

Reunion Convocation 2015 Address

Barry Mills

Sidney J. Watson Arena

May 30, 2015

Thank you. And, Welcome back to Bowdoin.

And, now it is time for farewell. This is a day that seemed so far away, but it is time.

These past 14 years have been simply a joy for Karen and me and our boys. As citizens of Brunswick, Maine we count Brunswick as our home and are grateful to Angus and Mary, and all of our neighbors, who welcomed us to Brunswick. We have had over these past 14 years our share of challenging times personally in our family, and the support of our friends in Brunswick and at Bowdoin have nurtured us always.

To all at Bowdoin, we are so grateful to all of you for your friendship and support over these past 14 years. I feel close to all the folks in this room who were at Bowdoin in the late sixties and early 70s. There are so many alumni, parents and friends who throughout the generations of Bowdoin have become so important to us. But, the special connection I feel is to the folks of the classes of 2002 through 2015 — including our reunion classes of 2005 and 2010 who are back in record numbers — you are our Bowdoin classmates. Karen and I are so grateful to count so many of you as our dear friends and will remember you always. I am delighted that Karen and I are also proud members of the class of 2015.

Bowdoin is blessed with a terrific and dedicated faculty. They are committed to teaching and learning with our students just the way the folks from the Class of 1965 remember. And, today at Bowdoin our faculty are scholars and artists who bring a commitment to research and excellence that reinforces the sophistication of our College and the intellectual life of our community. Craig McEwen led this faculty in my early years, and for the last nine years, Cristle Judd — the incomparable Cristle — has created an ambition for excellence at the College that will serve us well into the future. Cristle, thank you and we wish you well at the Mellon Foundation.

The staff at Bowdoin is the best. We are the “special sauce” of the College embodied in the people who work here and their devotion to the College and our students. There are coaches who provide leadership and inspiration to our students in the Bowdoin way. Student life leaders who guide our student experience in the residential life of our College — they do this with grace and compassion, and with a balance of direction and freedom to live and learn. Admissions folks who work year in and year out to bring the best students to Bowdoin who are Bowdoin people — students who should be at Bowdoin. Financial, communication, human resources, facilities and dining staff, who are simply the best at what they do. Technology at the most sophisticated level that almost always works seamlessly. We have world-class investment folks, who are the very best and a development staff that keeps you connected to the College financially and emotionally.

Today Karen and I say farewell to all of our colleagues who are the Bowdoin of today. “Breaking up the band” is the hardest part about leaving.

All of that is looking back — but of course, we must look forward, I always do. Please welcome our new president, Clayton Rose, and Julianne. They are both terrific people who will lead Bowdoin into the future. I have complete confidence in them both and know that in their bones they understand Bowdoin. Our collective and individual responsibility is to support them and Bowdoin into the future, just the way you have supported Karen and me over these past 14 years. Bowdoin is in the hands of a terrific leader with the brains, compassion and commitment to ensure the future of this great College.

Bowdoin was a special place in 1965 — a fantastic college. And, 50 years later, we are a Bowdoin that is simply among the very best colleges in America-dare I say, for me, the very best. The College has always considered excellence to be its standard-certainly the guiding principle of my 14 years. But, the College must always strive to be excellent for its time.

I remind you of the words I quoted in my inaugural talk 14 years ago. The words of Roger Howell, my president of Bowdoin at my commencement in 1972, when he said in his inaugural talk:

We should remember that no institution can live on its past, no matter how praiseworthy that past may be. If the study of the past leads to a stimulation of our minds for the future, than the effort is a laudable enterprise. If it lulls us to complacent inactivity, then it is fatal.

It is my sincere wish that history will look back on these past 14 years as praiseworthy. But, I expect that history will look on the next decade and beyond as a time of excellence and success for Bowdoin built on the shoulders of the past, but with an innovative and clear and compelling vision for our future.

What are the guiding principles of the future? I spoke last week at Baccalaureate about always considering what is right for Bowdoin. And, we must remember the need to consider the appropriate time for change and the pace for change. But, it is also important to harken back and remain true to our guiding principles.

So, for the last time as president of Bowdoin College — let us remember that words of President Joseph McKeen when he instructed us that “...literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good and not for the private advantage of those who resort to them for education.” This clarion call for the common good is fundamental to Bowdoin and I hope it will continue to focus us all in making it possible for all who should be at Bowdoin regardless of financial means to have the opportunity to learn and live in this residential community. For, there is no higher calling of the common good than access and opportunity for all.

And, the mission of the College, the guiding principle of our College for over a hundred years — the words of William DeWitt Hyde:

To Be at Home in all land and all ages;

To count Nature a familiar acquaintance, and Art and intimate friend;

To gain the standard for the appreciation of others work

And the criticism of your own;

To carry the keys of the world's libraries in your pocket;

And feel its resources behind you in whatever task you undertake;

To make hosts of friends....

Who are to be leaders in all walks of life;

To lose yourself in generous enthusiasms

And cooperate with others for common ends-

This is the offer of the College for the best four years of your life.

Our time at Bowdoin was for so many a terrific four years and the best four years of our life simply because those years prepared us for life in the Bowdoin tradition.

But, in my case, Hyde had it sort of wrong, for I have had the best 14 years of my life here at Bowdoin leading you as our College's president. Thank you for the opportunity to serve.

I wish you all good health and a life worth living in the spirit of the common good and Bowdoin.