

## Commencement 2017 Final Draft

I was going to start my speech with a line about the ceremony being at 8 am, but then they moved it to 9 and I was “afreud” it wouldn’t go over well. However after running the difference through r commander I found that  $p > .05$  and there is really no significant difference between 8 and 9, so if everyone could pretend that it’s 8 that would be awesome. My favorite writer, Dr. Hunter S. Thompson once said: “I have a theory, that truth is never told during the 9-5 hours,” so I am honored to have the opportunity to convey to you something I know to be true at 8 in the morning: That the last plus or minus four years which we have spent studying psychology and neuroscience has been worthwhile— for us as students and for humanity as a whole.

A couple months ago in Dr. Pittman-Wager’s Clinical Interventions class, our guest speaker Dr. Kaufmann, gave our 11am class on the fourth floor of Muenzinger a piece of advice I will not soon forget: “Never Google your client.” I pondered this profound piece of psychological wisdom for quite some time, finding its essence entirely true.

If you Google my name, Noah Stein (and add Boulder after it to assure that you aren’t searching for Noah D. Stein, an electrical engineer at MIT), you’ll find a handful of news stories about Greek life at CU; which makes sense because I’ve been active in Greek life throughout my college career.

My Freshman year I joined a fraternity. Over the ensuing four years I rose through the ranks, becoming the recruitment director and then the president of the chapter. Then, during the Fall semester of my Junior year, I was elected President and CEO of the Interfraternity Council, the governing body for Boulder’s fraternity community. Over the course of my experience in Greek life, it became my identity. Because others perceived me as self-confident and partly due to the hyper-masculine tradition of fraternity, I felt forced to accept this new identity; projecting an image of strength, confidence, power, and leadership. As a result, I buried part of myself deep inside. The fact that I live with Bipolar Disorder.

While my affect indicated high self-confidence unbeknownst to my peers, mental illness plagued my mind. Bipolar disorder ravaged my internal self-confidence. In public I gave speeches, told jokes, and socialized, but in the confines of my room, within the walls of my mind the facade cracked. Out crept anxiety, panic attacks and depression. I tried to tackle my disorder on my own and failed.

Our society does not know how to talk about mental illness. Other than my family and closest friends, I kept it to myself. Because of my self-established image, as a fraternity man and a community leader, I inadvertently doomed myself to feel forced to lock away my illness deep inside, allowing myself to become cornered by my cognitions.

Why did I choose now to come out with this information? Because before me sits a community of empathizers. In a world where hate, zealotry, and intolerance dominate, where the loudest voice wins and the weak are washed to the wayside, you all chose the road less taken— to become harbingers of hope. The value of a degree in psychology or neuroscience in particular, and of liberal arts in general, manifests itself through the empathy you have learned here at CU. You have learned to relate with other human beings on more than just the surface, on a level deeper than a projected image or google search. You have learned that through concerted compassion, through fierce affinity for forging relationships, through understanding other people, you CAN make a difference. Countless people in the world, maybe even in this room, will benefit from your help, will benefit from your ability to listen without judgment and ask the right questions.

Whether your career leads you to a path such as clinical psychology, research, education, law, management, human resources, business, medicine, or politics, you all have a leg up. You have put time into understanding the human mind— to acknowledge that while we all have our differences, while we all struggle at times, that we are all human— that there is no one person inherently better than another. That we ought to pay attention to differences in class, race, religion, sexuality, and gender. That mental illness can come in countless shapes and sizes. In the end, love and understanding will trump hate and hurtfulness. Because of people as audacious as you, we have the ability to stop forcing human beings into boxes, for things that they cannot control— and rather than ostracize these differences as deficiencies, embrace the fact that diversity makes us stronger.

I live with my Disorder, and while I know that the world equates mental illness with weakness I am confident in front of my peers because before me sits that community of empathizers. You all have collected the tools to battle a weary world. You have prepared yourselves to look past arbitrary identities and to instead judge people on the merits of their character. Our generation, specifically those of us who study liberal arts have the potential to rejuvenate our workforce with positive energy, to shift the status quo; to change the world.

Barack Obama said: “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek...” Today I

seek to catalyze change by speaking up about mental illness, by repudiating the repulsive, stigmatizing system which serves as our status quo, by embracing my illness as part of my identity with the understanding that there are people out there who care, people out there dedicated to the service of humanity— people like you.

Before I conclude I would like to take a moment to thank the faculty of the psychology and neuroscience department for their dedication to providing an excellent education in support of social justice, while contributing in enormous ways to the existing body of research literature in psychology and neuroscience. Their efforts are nothing less than inspirational. And on behalf of the class of 2017, thank you to our parents and families we couldn't have done it without you. Finally, congratulations fellow Buffaloes on taking on the challenge of changing the world through the study of the human mind. Your openness has allowed me to tell my story today, and will allow countless others to tell theirs in the future. As the Hippocampus would say, thanks for the memories and go buffs.

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Class of 2017