry, but also for Biology and anyone who wishes to go into medicine. After passing that class, I decided to work as a Supplemental Instructor, someone who worked with the students and the professor to make the material more approachable by providing, essentially, more office hours.

Perhaps more important, through my leadership positions, I learned the importance of doing everything I could without having a clear idea of the outcome for me, or for others. I embraced leadership opportunities because it was a way for me to show my gratitude to my chemistry community and do what I thought was right. It was important to share my experiences with fellow students, both as a peer mentor, Supplemental Instructor, and Chemistry Club President. I shared my struggles with my fellow students so that they would know that it is ok to struggle. I hope that in the future, we can all go out in the world, and be more open about our struggles so that conversations and change can be made to fix the problems, or at least so people don’t feel alone. By being involved in my department, I became a better student and person because I was not only accountable for myself and my teachers, but also for my fellow students. I also got opportunities, like to travel to a conference in San Diego to share the tips and tricks of running a successful club. Most importantly, I got to know many wonderful people, including many outside my major. I didn’t realize all these would come because of being involved, but I’m grateful that it was.

If I can give you anything today to take with you from your time at SSU, it is to always get involved and do the right things, even if it is hard or doesn’t instantly lead to something that you want. Make friends, be thoughtful, and find ways to help others. Work hard because oftentimes, the things worth having are the ones that take the most work.
to achieve. You have changed and grown from your years of work here at Sonoma State University, and now you are ready to become informed members of our society. Find ways to use your life lessons, share them with others, and make the world a better place through compassion and understanding. Each one of us sitting here today should be proud of all they have accomplished; always remember all the work it took to get your degree to continue to inspire yourself and others. We are sitting in this beautiful hall about to be 2017 School of Science and Technology Graduates ready to take on the world and start a new chapter in our lives.

And so, whether you are continuing on to higher education, starting your dream job, or not even knowing what is to come, we all have something in common to begin this journey: we are Seawolves, we all made it through and learned from Sonoma State University. We have the ability to achieve whatever we set our minds to and reach our goals. So here’s to us class of 2017!!

— Tania Deleva (Biochemistry, B.S.)