

President Rose, Members of the College, and Guests,

One of my greatest fears is getting lost. When I was eight years old, my dad and I got lost in New York City on our way back to my grandma’s house. I began the journey in high spirits, singing along to the *Mary Poppins* soundtrack and waving to strangers. But as the sky darkened and a storm rolled in, I grew afraid. Thirty minutes passed, then an hour, then *two* hours. The rain was coming down in thick sheets. I began shaking with worry. What if we were out here, wandering, forever? Desperate for some reassurance, I asked my dad, “Do you know where you’re going?” He admitted, “No. We’re lost. But we’ll figure it out.” And we did, eventually. But in the back of my young mind, something *still* worried me. If even my dad, who knows everything, could get lost, then what hope did I have of avoiding this most dreaded feeling?

Believe me, I have tried. I print out directions in case my GPS dies. I memorize maps. I follow signposts religiously. No surprise then that my favorite signpost is the one that reads, “All Maine Points,” along I-95 North near Portsmouth. I love this signpost because it guarantees that if I follow it, I will end up in Maine. And for me, Maine is synonymous with Bowdoin—a place where I built strong relationships, where I studied and worked and volunteered with a clear purpose, where I was sure of who I was. Every time I drove under that sign, I knew exactly where I was going.

When I drove under the “All Maine Points” sign last March to gather my things and evacuate campus, that sense of certainty was gone. My best friend was seated in the passenger seat beside me, both of us silent, struggling to process this abrupt end to our college experience. The wide-open space of the road before us did not feel exhilarating. It felt scary.

We, the Class of 2020, have had the unique experience of stepping into our uncertain futures before formally graduating from Bowdoin. We have had to unmoor ourselves from our college lives and move forward, without knowing exactly where to go next. On that final frightening drive up to Brunswick, I realized that I was looking for signposts that would tell me where I was going, when I should have been paying attention to those that remind me of who I am.

That friend in the passenger seat has been a signpost for me, pointing me toward honesty, loyalty, and, above all, integrity. The friends I made at Bowdoin, friends I know I can count on for years to come, inspire me to live fully and fearlessly as myself. We will keep showing up for each other, no matter how far we may stray from Moulton Light Room.

My backpack, with its residue of chlorine, is a signpost, reminding me to stay grateful. Competing on the swim team at Bowdoin taught me that when I am overcome with anxiety, I need only sink into the water, my body, my breath to ground myself. It is here, in the present, where I find gratitude.

The countless notebooks that I filled over my four years at Bowdoin are signposts, challenging me to make connections. Studying under professors who bring passion and humanity to their work taught me that to be intellectually fearless is not to know all the answers, but to ask the right questions. When I do this, I come to see the many ways we are all connected. Working in the McKean Center for the Common Good taught me that through connections built on trust, respect, and understanding, I can put my learning into meaningful action.

Integrity, gratitude, and connection. My time here has been fundamental in forming these inner “directions” I will rely on for the rest of my life. Bowdoin has helped us all erect our own

Julianna Kiley
“Signposts”

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signposts that will remind us of who we are whenever we feel lost. We may not always know where we are going, but we can trust that we will figure it out. Thank you.