Text of speech by Joshua Place, student speaker, at Pima Community College’s 2013 Graduation, Thursday, May 16 at the Tucson Convention Center:

It is an honor, and great privilege, to stand before you all today. Friends, family, faculty members, administrators, graduates, and to everyone who is just now realizing that this is not the Gem Show, I welcome you to Pima Community College’s 2013 Graduation Ceremony.

The TCC staff has asked me to point out that there are emergency exits on the right and left hand side of the building, and in case my speech crashes, your chairs do double as a floatation device.

In my second semester, here at Pima, I waited in class for my new math instructor to arrive. Abruptly, a man, who I assumed was lost and somehow managed to escape from the hospital, began hastily scribbling equations on the board. To my surprise, this man continued for the next hour and a half… by the end of that class period, I had learned more about quadratic polynomials and natural logarithms than ever before.

However, the greatest thing I learned that day was not formulas… it was that people, no matter how strange or extravagant they may seem, are ALL capable of incredible things. Now, you all look a bit concerned... do not worry, I am not here to lecture you about the science of human behavior, neuropsychology, or just plain psychology...

No, I am here today to point out how little we know. Yes, if the sound engineer in the back hasn’t turned my mic off yet, you did hear me correctly. Today is not only about celebrating how much we have learned through our education here at Pima, but it is also about celebrating how little we truly know. You see, the more we know, the less there is to learn, and what would life be like with nothing new to discover?

For me, I am celebrating everything that I have yet to discover, everything I have yet to learn, and everything that is yet to be invented or even imagined. Today, we acknowledge that our insignificance is exactly what makes us significant.

You see, the story I told you about with my math teacher, the one who I had built up in my mind to be this great and powerful, wise mathematician, well, he truly was exactly the man I had imagined him to be like. . . he just didn’t look like what I had imagined him to be like. Somehow, when we expect something to be great, we compare it to the greatest marvel our eyes have ever seen.

A wise man named Augustine said it like this, “Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, the huge waves of the sea, the long course of rivers, the vast compass of the ocean, and the circular motion of the stars. . . yet they pass by one another, and don’t even notice.”

Whether you are here today as a parent, teacher, friend, administrator, or that guy who still thinks that this is the Gem Show... We are all here for the same reason, to celebrate the beginning of the rest of our lives. For us, the graduates, we are beginning a new chapter in our life’s book. But today, I challenge the rest of you to be the next character in someone else’s book. Be the next Main Character in another person’s life. As I look at the past heroes in my book, my math teacher, my family and friends, I begin to look at all of you before me, wondering what chapter of life our paths will meet. Even if today is the last day that our paths cross, I am so grateful and thankful that it happened at all.

In closing, I want to thank all of you, every one of you, for supporting Pima’s 2013 graduates. To my fellow graduates, WE DID IT! We finished this chapter, now let us turn the page and change the world.