GRADUATION SPEECH

FOR

MOHAMMED ALSHEHRI

Hello everyone… I am Mohammed Alshehri, a proud member of the graduating class of Southwestern College Class of 2016. I am also very proud to be a part of the Saudi Association Club, especially as we honor this year’s Saudi graduates. Of course we are thrilled to be members of a diverse and enthusiastic group of graduates and as an entity we honor all of our colleagues, but tonight we express a special acknowledgement to our Saudi compatriots and to all of the students, faculty, and administrators here at Southwestern College who have seen to it that our time spent here has been filled with a lifetime of knowledge, friendship, and cultural enrichment. As we are considered the first group of Saudi students to graduate from this college, we are particularly honored to have the opportunity to share our gratitude. This is the first graduation ceremony that the Saudi Association Club will host and it is our intention that this wonderful evening serves as a foundation for all such acknowledgement ceremonies to follow. We are proud to be a part of this premier event and it is no secret that we did not achieve this distinction in a vacuum. There are many people to recognize and thank and it is a great privilege for me to do just that,

Benjamin Franklin said, “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” There are many wise and generous people that have accepted us and guided us as we found our way within the walls of this institution. To our college President, Dr, Brad Andrews, and to our Dean of Education, Dr. Cameron Carson, on behalf of my fellow graduates, we thank you for your dedication and focus on maintaining and advancing the vision and mission of Southwestern College. We are inspired by that mission and we find new meaning in “Leadership through service in a world without boundaries.” To all of the distinguished faculty who really focused on teaching and making sure we learned about life as well as our lessons, we thank you all for your dedication. To all of the family and friends here, you are our greatest cheering section and the reason why we do what we do. Your constant support and enthusiasm provide us with the energy and purpose to “Yearn to Learn.”

As we know this is the first group of Saudi students to graduate from Southwestern College. We are very thankful and grateful for the generous support of King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz and King Salaam bin Abdulaziz and to the Saudi government for granting the scholarships that made this program possible. I would also like to recognize the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the United States for encouraging our studies. As a member of this class I have to say that it has been a real blessing and a gift to be chosen. To think that we have hopefully begun a tradition of international educational studies is very humbling indeed. I am sure that the lessons we learned here at Southwestern College will last a lifetime and it is our intention that the connection we have forged will inspire future students to follow in this path.

Of course I also want to acknowledge all of my friends and fellow students that have been on this journey with me. The French author André Gide (**pronounced GEED with a hard “G” as in “Guide**) said, “It is only in adventure that some people succeed in knowing themselves- in finding themselves.” This experience has really been an adventure for all of us. When we began the early steps of this process we struggled. It was not easy learning English in 18 months (**If you want to make a joke you can say**)… Imagine… there are **THREE** different ways to spell the little word **TWO**!!! Go explain THAT to someone who doesn’t speak English!! (**And wait for the laugh**). I know we all have clear memories of wondering how we would be able to do all of this… traveling, living far from home, having kids, learning new ways of life AND having to concentrate and excel at our studies, but it is clear that when a person is fulfilling his or her destiny, God leads us and shows us the way. We received amazing support from people like Dr. Sheryl Jackson, our academic advisor. Dr. Jackson, on behalf of this class we want to thank you for your guidance and wisdom and for literally and sometimes figuratively placing us on the **right path** (**If you want to make a joke you can say**)… after all, this is a **big campus**! (**And wait for the laugh**). You provided us with a clear plan that showed us all there was to learn from so many aspects of college life. We gained valuable experience thanks to your suggestions and the lessons learned from the various symposiums, conferences and workshops we attended really enriched our educational experience.

I would also like to acknowledge Mr. Jeff Everett, a collaborative principal at Irving Elementary School. Having many opportunities to observe different aspects of the school experience throughout the year really brought to life all that we were studying in class. We thank you and your teachers for your generosity in sharing your spirit and your skills.

So now my fellow graduates, it is time to take all that we have learned and share that bounty with those who will learn from us. I believe we have a lot of which to be proud. We learned and we gained a priceless experience and education and it is time to share our gifts. As we know, this is just the beginning of our education as adults. We have shared our wonderful heritage and culture with our hosts and teachers and it is time to share all that we learned as we begin to take our places and make our mark on the world. We are all so fortunate to have this chance to learn from such great professors in such a welcoming environment and now it is our privilege to bring that spirit to others.

Thank you all!