

Women in Cybersecurity, May 17, 2019
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It is a true honor to be here. Distinguished administrators, faculty, family, friends, and of course the graduating class of 2019, welcome all. We have been fortunate to have the opportunity to study at one of the finest community colleges in the State of New York. I would like to take this moment to express my appreciation to my instructors, mentors, and advisors who have always helped us.

When I was 6 years old, I was obsessed with drawing and I wanted to become an artist, my parents bought me crayons and drawing books to draw because as a girl in my country I couldn't go to elementary school. We were living under the brutal regime of the Taliban in northern Afghanistan. They didn't allow girls to go to school. I felt hopeless, I thought I would never be able to go to school and that I would be invisible, wearing burkas for the rest of my life.

My parents wanted to flee, so I and my brother could go to school, but they couldn't afford it. Because of the massive global effort spearheaded by the American people after the tragedy of 9/11, I was finally able to start elementary school although a few years behind I caught up to the rest of the students quickly. That first day of school I felt as liberated as my oldest daughter was on her first day of kindergarten here in New York.

My three daughters were born in different countries; each close to 10 pounds. Their father who worked to secure the peace in Afghanistan, and is working now in our community here, and I know that 7 of those pounds is the American heart each were born with. My America is born in the mind, the heart, the spirit, and in the actions. It is about finding a way as a community to work towards the good and the enlightened even when challenged. For me, being American is about getting out of one's comfort zone.

One afternoon I got out of my comfort zone and started to research about cybersecurity on the internet. I was scared to go near the idea of "cybersecurity". Words like hacking, dark web, and online scamming made me nervous as a mom of three young girls in a fast-changing world, but I had no idea what they were. What really caught my attention in the cybersecurity field were not the buzz words mentioned earlier, but that women are underrepresented the field.

There is a dangerous shortage of cybersecurity workers globally and women only make up 11% of that global workforce. We need to close the gender gap in Cybersecurity. Increasing the number of women in cybersecurity brings a different perspective, leadership, and experience which is needed. We need women in this nation who are willing and able to expand their knowledge of STEAM disciplines. Though women can't do it alone and they can do it in partnership with many present in this room today. Today, I would like to call on everyone, especially to other women, to face our fears and embrace the challenges we encounter. This is what makes us and future generations stronger. If we run away from them, we run away from the opportunities for leadership that life brings to us.

Our passions, vocations, and educational goals vary but it is our job to be the guardians of the artistic, creative, and humane treasures of this nation, our community, and this world. Each and every one of us are called on to secure peace to move our planet into a sustainable future, to keep governance fair, elections open, and to keep our first responders, critical infrastructure, education system, and public services viable to serve all people.

Fight for yourself, fight for what you love, and keep fighting to learn. Don't be intimidated. Take chances and face the difficulties. A drop of rain is not afraid of the ocean. The diploma we hold in our hands today, it is not the end of our journey, in fact, it is the beginning of the new

journey. Thank you all for your time and congratulations to the class of 2019, we did it, and will do more.