Thank you Board of Trustees, President Galligan, Dean Taylor, colleagues, guests, family members and Class of 2012 graduates. I am honored to be here today, and to have this opportunity to speak with you at such a wonderful and happy occasion.

As I planned for this commencement address, my brother-in-law Steve told me that if he had this opportunity he would simply look out into the audience and say, “engage life.” He would then say “thank you” and sit right back down. I laughed, but I also acknowledged how appropriate his idea was since one of our college’s four strategic themes is “engaged learning.”

While Steve and I were talking I wondered aloud if I could even take his idea one step further. As a business faculty member who teaches management concepts, I thought perhaps I could effectively demonstrate the management practice of “delegation” and simply “delegate” this commencement address to my brother-in-law. But, I quickly realized that Professor Tony Quinn would not be impressed, nor would Steve be available since his own daughter is graduating this weekend.

So, here I am – truly honored to have the opportunity to share a few brief comments to this year’s graduating class.

While I appreciate the idea of “engage life,” I also want to expand that concept by welcoming you to think about living an engaged life that is in balance. My sister laughed when I said I was going to talk about balance because, in fact, my life has not been in balance over these last few years.

Let me explain. About twenty years ago, I, like you, was a new college graduate. I, perhaps like some of you, thought I knew exactly what I wanted to do for my career. I think I decided in high school I wanted to be a controller of a company. A controller is a type of senior accounting manager. I do not even remember how I learned about controllers, but, that was it, I wanted to be a controller. I worked very hard to get there with extremely limited resources. I graduated
with my bachelor’s degree. I worked in the accounting field for a while. And then I went back to school at night for my M.B.A.

During this time, one of my graduate school professors said that he thought I should teach accounting at night; he thought that I would really like it. Interesting, I remember thinking – that was not part of my plan – and I am a planner. But, I thought, okay; I loved being a student – maybe, I will love being a teacher, so I tried it. I did love it. Also, during this time, I worked my way up to the controller position. As a controller, I worked many hours in addition to teaching at night. Something had to give, it would have been logical to give up teaching at night, as it was only part-time. However, I surprised myself when I could not do it. I loved teaching. So much in fact I wanted to try it full-time. Did I mention I am a planner? I am an accountant after all. This was a huge risk. What if I left my job as a controller, and teaching full time was not what I expected? All I knew was that I could not do both – as much as I wanted to – because it was simply too much. My life was not in balance. I decided to be open to this new opportunity and take a risk. I came back to Colby-Sawyer College where I had once worked as an assistant controller with Doug Lyon. And, I quickly found that I did love teaching full time.

But, that is not the end of the story. I needed to earn my doctorate. This was also not part of my original plan. I had thought my years of formal education were over; I looked forward to “lifelong learning” in various informal settings. I did a lot of reading. I took ski lessons. I visited museums. I traveled. I learned this concept of “lifelong learning” from my Hungarian mother – who was an avid reader and took many “English as a Second Language” courses after she retired. And, although the English language challenged her, she continued to take courses well into her sixties. Using her as a role model, I thought, I can complete my doctorate.

So, like you, I have been a student. In fact, I just completed my Ph.D. last summer. I, like you, had been juggling multiple priorities including academics, work, family and friends.

In case school and work were not enough to keep me busy – my husband and I had our first child during this time as well. (In fact, as a side note, this delightful and happy little five-year-old boy is also a graduate at Colby-Sawyer College this year – the Windy Hill School at Colby-Sawyer College – but if you ask him, he would likely tell you he went to Colby-Sawyer.)

All of this juggling of commitments was a sacrifice on my part, and the part of my family and friends, but as I said, I love teaching and I understood the importance of an advanced degree so I
was willing to work very hard for this accomplishment. This degree, perhaps like your degree, was earned by much writing and, at times, with frustration and tears. I, perhaps like you during your senior Capstone work, was overwhelmed and crazy-busy at times. Yet, at the same time, I knew that there is a continuum between being overwhelmed and crazy-busy and under-stimulated and bored. I also knew that I wanted – needed – to be somewhere in the middle – to shoot for the area that represents work and life balance. And, while I consciously lived in that stage of busyness for a while, I recognized that there was not the necessary balance I wanted – needed – but it was only temporary and I could do this.

But now, like you, I am on the “other side” as a recent graduate. And, as I reflect back on my experience as a student I am amazed with how much I have learned. As I further reflect, I also know – wholeheartedly – that my life was not in balance (my husband as well as some of my colleagues may be nodding their heads in agreement right now). Similarly, as a student, there were certainly times that your life was not in balance. This last semester, for example, with senior Capstone projects and Scholars’ Day, it may have seemed that all you did was schoolwork. Then, this last week, with senior’s week, it may have seemed that all you did was have fun. Two extremes, but both equally valuable as you look back at your college experience.

I am also amazed at what I have learned outside of the classroom. For example, I learned that no matter how many times I go to the New York Stock Exchange I am still thrilled to be there (our Investment Management student who was on the floor of the Exchange twice in the last year would likely agree). I also learned that I like Indian food after being positive that I did not for some reason. And, as a new mom, and a non-hockey mom at that, I learned that I could get teary eyed just watching how excited my son is to play ice hockey. It is exciting to consider that I have discovered all of this while being crazy-busy. I cannot wait to see what else is out there that I may be passionate about now. Similarly, I hope that you are all equally as excited about learning what else may thrill you – whether that learning takes place through formal education or informal education outside of a classroom environment.

I cannot help but end my speech today by using an accounting metaphor. In fact, those of you that took an accounting course with me could think of “accounting as a metaphor for living life.” (I know some of my business colleagues and accounting students – as well as some of my Strategic Management students – may be rolling their eyes right now!) In accounting, I frequently say, “balance sheets must balance”; well now I realize how applicable this is to real life as well. “Life must balance.” There will be times that there is too much work, and there
will be times when there is too much fun, but in the end, on average, it has to balance out – not necessarily every day, or even every week or month, but as a whole.

But, enough about accounting analogies. even though I was tempted to do many more I limited myself to only this one. Today, it is all about you: the Class of 2012.

As you go forward in this new stage of your life as a college graduate, I wish you well as you “engage life” just like you “engaged learning.”

I encourage each of you to be open to opportunities – to change – and to what “thrills you” as you pursue lifelong learning.

I also wish that each of you will be able to find your “balance.” My sincere congratulations.

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