Commencement Speaker Intro Video

2014 Sochi Winter Olympic Games
Noelle Pikus Pace – Final Run, Skeleton Sled

Announcer 1: Noelle Pikus Pace and her family have enjoyed the success; they've endured the injury; they've swallowed the retirement; and rallied in the comeback. The wait for an Olympic medal has been far too long. Now is her time. (Cheers, Cowbells Ringing and Applause.) Farwell games; farewell drives; farewell runs are always special. This is it for Noelle Pikus Pace! (Cheers)

Announcer 2: Did you see that moment; that moment of prayer there. She closed her eyes and had her last focused moment of anticipation of what she wants out of this run.

Announcer 1: In 2005, she won the World Cup. She was then hit in a training accident by a four-man bobsled. Nine weeks later she came back, but she missed the Torino games. She had to wait another four years for Vancouver and missed the podium by a tenth-of-a-second. She’s had to wait ‘til now. This is her final Olympic run for that elusive medal.

Announcer 2: On all of these turns, what she’s carrying with her is family. The only reason that she is here today is because her and Jansen, who built her sled – that’s her husband, decided that they wanted to give this one more go as a family together.

Announcer 1: Noelle Pikus Pace has that Olympic medal! She finally has it. (Air horns blowing, cheers, applause.)

Announcer 2: She did it!!! (Air horns blowing, cowbells ringing, cheers, applause.)

   Noelle: (Screams) Oh my goodness. Fantastic! Aahhh! Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!

   Jansen: Yay!!! Way to go!

   Noelle: Aahhh! Oh my gosh! (Giggles; Cheers, cowbells ringing,) Aahhh!

   Jansen: Whooo! Yay!!! Yay! (Laughs) Great job!

   Noelle: Oh my gosh! We did it. We DID it! WE DID it!!!
Commencement Address

Noelle Pikus Pace
Olympic Medalist, World Champion and CTU Graduate

Woohoo! (Giggles) Wasn’t that awesome? Oh my gosh, that was so cool. I know each of you... I know each of you have always dreamt about throwing yourself head-first down an icy chute... 90 miles an hour... I know you each have, right? Just as much as you’ve dreamed about today... getting that diploma? I know you have.

Umm, first of all I really have to let you know I’m not quite as aerodynamic as I was a year ago. (Laughter and applause.) I am actually pregnant and due with twins next month, so we’re excited. (Excited exclamation and applause.) Aaahhh... thank you. Thank you. So, looking at this video and just watching, it brings back so many memories to me. I remember it like it was just yesterday. It was a year ago, but I remember jumping up off of that platform and up into the stands and reaching for my family and remembering all the tears and the hardship and sacrifice that my husband and I and my family had to go through to make that moment possible. I knew... I knew as I set that sled down that it was never just about me. I knew that the people... that everybody would be able to see me going down that track but it was never just about me. It was about so many other people; and all the love and the support that I had all along the way that pushed me and drove me to be my best. I remember crossing that finish line and jumping into the stands and the only thing I could say was, “We did it!” “WE did it!” (Exclaim and applause.)

It was a... very emotional day for me and I know that for you, it is as well. To be able to stand up here and to look out and to recognize all of the sacrifice and the hardships; and the trials and the joy; and happy times and sad times. I know there’s so much emotion and so much trial that have gone into each and every one of your lives... to make you come to where you are today. I just want to give a round of applause to all those that are here supporting you, as well. (Applause)

Many of you might have someone that you look up to; someone that you consider to be your hero. For me, it’s my mom. I love my mom. (Giggles) She decided to go back to school. She didn’t have her Bachelor’s degree. She went for about a year and then she... got married and then life kinda went on, as it does for us. Right? She went on and she realized she wanted to go back to school so when she was about 47 years old, she said, “Y’know what? I really want my Bachelor’s degree. I want to go back to school.” She made that decision and I was in high school and I remember seeing her. She was working full-time, she was going to school... attending her classes. She was determined. I saw the sacrifice that it took for her to obtain this degree and I saw how much it meant to her. My parents instilled in me at a very young age the importance of obtaining my education; and obtaining as much as possible. They always told me if it ever came down to going out for sports or getting my education, my education would always need to come
first; and I’m grateful for the lessons that they taught to me. I saw her sacrifice; and I saw her endurance; and I saw her persevere.

One of the greatest moments of my life – up there next to what we just saw – was when I was able to graduate with my Bachelor’s degree right alongside with my mom. (Applause) It was incredible. For me, getting my degree was just kind of the next step out of high school. I knew that I always wanted to. I ran track; I had a scholarship and went on for it. But for her... as I stood there, I received my diploma; I was all smiles; I was excited; I was done (or so I thought – I went on for my Master’s later – I THOUGHT I was done). But as I saw her... and she was just in tears. I knew that it was because of all the trials and the sacrifices that it took her to get that degree. It stood out to me. It made me recognize that anything worthwhile, anything great, any dream worth obtaining is gonna take sacrifice. It’s gonna take hard work. Not saying that mine was any lower because I felt differently about it or because I just went on for it, but to see HER sacrifice, I was so much more happy for HER.

