

Good afternoon. My name is Laura Henry, and I am an associate professor of government and legal studies here at Bowdoin.

I have the great pleasure of welcoming you to the opening celebration of our newest and greenest academic building, the Roux Center for the Environment. Over the next few days, you will be hearing about this LEED Platinum building and the opportunities for collaboration and innovation that it will provide.

Since this is the first event of our celebration, I'd like to take a moment to thank some people. First, we owe enormous gratitude to Dave and Barb Roux, who are with us here today. Dave and Barb, thank you for the gift that made this building possible, and for your vision for the ambitious and creative work that the center will support.

To President Rose, thank you for your leadership in translating this vision to new opportunities for research and teaching on the environment.

To Dean McCormack, thank you for bringing our speakers and panelists together today for a lively discussion.

And thank you to the faculty members who helped organize this event and who will be on stage later this afternoon.

Most of all, I would like to thank my stalwart colleagues with offices and classrooms in the Roux Center, who have taught, researched, and advised in the building even as the last stages of construction were completed. From your days wearing hard hats, I know that you appreciate the building from its very girders, drywall, nuts, and bolts to the glorious result.

For those of you not fortunate to live in Maine, I would like to welcome you to this beautiful place. Our study of the environment—wherever our research may take us—is inspired daily by our surroundings.

We are part of a long lineage of those who have used and managed and been inspired by Maine's natural environment, who have studied and written about the environment and advocated for its protection while based in Maine. We are mindful of those who have come before.

The Wabanaki, the "People of the Dawnland," who lived with the land for thousands of years and who are an important part of Maine today. Immigrants and their descendants who fished, felled timber, and farmed—living off the land in a different way. Kate Furbish chronicled the native plants of Maine, Henry David Thoreau trembled before the "stern and savage" Maine forest, Rachel Carson contemplated the sea from Boothbay Harbor as she developed the ideas that appeared in her landmark book, *Silent Spring*, and Maine Senator Edmund Muskie, who advocated for the Clean Water Act. An illustrious history indeed. Maine is a good place for thinking big about the environment.

Environmental issues from the local to the global meet and entangle and shape our daily lives. Today Maine is where we contentiously debate issues such as new national parks, the co-management of shellfish, bear hunting, and an East-West highway; the placement of wind turbines, models of economic development, and persistent poverty; and the integration of new Mainers—some refugees, displaced by drought or war.

And urgent environmental questions loom larger every day. The most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us that time is short to mitigate the effects of sea-level rise, desertification, and ecosystem collapse and further displacement. Avoiding the most serious damage from climate change requires transforming the world economy within just a few years.

This is a task that can seem insurmountable. It seems, as Carl Sagan said, we “are by accident of fate alive at an absolutely critical moment in the history of our planet.” This accident of fate means that we have the responsibility to meet the challenge of our era, but we will each do so in our own way.

Some will choose science. Addressing environmental questions requires rigorous scientific research, conducted over the long term. But, as we have learned from debates over climate change, even innovative and meticulous science is insufficient to tackle the challenges that require collective action toward a common purpose.

Environmental challenges engage all aspects of human understanding. We need literature and the visual arts to stimulate our curiosity, concern, and compassion to convey the beauty and the fragility of the natural world. We need to learn from history—from the migration of peoples long ago and in order to deepen our understanding of how we arrived at this moment. We need ethics and the humility to examine our ideas of what constitutes justice as we make hard choices. We need to engage diverse communities, reaching beyond those who share our experiences or our opinions. We need the linguistic skills and cultural sensitivity to collaborate with and learn from others. We need policy options and legal opinions, persuasive arguments, mathematical models, and economic analysis to better understand the merits of alternative paths.

From this incomplete list you can appreciate the insight of my colleague, Matthew Klinge, director of our Environmental Studies Program and associate professor of history, who has said, “The study of the environment is where the liberal arts converge.”

In my own work, I have seen how the global demand for energy, oil extraction by multinational corporations, the legal framework of the Russian state, the rapidly changing environment of melting permafrost, and the knowledge and experiences of indigenous communities in Russia’s Arctic territory interact in unpredictable ways. No single discipline is sufficient to understand these complex and coinciding processes.

Bowdoin College is proud to have been at the forefront of environmental studies as an expression of the liberal arts, in Maine and nationally. A visionary group of faculty members founded Bowdoin's path-breaking environmental studies program in 1972.

This program has been the locus of genuine interdisciplinarity. Evidence of this can be seen in how the directorship of environmental studies has seamlessly flowed across faculty members jointly appointed in departments from economics and philosophy to biology, earth and oceanographic science, and history. We have seen the mutual respect and interdependence of our faculty engaged in environmental studies embodied in our team-taught introductory course and research collaborations—large and small—across the disciplines.

As we inaugurate the Roux Center and look toward the future, we are fortunate to build on this strong foundation. We have a passionate and committed community of scholars and students working on the environment at Bowdoin and, through the Roux Center, we have an opportunity to broaden our existing research and community engagement to do even more to transcend the disciplinary boundaries of the past.

We undertake this task in a building inspiring for its achievements in efficiency and design. A facilitating and catalyzing space not only for traditional learning, but also for the insight that comes from a chance meeting, casual conversation, and the discovery of a shared curiosity.

The Roux Center provides a location and an impetus to invite in those who have not previously considered the environment as an explicit component of their studies, to start new conversations, and to have them teach us how their work grapples with our shared quest to live harmoniously with each other and the natural world. It is a place where we can invite those studying the environment from other parts of the globe, to learn about approaches to the environment devised by other communities and using other systems of knowledge. It is only with a diversity of voices and experiences and opinion, with give and take, with an expansive view of what the environment is and what it means in different contexts that we will begin to find a common path forward.

So, my vision for the Roux Center—and one that I hope you will share—begins with a gorgeous building—with a green roof, and a “lantern” space for gathering, and new technology for teaching and research. But to live and breathe, to shape our community, to make a difference, the Roux Center will be what we make of it: what happens inside, who feels welcome to gather there, who uses the space, and the discussion and study that it enfolds and elevates. The Roux Center can be a hub of intellectual engagement, a place where ideas and energy from all disciplines and student groups flow in to be debated, refined, and applied—and then ideas and that energy can flow out again to inspire and stimulate action on campus and far beyond.

Thank you.