

Academic Convocation

Welcome and Remarks by Provost Melissa Morriss-Olson

September 11, 2012

Good morning and welcome to academic convocation. If you were one of those who joined us in the early hours on August 27 for the campus awakening, you had a taste of the symbolism and mystery that is an integral part of the college experience. On that morning, we lit candles and walked together to wake up the campus on that important first day of class. We ended our walk at Deepwood circle, and in my comments that morning, I talked about the significance of the circle for describing what it means to be a member of the Bay Path community. As a member of the Bay Path community, you are now a part of something that is never ending. Wherever you go from this place, you will always be a member of this community and you will have access to networks and relationships that extend well beyond this place and time. For those of you who are seniors, hope this is a comforting thought as you consider that for many of you—this is your last year on our campus.

In today's convocation, you are experiencing more symbolism. For example, our faculty and platform guests are dressed in academic regalia, a tradition that actually dates back to the medieval universities of Europe. During this time, college students were required to wear their robes to class and, in fact, were not allowed in to their classes without proper attire. Things have certainly changed!

At the end of today's program, you will experience more symbolism in the "Donning of the Caps" ceremony. During this part of the program, we will formally induct our new students into the Bay Path College learning community by asking you to place the caps that you are now holding on your heads. As you don your caps this morning for the first time, you join with college students and faculty in a tradition that is more than 800 years old and that signifies an important rite of passage... a transition into what we hope will be a successful and meaningful time of life for each of you.

Here at the outset of this new academic year, there are three things that I want to urge you to consider. First, do look beyond this symbolism, beyond the formality of today's program and attire to consider the men and women who sit behind me on this stage and who are your faculty. From my experience at Bay Path, I know our faculty as individuals who care deeply about teaching, who are passionate about working in a college like this and who really want to get to know you. I urge you to make a

commitment to yourself to get to know at least one faculty member really well this year.

You will find that your faculty are highly interesting and caring human beings with a wide variety of interests. Consider inviting one of your faculty members to lunch or for a cup of coffee at the Carpe Diem cafe. If you do, you will make a friend for life and the reach of the Bay Path community will extend even further for you. During the Donning of the Caps ceremony, your faculty will surround you by standing in the aisles on either side as you recite the affirmation and response. This, too, is symbolic of the role that your faculty will play in supporting you and your educational journey.

Second, I want to encourage each of you to anticipate and embrace the sense of discomfort that you will feel many times over in the days ahead, something that is a natural part of any big transition to a new situation. Know that this feeling of discomfort and angst is actually a good thing—it means that something very important is happening inside of you. As your faculty know, real learning does not happen without pain and discomfort...and so if you are experiencing these feelings in your classes, if you have some classes where things seem ambiguous and the dots don't easily connect, know that nothing will make your faculty happier...because one of their goals is to create learning experiences that will stretch and challenge you. I want you to let your faculty know when you are feeling this way—if a particular assignment does not make sense or if a classroom discussion seems over your head. Don't get frustrated—know that your faculty are there to help you work through these moments. Likewise, if you never feel a sense of discomfort in your classes, I want you to also let your faculty know that so you can work together to create an appropriately challenging and successful learning experience.

As you may know, the theme that we have selected for this year's Campus Theme program is "lead with compassion." And so, the third and final thing I want to urge each of you consider is this: What role does compassion play in your life?

There is a wonderful statement about compassion by the Dalai Lama in your program and here is another--Compassion is a virtue which requires us to put ourselves consistently in another person's shoes, to feel his or her pain as though it were our own, and to enter into his or her point of view.

Why is compassion so important that we would focus an entire year on this theme? Well, there are scientific studies that suggest there are physical benefits to practicing compassion—people who practice compassion actually produce more DHEA--the

hormone that counteracts aging-and less cortisol—the stress hormone. So, it's good for you.

Just as important, being able to understand what others are going through and acting on their behalf is a critical skill for the new America in which we live—and in which you will work—where you will have contact with people from all over the world, many of whom have different worldviews and life experiences.

Each of us has the opportunity on a daily basis to practice compassion—in both large ways and small—and the impact can be profound. I urge you to pay attention to the opportunities that you have in the coming days to practice compassion. For example...

- Perhaps you will consider getting involved with one of the many service opportunities that are offered on campus and in our community;
- Or, the next time you hear someone being gossiped about or see someone being mistreated, perhaps you can speak up on that person's behalf?
- What about the individuals you have met in the last few weeks who are really different from you—how about taking some time to get to know them
- Or, how about the people who are sitting alone in the Dining Hall and may simply need someone to talk to—perhaps you can be that listening ear?

Through the campus theme program, there will be many activities in the coming months that will challenge each of us to consider how we can be more compassionate...I encourage you to go to as many of these as you can and to look for those opportunities that are right in front of you..to practice compassion.

In a few weeks, you will be back here for our Thumbprint Inaugural Lecture by Maria Karianginis a long time journalist and social entrepreneur who is pursuing her life's calling of helping others craft and live lives that are worth meaning---compassion plays a huge role in how she defines a meaningful life.

It is now my pleasure to introduce and welcome to the podium your president, Dr. Carol Leary.