I want to share with you one of the greatest lessons that I learned from my Olympic journey. After I continued on – so this was just shortly after I received my Bachelor’s degree – I was determined and excited to become an Olympian. I’d never been an Olympian before and in the fall of 2005... going into the 2006 Winter Olympic Games... I’d never been an Olympian – still excited... I was ranked first in the world. (A small bit of applause.) Yes, thank you... that was, that was awesome. Oh, there it is, okay... thank you. (Giggles) But I was – I was ranked first in the world and so excited to become an Olympian. I still had to try out for this Olympic team – even though I was ranked first in the world, I still had to try out. So, at our U.S. Olympic Trials I had gone down the track and I finished my practice run and I was sitting there waiting with four of my teammates. We were waiting at the bottom of the track for a truck to drive down and we’d pick up our sleds and we’d get onto this truck and the truck would take us back up to the top of the track so that we could go down again. Well, as I sat there waiting... for another girl to come down on her Skeleton sled, I heard a loud noise coming from the finish line. And I remember turning and looking over my shoulder and crossing the finish line was a four-man bobsled. Now, a four-man bobsled weighs about 1500 pounds... and they were coming 60-70 miles an hour towards us. Immediately, I jumped up to my feet to get out of the way. I could tell that this bobsled wasn’t slowing down; they weren’t pulling their brakes. So, I jumped up to my feet, but I was boxed in: all my teammates were in front of me, and the bobsled was coming behind me, so I wasn’t gonna run back towards it. But behind me there was a staircase, so I couldn’t just jump out, either. I had to take one step to jump out of the way of this oncoming bobsled. Right when I took that step, the bobsled hit me from behind. I remember flying through the air 25 or 30 feet and I landed on the hard asphalt. I tried to jump up to my feet to see what had happened and I fell back to the ground. And I could hear my teammate screaming and running around. There was a lot of commotion going on. I tried to jump up to my feet and I could see the bobsled in the distance going off the end of the finishing dock onto the pavement and I fell back to the ground. And that’s when I looked down at my leg to see why I couldn’t stand up. And my bones were sticking out. Gross... eww.... (Nervous laughter; giggles.)
In a split second, everything I’d worked so hard for was gone. In a split second, all the sacrifice, all the time, all the financial strain. My husband and I had both just graduated. We were living in my parent’s basement. We were trying to pay off our student loans – some of you may understand that situation. (Laughter) It was a really tough time and we were sacrificing everything to make this Olympic dream come true. And in a split second, it was taken from me and I didn’t have any choices. It was gone. (Silence...) Today’s a happy day – I’m gonna lighten it up a little bit. (Laughter) So, I get wheeled in – I’m gonna tell you a funny story. So I get wheeled into the emergency room and I go into surgery and the doctor comes in and says, “Okay. We’re gonna have to put a titanium rod down through your knee, into your leg, and it’s gonna go from your knee to your ankle; put some screws in the side...” I said, “Do what ya gotta do – just fix my leg.” And they said, “Okay, so we have to give you some medicine so you’ll be asleep for it.” Awesome. Thank you. And so I go under and I’m getting surgery and I wake up... I’m looking around... and I look down... and there’s four or five doctors around me. I look down again and one of them has a hammer! (Laughter) Ya! They’re hammering the rod into my leg! I can’t feel it – luckily – but I can see it and I don’t wanna see it. So, I didn’t know what to do and so all I could think to do was... there was a doctor walking by me and I said, “Excuse me.” (Giggles) “Excuse me. Down here.” And he looks around and he sees me and I said, “Umm... I don’t think I’m supposed to be awake for this.” (Laughter) He looks around; he takes that little blue sheet and he pulls it over my head and I’m all... “… I can still hear you.” (Laughter and giggles) They must’ve given me more medicine after that ’cause I didn’t hear anything. So, yes – awesome. (Giggles) The lesson that I want to share with you guys, though, happened just a few moments after this. As I got wheeled out of this surgery room and into my recovery room, I remember that was truly the moment that it hit me: my Olympic dream is gone. My teammates will go on to tomorrow to try out for this Olympic dream and they will continue day-after-day, racing and competing and I will still be sitting here; in this hospital room... trying to recover and going to physical therapy and doing what I need to get better. And that’s when it hit me and a tear started coming down my cheek. And right when that tear started coming down my cheek, my hospital room door flew open and in walks my surgeon and she’s carrying a clipboard. And she looked up from this clipboard and she saw this tear and she said, “...Why are you crying?” (Laughter) I know, right?!?? (Laughter) Thinking back now, I wanted to say something like, “Umm... you get hit by a bobsled and see if you cry, okay?” (Laughter and giggles.) I was speechless – I didn’t know what to say and she just said, “Why are you crying? You have two choices: you can either look back and be upset and be angry and frustrated about what just happened to you; or, you can choose... to move... forward.” (Applause) She said, “Your leg is broken and crying is not going to fix it.” I knew right then I had a choice. All I really wanted then, was a hug... was that too much to ask? (Laughter) But I knew in that moment that she was right and it was exactly what I needed to hear. I had a choice. We always have a choice. No matter what situation you’re in; no matter what obstacles you face, you always
have a choice. Do not blame your circumstances... or allow them to hold you back from becoming who you can become. You have so much potential; go out there and fight for it. (Applause) Right then, I knew my future was up to me. That following year, I went on to win the World Championships. I became the first American woman to win the world championships and I won it by the largest margin in the history of our sport. And it’s a sport that is based on a hundredth-of-a-second and I won it by over a second and a half. (Cheers and applause) Whoo!!! Thanks. Your future is your own. What you decide to become and where you decide to go from here is up to you. It takes a team. It takes a support network. It takes so many people to make you become your best; but, inevitably, it is up to you to decide where you will go from here. Where you will go a year from now; five years from now; ten years from now... it’s your choice. Do not be afraid. Do not allow your circumstances to hold you back.

