

With Love and Support
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Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon 2017

I am honored to be speaking in front of all of you today.

The first experience I had at Bowdoin College was during the fall of my senior year of high school. I was in the middle of a five-weekend marathon where each Friday I went to a different school to meet students and the swim team before heading home on Sunday, only to repeat this process the next week. Bowdoin was college number 4 on my odyssey and to be frank the schools had begun to blend together into an indistinguishable mix best described as “small college”. However there was one thing about Bowdoin that struck me almost immediately and instantly I knew that this was the place for me. Bowdoin was the only school where the students I talked to were supportive and encouraging about every college I was visiting, they seemed way more intent on helping me make the right choice than trying to sell me on Bowdoin. That more than anything compelled me to become a part of the most supportive college community I encountered during my visits.

Our community is supportive, but also encourages students to think critically. I think a great example of this is how we engage with each other over our academic work. We take the time to scrutinize and improve our fellow classmate’s assignments. We engage in discussions of difference and identity, carefully crafting our opinions and sharing them with others. But perhaps most importantly we are able to look at this institution and begin to realize what Bowdoin is lacking. And then we are given the opportunity to act on these realizations. And whether you are an active member of a student group trying to bring a speaker onto campus, engaging in a meaningful conversation with a friend, or striving to bring change to Bowdoin at an institutional level, we all have the opportunity and ability to leave our mark on this campus. For me, spending three years as a member of the Residential Life student staff has given me numerous opportunities to support fellow students and help build communities within my dorm.

Of course, often times we must face challenges in our academic and personal lives that can prevent us from engaging with the community as much as we may want. I often think about these challenges in the form of the “silent struggle”. Bowdoin students are intelligent, capable, and ambitious, but everyone faces

difficulties during their times here; and we are not always the best at being open about them. Whether you have an exam looming that you feel unprepared for – not that anyone could *possibly* relate to that this time of year – or something far more personal, we often have things occupy our headspace that can pull us away from being the students that we truly want to be. And we often interact with one another in a way that makes it really, really hard to be open about what is bothering you. This year, I have gained a much deeper perspective on how challenging being a student at Bowdoin can be when your silent struggle is happening 100 miles away. In the interest of being more open and to try and better capture how I think Bowdoin prepares us for the rest of our lives, I wanted to share the story of my “senior silent struggle”.

In early November, my dad suffered the second stroke of his life. And he lost a significant amount of mental acuity and was both immobile and unable to perform most basic functions. Visiting home over Thanksgiving break was the first time I got to see my dad after his stroke – and I had to face the changes that had occurred in our relationship. Without going into too much detail, my parents are divorced and I am the oldest child capable of being his medical proxy. And this responsibility meant I had to spend hours each week discussing my dad’s medical status with his rehab facility, and I often had to make decisions about his life without his input. So while I was still enduring my day-to-day trials of Bowdoin that included Thermodynamics, being a first-year proctor, and the start of the swim season, I was constantly carrying this burden of concern and care for my dad. And beyond just a burden I often felt pulled away from everything I was attempting to do at Bowdoin. There were several days towards the end of the semester where I struggled to concentrate during classes, and I often felt frustrated that I wasn’t at home with my family. It was during this time that I found support from my coaches, the Office of Residential Life, my deans and professors, and of course my friends and family. I found endless compassion and time for me to just talk through everything that was going on. As I said earlier, our Bowdoin community is supportive, but I had never before realized the depths of that support.

Reflecting back on those months, I cannot express how much gratitude I have for my incredible friends, family and the support networks we have here at Bowdoin. My dad is continuing the fight to regain pieces of his old life, but has made remarkable progress. And through this journey, I have been given a new perspective on how many people are here at Bowdoin to lift us up during times of challenge. The “silent struggle” is still very real, and no Bowdoin student is

prepared for everything they will face during their time here. Too often differences of race, religion, gender, class, sexuality, and many other facets of our identities can force students to spend extra time and thought challenging negative stereotypes that have been unfairly placed on them. And while there remains a great deal of work needed by Bowdoin and our community to create a more inclusive environment; the compassion, love, and genuine care I have found at Bowdoin– especially when I needed help this past Fall – was nothing short of incredible. And I am graduating Bowdoin with a deep respect for the support that exists on this campus when someone needs it.

This support for Bowdoin students like me extends to the larger Bowdoin community as well, including many of the people in this room, and that support comes in the form of scholarship aid. As we celebrate the incredible generosity of everyone here, I can't help but think about my own journey and how much Bowdoin, and the support of this community, has been a part of it. Take this time as a moment to look back on your own journey, to think about the trials you've faced and the successes you've cherished. Having the opportunity to attend Bowdoin has challenged me, taught me to find help in others, and has allowed me to grow so much in such a relatively short time. It really feels like a short amount of time now that I am only a couple weeks away from graduating. And I know I speak on behalf of many of the students in this room when I say that we are extremely grateful for the opportunity to grow through the unique environment that is Bowdoin College – and emerge a more-rounded person ready to face the world. Thank you again for your support.