

# The Work Ahead

August 2018—*In his remarks at Convocation to start the 2018-2019 academic year, Bowdoin College President Clayton Rose focused on the work ahead that will shape a Bowdoin education and experience for the next ten to fifteen years and well beyond. Guided by the examination and considerable discussion at the College of these topics over the previous three years, his remarks were specifically informed by the recommendations of a faculty-led committee of students, faculty, staff, and trustees charged during the 2017-2018 academic year with considering the central question: “What knowledge, skills, and creative dispositions should every student possess upon graduation ten years from now?” The following is an excerpt from President Rose’s remarks at Convocation.*

**W**ell beyond the confines of our Quad, we find ourselves in the midst of a new revolution. Like the Industrial Revolution that began over 200 years ago, we are in a period of unprecedented change in every aspect of life, and there is no turning back. It is an era characterized by globalization, by significant challenges to the political, economic, and social status quo in systems around the world, demographic and economic shifts not seen in generations, ever-increasing speed of change, the availability of vast amounts of data and the tools to rapidly sort and use these data, a culture of experimentation and acceptance of failure, a thirst for wisdom, judgment, and ethical perspective, and the virtual disappearance of civil discourse. It is an era of both great promise and significant concern, and much of it remains uncharted. This is the age of our students today and of generations of students to come.

## Meeting the Challenge

To meet the challenge of preparing our students for this age, we need equal measures of confidence in the profound power and enduring relevance of our core liberal arts tradition and a commitment to build from strength to transform essential aspects of what we do.

Our liberal arts education is centered on small classes and close bonds between student and faculty. Our faculty set high expectations, and because they know our students and work closely with them, our students respond in kind with exceptional effort and great accomplishments. The culture of collaboration—with students who operate well in this environment—enhances the effort applied and the results attained. The combination of amazing students who come to do their best work and to be their best selves, talented faculty who care deeply, and close and collaborative working relationships creates a unique and powerful educational experience, one that has had a profound impact on Bowdoin students, generation after generation.

This experience develops and enhances the timeless skills of critical thinking, analysis, reasoning, and the capability to continue to learn and adapt. It also provides our students with the essential knowledge, insights, and tools that come from broad exposure to and deep inquiry within the intellectual disciplines.

We marry this profound experience to our commitment to access—the promise that if you earn a spot at Bowdoin, we will find a way for you to come here, regardless of your financial circumstances.

## **Building On Our Strengths**

We will remain steadfastly committed to continuing this work, but we will also have to do some things differently. We will do what we always have—we will adapt, change, and lead.

In our curriculum, we will need to craft an intellectual experience that is substantially more problem-based and more interdisciplinary—one built on greater collaboration.

We will need to develop a way for our students—all of them—to engage in a sustained way with the challenges and imperative of exercising ethical judgment and living lives of integrity.

We will need to provide a sensibility and baseline set of skills for them to understand and work with data and quantitative concepts.

We will need to enhance their disposition to experiment and willingness to fail.

We will need to engage them more robustly in creative expression and in the challenge of “making” in the arts.

Across our campus activities—as we have discussed at great length—we need to double down on our work to develop the skills and practice engagement in the most difficult discourse, to enhance our understanding of the remarkable and varied backgrounds and identities we each bring to Bowdoin, and to underscore the imperative that we maintain and strengthen our communities. These issues of inclusion, identity, community, and discourse are deeply interwoven and are among the most pressing issues we face.

More broadly, we need to be an institution that embraces collaboration within our classrooms, across campus, and with other great institutions and organizations in this country and around the world—to share what we know and do, to learn from others, and to create and be part of something bigger.

The work that is available to graduates after they leave our campus—and the pathways to that work—are changing in this new age. Our career-planning program will engage every student early and often in their time at the College. It will help students explore the many possibilities of what they might do; create even stronger links to our powerful alumni network for insights, advice, and opportunities; provide the training and skills to obtain a position; make available specific tools necessary for initial success on the job; and, critically, it will have the financial resources that make all of this possible, including critical unpaid summer internship opportunities.

Finally, we need to continue to deliver on the promise of access for everyone who has earned a spot at Bowdoin. A need-blind admission and no-loan, grant-only financial aid program like ours is found at only seventeen other colleges and universities in this country. This commitment is essential to attracting the best students, both those who require aid and those who do not, and the best faculty who want to teach amazing students, and it will be a central point of distinction in the years ahead between the exceptional colleges and universities and the rest. This commitment is expensive and is only possible through the amazing generosity over many years by our alumni, parents, and friends.

Is all of this ambitious? Very much so, and that’s how it should be—Bowdoin should be

very bold and very ambitious. Is success a foregone conclusion? Not by any means. But with sustained effort and a willingness to continue to change, it is very much within our grasp.

### **Our Future Graduates**

So, what does it look like when we get there?

We will continue to have a campus filled with students from an amazing variety of backgrounds, experiences, and identities, who share the characteristics of being “wicked smart,” engaged, curious, kind, and of great character.

They will continue to develop and hone the timeless skills of the liberal arts, and develop the knowledge and insights that come from working within traditional intellectual disciplines.

From this foundation we will then build. Our students will be intellectually nimble, disposed to and skilled at collaboration, and able to evaluate and tackle meaningful, complex problems and opportunities from multiple directions.

They will think about decisions they make, and evaluate and influence those made by other leaders. They will have the knowledge and ability to evaluate data, to understand its limits and powers, to explain what is important and what is suspect, and to develop the next questions.

They will appreciate the differences among us, will be able and motivated to engage across cultural divides, and have the skills to bridge profound differences and the ability and disposition to do so thoughtfully and with respect.

They will chart a course of study here that is not motivated by practicalities or by some notion of a future job. Rather, they will explore, experiment, and study those things of deep interest. And, at the same time, they will leave here with an understanding of the work they will find satisfying and with the skills to succeed in that work.

They will be prepared—as Bowdoin graduates have for generations—to lead and shape the world with character, integrity, and judgment. And in doing all of this, they will advance in this new age the two-centuries-old tradition of Bowdoin graduates who change the world.