

**2009 Valedictorian Speech
by Ayesha Siddiqui**

President Hotzler, Provost August, New York State Comptroller DiNapoli, distinguished guests and faculty members, students, family, friends, fellow graduates.

Today is a glorious day. We have gathered here to commemorate a vital milestone in our lives. It is a great honor for me to deliver my valedictory address to the graduating class of New York City College of Technology on this first day of June 2009.

Today, our dream of becoming graduates has come true. We worked hard and our continuous dedication has finally made it possible. This magnificent accomplishment would not be possible without the blessings of our supreme creator, the support of our family and friends, and the encouragement of our City Tech professors, faculty and administrators.

My fellow graduates, I came to this country with a dream of becoming a successful woman with my own identity. Like many of you, I was unsure about my future. I faced what seemed at the time impossible milestones to overcome. For instance, I started my academic career after a long interval of nine years. I was challenged by the circumstances of a new country, a new educational system, a new culture, and above all, a new family situation. I had two young children at home, all the daily household duties of cooking and cleaning, and a husband who worked seven days a week. I didn't know if I would ever be able to balance my educational and family responsibilities. My dream seemed unapproachable and distant.

I stand before you today, telling you that dreams do come true. The journey from start to finish was a roller coaster ride, but it was ride worth taking it. I remember how nervous I felt the first time I stepped into a classroom. The people around me were much younger than I. They had advanced technical skills. The graphic design terminology itself was a challenge for me to understand. But I received tremendous support from my family -- no matter how near or far away they lived. They fueled my spirit and helped me keep moving. My husband and children were always by my side. Today I stand before you as a proud mother and a wife, a daughter, a daughter-in-law, a sister and a college graduate.

I believe the key to my success is effective communication, responsibility and respect. So, dear graduates, please communicate effectively. You will need to in the real world. Be proud of yourself and your degree but also be open to knowledge and wisdom. Life is a learning process. The respect I had for everyone around me, for their individuality and diversity helped me learn. I have learned from interactions with professors and fellow students. Working in group projects enabled me to develop patience and understanding, and leading the group projects developed my leadership skills.

My fellow graduates, life does not always go as planned. It takes unexpected and sometimes dreadful turns. We have to be ready to meet the challenges with courage and strength. In November of 2008, just four weeks before final exams, my beloved father suddenly passed away. It was the greatest loss of my life. I felt like giving up, but my father's greatest wish was seeing me succeed in life. I found strength in his dream and I pulled myself together and I finished my semester with a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Many of you have faced similar hardships; many of you will face them in the future. I stand here today, telling you not to give up, but instead find your strength from your weakness and your gain from your loss.

My fellow graduates, in this time of economic hardships, life will not be easy. But I firmly believe that with hard work, with dedication and with the knowledge and skills we have acquired, we can overcome every obstacle and reach our personal and professional goals. The world is changing and a good education is the key to life's success. In fact, President Obama said, and I quote, "In

a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity -- it is a pre-requisite."

Dear graduates, remember that the whole world is watching us: Together, with high standards in education, hard work, strong values, tolerance for difference and effective communication we can lead this world out of a recession, and lead it toward serenity and harmony. Now is the time to bridge the gap between different faiths, cultures and nationalities around the world. Now is the time to work for global peace. Now is the time to work for all of humanity rather than a fraction, so that our future generations will live prosperous and tranquil lives.

The teachings of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) help us understand the issues of equal opportunity this great country has struggled to provide for its citizens. 1,400 years ago, in his last sermon at Mt. Arafat, he said, and I quote, "O' people! An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor has a non-Arab any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor does a black have any superiority over a white - except by piety and good action." His words resonate in the words of President Obama.

Barack Obama's experience as the first African American president in the history of United States and my experience as the first Muslim female Pakistani valedictorian in the history of City Tech have strengthened my belief that regardless of our religious beliefs, gender, race or ethnicity, what really matters is that we are all Americans that we stand together as a whole nation and that we are proud to be citizens of this country.

Today, as we graduate and begin our new lives, I ask you to be proud of yourselves and believe in yourselves. Today is the day to keep your spirits high. Remember the sky is the limit. Today is the day to dream big and prove that we, City Tech graduates, are second to none. Today is the day to take up the challenges and face them boldly. Today is the day to plan our futures, for our degrees are a milestone and not a destiny.

Dear fellow graduates, let me take this opportunity to congratulate all of you for a job well done. And also on your behalf, I want to pay gratitude to President Hotzler for presiding over City Tech and improving the standards of the college, all of our faculty members and staff at City Tech, for working hard on our behalf and guiding us every step of the way, and our beloved families and friends, for continuously supporting us. Our graduation would not have been possible without their constant backing and encouragement.

May God bless us all and May God bless the United States of America!

Thank you.