I wanna leave you with a challenge. I know that the time for reading books and studying (is over) for now. For some of you it may be over... for some of you this is a just a milestone; a stepping stone to the next step. But I wanna make a challenge for you. If you have a notebook... a pen, a pencil... a tablet, a phone... wherever you keep your notes. I have this challenge. Three of my keys to success... whether it’s in life; whether it’s in business; no matter which aspect it’s been... in choosing to go on for a degree; a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the absolute best school ever... CTU! (Cheers and applause.) These three keys to success have aided me in every aspect of my life. Here’s the first one. You ready? I see some of you don’t have notebooks. I can see you up front. That’s why you don’t sit up front. No, I’m just teasing... (Laughter and giggles.)

Okay, the first one – and I’m sure some of you might know this – but if you don’t, here it is: set smart goals for yourself. Not just any kind of goals. Each and every week, set a goal. Every day that I would compete; each and every day that I would train I would write down three goals for myself. Three S.M.A.R.T. goals. And I would focus on those three goals for the entire day. And at the end of the day, I would go back and say, “Was I able to accomplish these things?” In setting S.M.A.R.T. goals for yourself, you have to recognize your mistakes... and your faults and you have to strive to make them better. Just a little bit better tomorrow... I’m gonna be a little bit better.

The second challenge that I have for you is to be intentional with your habits. It’s so easy to fall into complacency; it’s so easy to wake up in the morning... and get ready for the day and go to work... and come home; eat dinner, turn on the TV, check emails, go to bed... only to do it all again. And you think, “What did I do today? I don’t know... it’s the same as yesterday.” Time is valuable. Be intentional with your daily habits and make good choices that will allow you to progress forward. And the third aspect that
I wanted to share with you. The third key to success that I’d like to share with you is to recognize that it’s those small habits; it’s those small goals... those small things that you do each and every day that make the biggest differences. As you know, you didn’t get here just by saying, “Y’know what? Tomorrow I’m gonna wake up and I’m gonna be a graduate.” (Laughter) That’d be pretty cool, right? (Giggles) You had to do Discussion Boards; you had to turn in papers; you had to write essays; you had to show up to get your things done. You had to actually work — oh my goodness — you had to work to do things. Set small goals for yourself each and every week that will allow you to be better. I promise you: if you can do these things, you will be able to reach your full potential. Dare to dream. Dare to fight for your dreams. Don’t be complacent. Don’t just wake up and go through a day. Set S.M.A.R.T. goals for yourself. I wish you guys all the best. All the absolute best and good luck in all you do and God bless. Thank you so much. (Applause) Thanks! (Giggles; cheers and applause.)

Provost’s Address

Dr. Connie Johnson
Provost & Chief Academic Officer

Hello CTU graduates! My name is Dr. Connie Johnson and I am the Provost & Chief Academic Officer for Colorado Technical University. On behalf of the Academic and Student Affairs team, and the entire faculty, I want to extend my sincere congratulations to you and your parents, siblings, spouses, children, partners, friends, and colleagues who supported you along the way.

I am speaking from personal experience: education and attaining a degree CHANGES YOUR LIFE. Education may assist you with a new career but more importantly, it can change the way you think, how you might approach a problem and how you view life. You are now a role model for thinking and learning. You have persisted and you have achieved your goal. You are an example for your children, for your co-workers and for your friends. You are a CTU Graduate!

We hope you have embraced a sense of lifelong learning. Consider the next degree—consider the next professional development opportunity—consider how you might influence others to learn. Take time to celebrate this important occasion. You have earned it. And continue to keep in touch with CTU as you are now officially part of the CTU Alumni family. Again, congratulations!