

Student Commencement Speaker
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Good morning! As I stand up here excited yet sleep deprived, as I'm sure some of you are, I can't help but wonder what senior class decided to start this tradition of staying up all night to watch the sunrise, graduating, packing up your entire room and then driving home. Could you imagine trying to do all of that before five? I can't. Whoever decided to change that—thank you!

First and foremost, I want to thank everyone who helped us along the way, whether it was our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, or those who stood in for them. Think of the people who made sacrifices and supported us through these four years and, in reality, our entire lives.

Thank whoever sent care packages during finals weeks, came to games in the freezing cold, attended art shows and performances, and picked up the phone to give you a call. Think of them and thank them. Seriously, let's give them a round of applause.

Thank you to our facilities and dining staff for everything you do, your actions never go unnoticed and your efforts are always appreciated! Thank you, professors! You constantly challenged us to think outside of the box and pushed us to believe in ourselves. You gave us the confidence to succeed in places and at times we never thought possible. And finally, Class of 2018, thank you for these four remarkable years.

As we come to the end of our college career, I want to acknowledge that some made it here easier than others. We lost some along the way. Some did it quicker; others, slower. But, if you are sitting out there, on those hard wooden chairs, in your beautiful cap and gown, under this Vermont sunshine, you made it.

Take a look around, these are your fellow scientists, politicians, economists, musicians, artists, superstars. They are your future coworkers, global leaders, and world-problem solvers. Your best friends, future bridesmaids and best men, maybe even your life partner. You all are now part of my family and are welcome to my place in Brooklyn—I just have to ask my mom if we have space!

And as I thought about this speech, I knew I wasn't going to stand at this podium and lecture. We've had enough of those. Nor give you words of wisdom. After all, what do I *really* know? I'm only 21 years old. Instead, I wanted to share with you some of the things I love about

Middlebury, the lessons I've learned, and what lies ahead.

After four years, there are only two things I am truly ready to leave behind. Twenty-degree snowy days in April . . . and vegan riblets for dinner.

But I will always miss the beautiful autumn leaves that greet us in the fall. Chocolate milk in the dining halls. Atwater parties that turned into Two Brother bar nights. Hepburn Zoo comedy shows. Sunshine on Dunmore days. Skiing up at the Snow Bowl. The student section at basketball games. Hiking Snake Mountain.

Ah . . . to-go boxes. Can't forget about those.

I can go on and on, but take a moment to think about the things that made Middlebury feel like home to you. Some of our fondest memories happened on this campus, and it's important to cherish them as we turn the page to make room for new ones.

And while we love this place, and everything it has done for us, I know our time here was not always easy. We all can think back to a moment when we said, "I can't do this." Whether it was a 15-page research paper due the next day, all we had was our name on page one, the cursor blinking, clock ticking.

Think back to that game you were down by three goals, 10 points, or five runs, imagining a comeback was impossible. Or that time you were rehearsing for a dance or theater performance and nobody could get their moves right. How about those long nights spent in Hepburn basement trying to finish the newspaper or practicing for the A Cappella Jambo, and no one was on pitch?

We all know those times. Anxiety rising, stress lines creasing our foreheads, fatigue pulling at our eyes. But somehow, after three Red Bulls and an all-nighter, maybe a GrilleMe order that never came, an unwavering work ethic and dedication to our crafts, we finished the task at hand. We found ways to make it happen.

And as we get ready to leave Middlebury with our liberal arts education, we have the opportunity to solve some of the world's greatest challenges. We are prepared to tackle these issues, clear hurdles, and overcome obstacles that stand in our way in pushing for progress.

Someone out there will be leading the next charge on climate change, developing new breakthroughs in science and technology, improving race relations or becoming the next pioneer in gender and sexual equality. The world is one big problem set, research paper, or science lab waiting to be solved. The answers are sitting right there in our minds.

More importantly, we have gained a multifaceted view of the world, seeing beyond one perspective or viewpoint. We might not like it and we might not agree, but we have the tools to challenge opinions and engage in deliberative dialogue.

We are transitioning into a world where harsh views and fake news seem the norm, where people are unashamed to spew hate. But now we have the tools to engage with this world, leaving it a little more truthful, a little more kind.

President Barack Obama, a man I deeply admire and respect, said this: “The future rewards those who press on. We don’t have time to feel sorry for ourselves or complain. We’ve got to press on.”

It is so simple, yet so true.

Though the world is wildly unforgiving, we learned to be intellectually fearless in the face of adversity. We must press on with persistence and resilience.

We learned that no matter how hard we get knocked down, we get right back up. We dust off our shoulders and get right back to work. So, let’s keep learning, let’s keep progressing, let’s keep loving. Let’s keep pressing on.

Except with vegan riblets; we can leave those things behind.

These last four years have been a pleasure. I will miss you, but I know for a fact this isn’t a goodbye. It’s simply a see-you-later.

Middlebury Class of 2018, we out! Thank you!