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The Great Hope of a Bowdoin Education

President Rose, Members of the College, and guests – it is an immense honor and privilege to stand before you all and speak on this traditional day of celebration for our institution.

Today as graduates hear their names called and cross this stage, they will become part of an extraordinary community of scholars, leaders, and innovators. Over the last two centuries, Bowdoin graduates have played critical roles in the progress of our nation and world across countless fields and endeavors. The collective talent, passion, and vision gathered here today on the quad is enough to inspire hope for the future in the hearts of all who are present, and it is this sense of a hope for the future, in its very essence, that is central to why I stand here before you today.

I am a first-generation college student who grew up in Mantua, a small community in Northeast Ohio. My family, along with many other members of that community, faced the everyday struggles of poverty that is shaped by substance abuse, violence, and trauma. In facing these conditions, every day when I returned from school it became a daily ritual to practice and embrace hope that one day, I would have the opportunity to break out of the vicious cycle of poverty that ensnares many parts of our country. Each day, I would look up over the low roofs of my trailer park into the sky while I walked home from the bus blaring Eminem's "Lose Yourself" through my headphones as I imagined myself being somewhere else. It was in these short moments of transition that I allowed myself to cling to hope for a better life and future until Bowdoin College gave me the opportunity to fully realize that hope.

When I was accepted to the College, not only was I supported by the generous financial aid packages that Bowdoin commits to providing to low-income students, but I was also placed as part of the inaugural cohort of the Geoffrey Canada Scholarship program which is a program designed to ease the transition of first-generation and low-income students like me to the College. As part of this program, I was introduced into the Bowdoin community that at first felt foreign from everything I have ever known. However, living in Baxter over the summer helped me acclimate to the physical space, summer classes helped me feel more confident that I could succeed here academically, and the other members of the program made me feel that I had a support system of others from a similar background. It was all these opportunities that helped me adjust to my new and dear home. Even after the full extent of my time here at the College, there are moments when the realities of the support systems present here still feel too good to be true and I often get emotional thinking about it. Each day I got to walk around our beautiful campus, eat free food in our dining halls, sleep in a free bed in my apartment in Harpswell, and engage with a scholarly community that has fostered my growth as a person in ways I never could have dreamed of before I came here. There are so many in our country and world that don't have these privileges and I feel that it is important to recognize that what we all have here is special in that way.

While many aspects of my story and path are unique to me, the personal growth that I have experienced as part of this college is something that I'm sure every graduate here today can attest to experiencing in some fashion. In many ways, that personal growth is the truest form of hope that Bowdoin has to offer us. Looking past the material and social support that the College provides, I see the immense privilege of the intellectual growth that is provided at this institution.

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That intellectual growth has awakened me to how I possess the agency to engage in our world and fight for a better future. Not only myself, but also for my family, members of my community and communities like mine. As a Religion major, Bowdoin has broadened my worldview in many ways as I have come to understand a multitude of different cultural systems that operate in our world and how much differently our world looks to so many different people. Bowdoin also helped me gain a framework to understand the many factors that underlie my upbringing and how cycles of poverty are created and sustained so I am now able to communicate with myself and others critically about what is really going in my community and communities like mine. Through these cultivated understandings, I have fostered within me a strength of voice that I have every intention of using.

Now, as our four years at Bowdoin are ending, it is now time for our newest community of scholars, leaders, and innovators to play a critical role in the progression of our society. What I find to be the great hope of a Bowdoin education is our capacity to inspire and instill hope in others. Whether we pursue that goal through advocacy, writing, research, music, and in all other boundless capacities we possess as Bowdoin graduates. It has been our privilege to come to understand the world, our place within it, and it is now our responsibility to create a life of meaning and hope.

There are so many ways many of you may be feeling on a day like today. It is okay to be scared, anxious, or confused about what may be coming next. We have all poured so much of ourselves into this place over the last four years and now, we are leaving it behind. However, on a day like today, we all still have so much to continue holding on to hope for. You have achieved something incredible today and you will continue to achieve incredible things as you move

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forward. It was through never losing hope that I have reached a point where today I will hear my name called, cross this stage, receive my degree, and celebrate becoming the first in my family to graduate from college and that for me makes hope feel so much more present and real than ever. Thank you and congratulations to all of the Class of 2022.