Good Evening.
Cynthia Ozziak, the American writer once said, "When something does not insist on being noticed, when we aren’t grabbed by the collar or struck on the skull by a presence or event, we often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude," and isn’t that the truth? We all have different ideas about what most deserves our gratitude in life.

Our families certainly come to mind, yours & mine. I have much to thank my husband or 37 years Marc for, and our 3-children, daughter-in-law and granddaughter, the most awesome Ms. Olivia.

I am grateful for the terrific country in which we live, one that gives us the freedom to speak openly about our differences and even encourages dissent.
I am grateful for our troops, many of whom have attended DCCC, who put their lives on the line every day to protect our freedom.
I am grateful that we are here tonight celebrating YOUR graduation, and I am thankful that I was lucky enough in life to always know what I wanted to do with that life.
I knew even as a child that I wanted to be a teacher.
My 87 year old mother delights in telling everyone who will listen how I used to set-up a school in our garage every summer and charge our neighbors, not to baby-sit, but to teach their children.
I have been teaching and learning every since.
I learned a love of reading from Mr. Tracy, my third grade teacher who would read aloud to us, changing her voice to fit the characters in the book.
I learned kindness in the classroom from Miriam Bedein, my ninth grade English teacher.
I learned a love of education from my parents, and how hard it is to be a good child, once my parents became elderly.
I learned how hard it is to be a good parent from my kids, and how exhausting but exhilarating it is to be a good teacher, from you, my students; and I continue to learn from you.
I guess I am a little bit biased, but I do know that everything I learned, I learned at the hands of a teacher.

Maybe that teacher was a parent, a neighbor, a family member, a friend, or a member of the clergy.

Maybe that teacher was in a classroom, perhaps sitting right here in front of you tonight.
Each of us has had a teacher who has inspired us, who has made a difference in our lives, and is partly responsible for our being here tonight; and that’s why I think being a teacher really matters, …but a big part of that is because of you.

My students have made me want to teach.

Every semester I believe that I can be a better teacher, that I can change your life; when in reality it is YOU who have changed mine.

I remember the student whose marriage had ended, whose husband told her she was stupid and worthless and would never make it without him. She graduated from here and went on to Penn and received her degree there, all the while raising her 2-boys. Every year at the holidays she sends me an email reminding me of how DCCC changed her life, and how grateful she is.

I remember the student whose young daughter was undergoing chemo @ DuPont Hospital who still managed to drag herself into class, every day, every week, every month, even through her daughter’s funeral (which the whole class attended), and still finished the semester with an “A” And grateful that we kept her focused on the future.
I think often of the student, who, as a single dad of four, came back to school with just a GED diploma and would sit down every night with his kids while THEY helped him with his homework. That takes guts.

I could mention one of my former students, who received our scholarship, who struggled to come to the U.S. for his college education, and who, as an ESL student from Ghana, stands before you today as YOUR graduation speaker.

I could tell you about other students who have faced personal crises and continues, who have overcome physical and learning disabilities, and persevered.

I could tell you about us, your faculty, who worry over how to reach you, is we are being fair, if we could do more, if we are doing too much.

We really do know what you are going through. Believe it or not, we were once students too. We cut classes and ditched homework assignments, and looked, sometimes, for the easiest teacher.

We worried, as you do, about all the time spent learning what we thought we would never use. I mean, who really cares about the date the Spanish Armada sailed, or about learning Calculus or Shakespeare?

What we didn’t understand then, but do now is that we are in the business of teaching you how to learn, how to process new ideas and think critically about them as you place them in a new context. It’s not only the date or the equation that matters; it’s the discipline of learning something new.

We also worried about the cost of our education, about whether or not we would find jobs.

But Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,” and he was so right.

Except that I think that teaching is also one of the most powerful weapons we can use to change the world.

The best kept secret in my house is that if I won the Lottery today, I would show-up for work tomorrow; of course I would be driving a new little red convertible, but I would still be here teaching. How many of us are lucky enough to say the same thing?

That is what I wish for you. You have given me the opportunity to look forward to coming to school every day, to continue to be excited about teaching.

In my parents’ generation, no one was expected to love their job. They worked to put food on the table and roof over their heads. They stayed at jobs for fifty years and if lucky, retired with a gold watch.

YOU will change jobs at least once in your lives; many of you four or five times. You will look for personal fulfillment and enrichment in your jobs, and yes, good salaries.

But I would like to encourage you to remember that, whatever you do in life, a little part of DCCC goes with you. Maybe it will be in how you feel about computers or mathematics, the music that you listen to or the art that you look at and enjoy. Maybe it will be, I can only hope, in the books that you read and the things that you write.

One day you will look around and realize how quickly your life went by, and it is only then that you will realize “that time is not measured by the passing of years but what one does, what one feels, and what one achieves.”

I would like for you to leave her tonight as excited for yourselves and for your future as we are for you.

I believe in your future, in all the possibility that is ahead of you.

You came to DCCC to make a difference in your life, remember that, and remember to give something back.

When you “make it” in life, and you will, fund a scholarship here, donate money to the student textbook fund, sponsor a deserving student or program, mentor a student; always remember to give something back.
I will leave you with a quote from Dr. Seuss:
“You have brains in your head; you have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You are on your own. And you know what you now. You are the guy who’ll decide where you go.”
Congratulations to the class of 2011!