

2019 Commencement Address
Clayton Rose
May 25, 2019

Good morning, Class of 2019!

Welcome to this glorious celebration.

Welcome to our honorands and trustees. Welcome to our faculty, staff, and alumni. Welcome to our Brunswick neighbors, and welcome especially to family and friends who are here to celebrate this joyous occasion. Thank you for traveling from all parts of our country and the world to be here on the beautiful campus of the College we love. And to our graduates, one journey ends today and another begins.

This is our 214th Commencement. In 1806, when our first Commencement took place on these grounds, Thomas Jefferson was in the White House, Congress was in only its ninth term, and it would be three years before Abraham Lincoln was born. While the design of this campus has changed a touch, Massachusetts Hall just over there, our first building, was standing. Very few institutions have been as durable as Bowdoin, a place that embraces both change and a steadfast commitment

to our core values as essential elements in providing a great liberal arts education.

In “The Offer of the College,” Bowdoin’s seventh president, William DeWitt Hyde, described these as among the best four years of your life. For those who have come before you—those who have marched in our previous 213 graduations—these were among the best four years of their lives because of the rich, wonderful, challenging, and rewarding experiences on campus, and because of the foundation of knowledge, skills, friendships, and deep sense of self that comes from these experiences—experiences that will make your life richer every day.

I would like to ask our students to stand up. Now, turn and face your parents, family, and friends—those who have supported you and who love you. Consider all that they have done to help you get here today, and thank them with your applause.

And now, it would be great to thank the faculty and staff that made this amazing Bowdoin experience possible.

I would like us to recognize several folks here today. First, as I noted yesterday at Baccalaureate, Dean Tim Foster has been in student affairs at Bowdoin for twenty-

three years and our dean for the last thirteen. He is retiring on June 30, and this is his last official Commencement. He leaves a legacy virtually unmatched, and he will be deeply missed. Thank you, Tim.

We are also saying something of a goodbye to Dr. Michelle Cyr, class of 1976, the outgoing chair of our board of trustees. Shelley, a physician on the faculty at Brown's medical school and a Bowdoin trustee for nineteen years, will (thankfully) remain on the board but has reached the end of her term as chair. She has been a great chair, respected and trusted by those on the board, and a wonderful and thoughtful partner for me. Thank you, Shelley.

I want to acknowledge the military service of two seniors. Amir Parker has served in the Army Reserve while attending Bowdoin, and heads to OCS next year.

And yesterday, continuing a long Bowdoin tradition, Jake Stenquist, was commissioned into the United States Marine Corps. Many congratulations, Jake. And Godspeed Amir and Jake

Finally, while each of our graduating students is special, this year, a truly remarkable member of our community

will receive her degree. This week marks two milestones for Lisa Bouffard, an administrative coordinator in our dining services. Monday was her twenty-third anniversary as a Bowdoin employee, and today marks the culmination of her eighteen-year quest to earn a college degree. During that time, Lisa has worked full-time, seen her own three children graduate from college, and gained four grandchildren. She took her first class in 2001, and matriculated officially at the College in 2008. Today, after a total of thirty-two classes—taken mostly one at a time—Lisa will be awarded her bachelor's degree with a double major in religion and gender and women's studies. Lisa, congratulations. You are an inspiration to us all!

So, Class of 2019, here we are. Four years later. I stood right about here. You sat right about there. It was a beautiful August evening and we all came together for the first time.

As I have said to many of you over the last few days, it is almost impossible to get my head around all that you have done and all that you have become since that summer evening. For all of us, the last four have been amazing, not every moment has been easy or great, but taken all together, summing it all up, it has been nothing

short of remarkable and life-changing, for you and for me. Know that you have made the College better, and you have made me better, as a person and a president. And for all of that, I am grateful beyond words.

There will never be another first class – you are it. For Julianne and for me, the class of 2019 will be always be special.

Yesterday at Baccalaureate, I talked about Iris Davis of the Class of 1978, and the challenge ahead for you of building or rebuilding community. This morning, I would like to share with you a brief related idea, and the singular insight I have gleaned in my sixty years for what I believe is essential for a happy life. It has nothing to do with your GPA or smarts, or the careers or fancy titles you'll have, or the money you might make. It is about your heart and soul.

Find and nurture the special relationships that make you whole.

Find those people who will love you completely and without question—they are out there—and give them the same. Grow the friendships and relationships that draw out the best in you, with those who love you for

who you are and who are there for you as you are for them—they are magical and life changing.

No amount of money, no fancy titles, no other goals can come close to the satisfaction that comes from these special relationships. Nothing else—nothing—will sustain you in the same way and nothing else will make you or your life as good.

Class of 2019, we honor you and celebrate all that you have accomplished. Many congratulations and Godspeed.