

June 9, 2022 -- Keynote Speaker Remarks

CCR Graduation at Lubber Run Community Center

Good evening everyone, buenas tardes a todos

First of all, CONGRATULATIONS! FELICIDADES TO THE CLASS OF 2022!
YOU DID IT!

Now, as a key reminder, leaving high school and going into college, just remember that you did not do this alone. You had an amazing mentor who guided you through it all, you had a wonderful team of staff members who oversaw programs such as this one who believed in you through it all, and you also had a supportive system consisting of your far and nearest loved ones who would be there to hype you up and catch you when you were about to fall. Please take a moment to remind yourself of the people who came across your path and helped you through it all. You could be the smartest person in your class, you could be the number one person to raise your hand, you could even be the one who always says yes to helping other people, but the point is, while you are motivated to serve others, do not forget that others were there to serve you first in order to help you succeed and help you reach the place where you are today.

My name is Flor Caceres Godoy, my pronouns are she/her/ella, I have lived in Woodbury park for the last 10-11 years, I am an alum from AHC's College and Career Readiness program from 2018, and I am also a DC Posse Scholar who went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in Film and Media Studies with a minor in

Anthropology/Sociology. I know it sounds like a mouthful so I just say “major in Film and minor in sociology.” I was born in Guatemala and raised in Arlington, VA since 2005, but I never was able to become a citizen or resident. Therefore, that makes me 17 years living in the United States undocumented.

I remember always looking for resources left and right to see who would be able to help someone like me – an undocumented Latina, woman of color, first generation, and low-income student. I was part of extensive programs that consisted of George Mason’s Early Identification Program, Emerging Leaders Program (where I actually met Ana), the Dream Project Virginia, and AHC’s College and Career Readiness Program. Not to mention, I was already doing a lot within the Arlington Career Center when I took my film course with Mr. Tom O’Day thanks to the inspiration of my brother. All of the people and communities that set out to help me reach college, continue to be the inspiration for why I do what I do even to this day.

I identify as a community activist and organizer, never once shying away from my immigrant narrative, but I would constantly get asked, “aren’t you afraid of deportation?” Yes. I am. Students who identify as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color constantly have to live in survival mode because there are many places and institutions society tends to exclude us from. I know my number one fear going into college and high school, because both of them were predominantly white students, faculty and staff, was “am I going to fit in?” The answer is, “no. You are not supposed to. You are meant to stand out. You are meant to shine brighter than ever before.”

I had to and continue to always remember every single person I am grateful to have met because it is them who have always checked in, motivated me, and given me something to look forward to. Without my community who had constantly looked after me in Arlington, without my Posse squad who entered Lafayette College with me, without my mentors and advocates at Lafayette, I would not have become the first Undocumented, Guatemalteca, Arlingtontian, and Posse scholar to ever be Student Body President. Mind you, as an activist and abolitionist, I am not really a huge fan of politicians. But the people saw something in me that encouraged me to move up into this position at my school that allowed me to create the change I wanted to see ever since I first step foot on my campus.

However, this is not to say that shining bright means putting your mental health at risk. No, no. Please listen to what I am about to tell you as you go into your first year of undergraduate...

Do NOT, and I mean this honestly, do not sign up for 20 different clubs at your first activity fair. Trust me, it would save you a lot of time in eliminating all emails for a club you will probably never go to. Secondly, take yourself out on dates. Get to know the place your college is surrounded by. I can honestly tell you, going to college is a privilege in itself. No matter our backgrounds, but we could be indirectly or directly harming the businesses and the locals there who rely on revenue that comes from us visiting the college towns. So make sure you stay conscious of your role in the institution, the power you have as a student coming into a new space, and the impact you will have on a community.

Lastly, remember who you are. As cliché as it sounds, but remember who you are in this very moment, how you will carry on or change some of your values because as an important person said to me once, “you will never stop figuring yourself out.” Even when you think you found a passion and you want to stick to it, a new one will come. You have to be open to new things – I never knew I was going to learn new Afro beats or Caribbean dance moves, not to mention I had never really tried Indian food until my senior year of high school and wanted to try it again in college, and I fell in love with halal food too. Always new things you have to be up to exploring. Remember, you are not there to blend in, you are there to stand out; You are there invite people to your own table, not necessarily be asked to be invited to theirs – and this is especially true if you go to a predominantly white institution. But essentially, have fun! Make connections that will last you a lifetime... and take care of yourself mentally, emotionally and physically. You are your number one advocate and you are the one that needs you the most.

With that being said, best of luck class of 2026! You are going to do amazing things anywhere you go. I may not know you, but I do believe in you.