Good evening distinguished faculty, proud families, and of course fellow 2018 graduates!!! Again, my name is Francine Brantley and I represent one of the many voices of this graduating class. When I was asked to be one of the commencement speakers I began to experience a mixture of feelings – excitement, anxiety, pride...yet confused on where to even begin– and slowly I started to realize that those same emotions I felt in that short period of time are in all of us today as college graduates.

When I first stepped foot onto UNCG to audition for the school of dance (again) those emotions arised within me and I wanted to give up...it was too much and I had too much against me. From the mouths of family and so called friends, I was said to be... too short, I was stocky, I was black, and most of all I didn’t have the training. But in the midst of anxiety and my confusion, I did have one thing and that was the will and desire to be...to be any and everything I always dreamed about..and that was to dance. French author, André Gide tells us, “Learning new things depends on self willingness; you cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore”.

Tomorrow, we are graduating and some of us will go off to start the beginning of our careers. Some will move to another state, go to graduate school, or do something completely opposite of their major...but this evening...as we gather with faculty, friends, and family to commemorate the past three or four years, let us reflect on who we were, who we have become, and who we can become. We are all here because we had the will and the guts to discover new oceans...and I beg that you keep that same fire as you go out into the world! Remember that your presence is strong and is needed. That what you have to givecan not be measured by money,by recognition or titles. Your gifts our valuable.

I thank our professors for giving us the tools to tap into our gifts! From technique with Mr. “Alriiggght”, Professor Duane, from grooving with Queen Robin, to BJ’s life lessons, to EARLY mornings with Mrs. W & Dr. Parrish, along with all of the faculty in their respective places that make this dance department what it is! Thank you. You hand picked us and saw our will to move, to create, to teach and you supported us in all of our creative endeavors and because of your love we are here today.

To end, let us go to the world and feel...let us feel excited, proud, and confused but at the end of the day let us remain willing. As we prepare for our future, may we hold fast to the words of the great Bob Fosse, “Live like you'll die tomorrow, work like you don't need the money, and dance like nobody's watching.”

Thank you!