Hello,

My name is Lauren Vanessa Watson and I am honored to be speaking to you all today.

Today is a day of great celebration. After the fast and challenging 4 years we are finally graduating from the UNCG dance department.

I am grateful and extremely blessed to have had the opportunity to be educated in this incredible program. During my time here I have learned to be many things including a scholar and a leader... but most

importantly I was able to find my voice as an artist here.

UNCG's dance department has given me so many unique experiences.. from dancing for the camera in Robin Gee's class to throwing myself onto the floor for BJ Sullivan... from taking my first reformer class with Mila Parrish, to running up and down Gate City Boulevard ... this department has always been nothing less than exciting.

In these 4 years, I have learned from Janet Lilly to ALWAYS take your shoes off in the studio, I have learned how to brand myself from Duane Cyrus, and most importantly I have learned how to be Gucci instead of Walmart from Maurice Watson.

I have accomplished so much here and was given so many opportunities. In 2014, I walked on bricks with my cohort for Fall Dances... In 2015 I spent the summer eating gelato with Janet in Italy and was able to Perform in The Table of Silence... ! auditioned and was picked to learn Prelude to Action by Martha Graham in 2016 and in 2017 I was able to perform it at the Joyce Theatre in New York City. This year, I was able to choreograph my own thesis and just two weeks ago I was able to see it come to life on stage.

Although I am sad that I have to leave this department, and I wont get to keep dancing in our new beautiful studios, I know that there are great things waiting for me.

To my professors.

We are so lucky that you decided to become educators. Even if I only had one semester with you, please know that I genuinely look up to Each and Every one of you. I aspire to be as talented, strong, and intelligent, as you are.

The difference that you have made in all of our lives is something that we will never be able to thank you enough for. Thank you for listening to us... thank you yelling at us, and always pushing us to be better. Thank you for seeing the potential in me when I couldn't see it in myself.

To my cohort,

Thank you for all of the wonderful memories.

We have all grown so much and I am proud of each of you. We have laughed together, We have cried together.. We have stepped on each others toes, but I know that we have made life long connections.

Even if we don't talk every day please know how much you mean to me and that I will always be a friend if you need one.

Starting tomorrow, we will be pushed out into the real world, desperately trying to get hired and to make our mark in the dance community.

Lets remember that we all have bright futures... We have all worked so hard for this moment. We must remember to continue to take risks. We must remember to stay strong at the sight of adversity and to never apologize for who we are. UNCG has given us the tools to teach, inspire and create flourishing careers.

Someone told me last week, You're done! Its all down hill from here. But they were wrong. We have so much more to offer and so much more hard work to do. We



are Just now beginning our journey into the unknown. There are many changes on the horizon and many challenges but its going to be amazing.

I'd like to close with a quote from TS Elliot:

"What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from."

Thank you 0