

President Rose, Members of the College, and Guests—

Growing up, I loved to create. It did not matter what I had near me; I always found a way to make something out of almost anything. Imagine the tallest stack of Legos or Jenga blocks that would become skyscrapers reaching the ceiling — or a spaceship made from paper clips and erasers. While I might not have always succeeded in fulfilling all my crazy ideas, at the very least, I always carried an unflinching sense of determination. When I was creating, there was one rule I lived by: No matter what I was making, or what the outcome was—*if I crafted until my heart was content*, I could achieve anything.

I remember my teacher in third grade, Ms. Carrasquillo. She would always have the most amazing items on her desk. One day while I was doing classwork, a particular object caught my attention. It was a huge rubber band ball. I was completely awestruck. After seeing all the vibrant colors combined into one, I decided to satisfy my curiosity and ask my teacher how *I* could make one. Without hesitating, she kindly taught me two simple steps and gave me a bag of rubber bands to take home.

The first step in creating a rubber band ball is making a core. Without the starting foundation it would be impossible to wrap the rubber bands around, so you bundle up a couple of rubber bands, hold them together, and your core is set!

The second step is then taking the rest of your rubber bands and wrapping them around your core. Continue to overlap the rubber bands and then...Ta-da, you have a rubber band ball!

You might be wondering why I'm speaking about an object that I used to make when I was a kid, and as I reflect on my fascination with this rubber band ball, I've come to one conclusion. Creating a rubber band ball is very similar to how we craft our lives.

I say this because our beings are similar to the core of the rubber band ball. Both are a testament to our individuality and one of the most fundamental pieces of what makes each of us different. From your musical tastes, to your stance on Thorne or Moulton, your core is fundamentally you — and it's made up of all of these bands of our experiences.

For some of us, a significant experience band was getting into college. You can all probably recall the exact moment when you received the joyous news that you would be attending Bowdoin College.

Other experience bands may have been late nights chatting in Smith Union with friends, getting gelato with your Bowdoin host family, or even just pretending to do work on the quad on a beautiful sunny day. And if any of you claim that you were able to get work done on a nice day on the quad, I will just assume that you're lying.

Regardless, the friends that became family, finding our chosen communities, and gaining exposure to our academic circles were all reasons why we came to Bowdoin - and our quest to add great experience bands was our driving force. College was confusing, but no matter what experiences we had or what the outcome was, we all continued crafting until our hearts were content.

While there were many firsts and great times, there were also tough moments while navigating Bowdoin. Imposter Syndrome probably ravaged many of us, which is the feeling that you are not capable or good enough even when you are. That feeling tainted many parts of my experience bands while at Bowdoin. Even more excruciatingly difficult for me was losing one of my best friends, Max, who passed away. Another band marked by confusion and sadness. And without a doubt, the Covid 19 pandemic impacted all of us in countless ways that forced us to pivot quickly and do our best to persevere. Through all these difficulties, many of us could easily have neglected the crafting of our rubber band ball of life, but instead, we embraced it and carried on.

With our rubber band ball of life, it is important to remember that your core will always be intact. Your core is what is holding all those great — and not so great — experience bands together. And while there may be those negative experience bands that we would rather throw away, some of those bands may still be helpful for our own learning and growth. We have the power to determine which of those negative bands will be useful in crafting our future stories. Our experiences help shape us, and there will always be an unwavering core that holds each of us together and makes us truly unique.

As we continue to expand and grow our rubber band ball of experiences beyond Bowdoin, remember that you are not alone. I hope we all as a Bowdoin community continue to expand each other's rubber band ball of life, because I am certain something amazing will come out of it for everyone. At the

end of the day, you are who you are. And whenever you might feel doubt or uncertainty, remember that no matter the outcome, if you keep crafting until your heart is content, you can achieve anything.