

# Completion Counts!

***RCC Commencement Address – Ronald O. Loveridge  
June 12, 2014***

Thank you for the honor, and opportunity, to speak to the Class of 2014 at the 97th Riverside City College Commencement.

I am here as a past elected official in Riverside--19 years as Mayor and 14 as a Council member. And I am here also as a political science professor-- in 2015, it will be 50 years of teaching at UCR.

Tonight, I will talk about Completion Counts, to offer kudos: first to RCC, then to RCC/City collaborations, and finally to you RCC's 2014 graduates.

For nearly 100 years, 97 to be exact, RCC has played a key role in the life and times of Riverside.

I often say that there are three important characteristics of a city--size, history, and major assets or resources.

Riverside is a city of 310,000 people, the 12th largest in CA and the 61st largest in the country.

Our history was citrus--we were the city in the groves. Or, as described by Kevin Starr, one of the State's most respected historians, "Riverside was the quintessential citrus town in Southern CA."

In 2014, the City's most important assets or resources are the four campuses: RCC, UCR, CBU, and LSU. We are now a college town.

According to the CEOs for Cities, "...the bell towers of academic institutions have replaced smokestacks as the drivers of the American urban economy."

Here at Magnolia Avenue and the Tequesquite Arroyo, RCC has a major presence in the City of Riverside.

Enrollment is about 17,000 students. There are 213 full time faculty members and 247 classified staff. And the estimated economic impact is over \$700 million.

As CA's eighth community college, RCC started in 1916.

Arthur Wheelock, RCC's first leader, said that the college was preparation for the university and for life. It would offer both theoretical and practical training that would help students find themselves.

RCC indeed offers training, theoretical and practical, to its students.

Tonight, there are 3,099 graduates in the Class of 2014, representing 2,200 AA degrees and 879 certificates.

You will be joining an estimated 91,000 past graduates of RCC.

The key marker of a City's success is the talent dividend, those residents with a degree beyond high school.

The Class of 2014 represents the talent dividend. Kudos to RCC and the education and training that you represent.

However you define the good city, RCC has, is, and will make an extraordinary difference in the past, present, and future of Riverside.

RCC and the City are better together. Collaboration works.

Several examples--RCC's Office of Economic Development helps local businesses grow and create hundreds of new jobs. This economic impact multiplied over many years deserves recognition, and kudos.

Next, the Aquatic Center--take a look--is one of the best such centers in the United States. It was built by a community partnership, with the City being a major funding partner. It hosted ABC's Splash. It recently hosted an international water polo tournament. It stands as a model of what difference collaboration can make.

In 1998, the City of Riverside became an All-America City--112 cities applied, 30 finalists competed, and 10 cities were selected by a panel of judges.

The All America award celebrated three youth projects: Passport to College, University /Eastside Community Collaborative, and Mayor's Youth Action Plan.

Passport to College was a community effort centered on RCC. It introduced students and their parents to a range of college-related experiences, and it created an endowment so that college could be accessible. Initiated in 1996, Passport to College focused on grade six students. Led by the RCC Foundation, the higher education community launched an effort to raise funds. The objective was to guarantee a two-year scholarship to RCC. Passport to College received national recognition as an early outreach model that worked.

The last example is Completion Counts. In 2010, the City and RCC received a three million dollar grant from the Gates Foundation to increase postsecondary education. We competed against many cities across the United States; four were selected: New York, San Francisco, Mesa, Arizona, and Riverside.

We named it Completion Counts. RCC was the host for the grant. Other participants included Alvord, RUSD, Chamber of Commerce, and the City.

In brief, many good things have happened.

For example, Alvord and RUSD now offer special Math and English classes to seniors to meet RCC college level requirements. And Math and English teachers from RCC regularly meet with their counterparts at Alvord and RUSD.

Further, Completion Counts developed a public report card around four indicators that outlined student-level goals.

However, the most important initiative is RCC's two year guarantee to the students from Alvord and RUSD. This year we have the first graduates.

In 2012, 356 students signed contracts. Tonight 154 graduate and another 74 could graduate after the summer session.

And for 2013, 347 students signed contracts. This spring 334 contract students enrolled.

The big test is whether the overall numbers completing degrees from Alvord and RUSD will increase. Here the jury is out.

However, for all students who are graduating tonight, kudos. Completion counts. You have successfully met the graduation requirements. Whether by a two year contract or not, you made it!

I read a recent column in the Los Angeles Times by Meghan Daum. It was titled: "Grads: It's Not About You." She wrote, "Because here's the thing about commencement speeches: They're not about the graduates. They're about the speakers."

