

Citation for Laurie Gagnon Lachance, May 2022
Presented by Deborah S. DeGraff, Professor of Economics

Laurie Gagnon Lachance, daughter of Maine, Bowdoin alumna and parent, president of Thomas College, we honor you today for your service to the people of Maine, visionary and effective leadership, and breaking of glass ceilings.

Raised in Dover-Foxcroft, where the seeds of your love for Maine were planted and are still nourished, you graduated Bowdoin as a first-generation student, later earning an MBA at Thomas. You entered college with a major in mind, but “discovered” economics and were hooked (a story that mirrors my own). Your career began at Central Maine Power, but you soon shifted to a different kind of power—the power to effect change for the people of Maine. Beginning in 1993, as the first woman in this position, you served as state economist for three governors—from three political parties. You then headed the Maine Development Foundation and, since 2012, serve as president of Thomas College—the first woman president in the college’s long history.

Your work leverages the synergy between investing in Maine’s youth and the future of Maine’s economy. Under your leadership, Thomas College has received its largest gifts, to expand the curriculum and establish Centers for Innovation to meet the ever-changing needs of Maine’s economy. Also, Thomas was awarded its first federal TRIO grants to support the retention and graduation of first-generation and low-income students. US News ranks Thomas tenth nationwide for advancing social mobility.

Your work is founded on the importance of people, and your belief in the value, both small and large, of helping people develop their potential. Your former professor, David Vail, who later sometimes debated you on policy, relates that those discussions were always a collegial search for measures to best serve Maine’s people. Your “people focus” is also acclaimed by the Thomas board vice-chair, noting that a first act of your presidency was to replace your office wall with glass, to better connect with the students you love and the people who serve them.

President Rose, on behalf of the College, I am honored to present Laurie Gagnon Lachance for the degree of doctor of humane letters, *honoris causa*.