Tonight my focus is on the Class of 2014, and the importance of your completion of an AA degree or certificate. Completion does count!

There was a brilliant story in the May 18th New York Times Magazine by Paul Tough. It was titled, "Who Gets to Graduate?" It centers on what University of Texas, Austin has done to increase graduation rates.

He emphasizes two big trends.

First, in the United States, for those who make it to college including community colleges, the drop out rate is more than half. This number is worse than any other country in the world except for Hungary.

And second, whether a student graduates seems to depend almost entirely on just one factor--how much money his or her parents make. To put it blunt terms, Tough says, "Rich kids graduate; poor and working-class kids don't."

The graduates we honor tonight completed their AA or certificate requirements. The barriers were immense. There are many obstacles. And in important ways, these barriers and obstacles are more difficult for community college students.

There are daunting requirements of tests to pass and papers to write. Tests and papers may raise the questions of "Am I supposed to be here?" or "Am I good enough." Homework must be done. Students must attend classes. Study habits must be developed. On occasion, hours of sleep are challenged. There are issues of finances--how to I pay for my studies at RCC as well as food, clothing, and shelter. Or, are the classes I need even available? There can also be serious family obligations. Hours at work compete with time in class, and especially for class preparation. Time is difficult to manage, for there are many choices that may be more compelling than going to class or more interesting than doing homework. And there is always the question: "What do I want to do when I grow up?"

Given the barriers, the obstacles, how has the Class of 2014 met RCC's requirements? How have you overcome the adversity that stops so many from completing an AA or a certificate?

All of us have help. It may be a parent. It could be a friend, or spouse. It may be a faculty member who was a good mentor as well as a good teacher. It may be a counselor who provided helpful advice. It may be a coach who gave personal direction. It may have been the support from a drama group or the Marching Tigers. Success is rarely a solitary accomplishment.

We celebrate and thank all those who have helped the Class of 2014 complete their educational degrees at RCC. It is true that "It takes a village."

While help is necessary, it is not sufficient. In the last analysis, it is your drive, your commitment to succeed. No one else takes the tests or writes the papers. The personal markers of completion counts are determination and self-discipline. You recognized the importance, the promise of a degree from RCC. Kudos, for you did it!

There was a TV program in the early 1960's called Naked City. It was about New York. It ended by saying "There are eight million stories in the Naked City. This has been one of them."

We celebrate tonight the 3,099 stories that represent the RCC Class of 2014. There are so many stories that answer the who, why, what, and how of completion counts. I wish we could share, and then applaud, every story.

Here are three such 2014 stories. The first is from Kelly Brautigam, a Counselor Faculty Member at RCC-- and my daughter.

Bree Dennis is completing her studies with a 3.49 GPA. Before starting at RCC, she was a divorced single parent with six children. Life was difficult and uncertain during her K-12 years, with Bree attending more than 20 schools. She explained, "I can overcome, prevail, and learn from my past." She works on campus in the Workforce Preparation Office, assisting students overcome their obstacles. Bree especially thanks her counselor Anne. Her goal is to become a teacher. President of the Pathways to Teaching, Bree volunteers about 700 hours a year. She says, "Studying with six kids is difficult but when you add a job and volunteering on top of that, it seems almost impossible, though I have learned to have faith in myself and my abilities." Kudos Bree Dennis.

The second story is from Brian Brautigam, Alternate Media Specialist for RCCD--and my son-in-law.

Matt Hojdila is graduating this year with a major in Communications & Language. Matt is transferring to Cal State Dominguez Hills where he will major in Communications and Language and minor in History. Matt was in a car accident that left him with a crushed skull, vision loss, and a broken knee. After years of physical therapy and 23 surgeries, Matt has completed his AA degree, including taking all the honors courses that RCC offers. Kudos Matt Hojdila.

The third story is from Garth Schultz, also a Counselor Faculty Member at RCC.

Tomas Rubio is a Marine Corps veteran. Tomas was a victim of the "great recession." Stores were being closed at his place of employment. He then heard of the VRAP or "Veterans Retraining and Assistance Program." Tomas decided to come to RCC to gain new and marketable skills. While in a hurry to achieve his own goals, he thought it was important to support other veterans. Last year Tomas served, and effectively so, as the President of the Student Veteran Association. At RCC, he earned a certificate in Air Conditioning/Refrigeration. Kudos Tomas Rubio.

In closing, Class of 2014, use your education completed here at RCC, and make it count!

Completion can/should/will count! RCC has provided a framework, a platform to make a difference in life, in work, and for the City of Riverside.

Thank you, and God speed.