

Address by Student Commencement Speaker Alyssa Limperis '12
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I can still hear the dean of the college explaining to my over-eager parents (sit down dad) that the daughter they were dropping off in Allen 235 was a very different girl than the one they would drive home with a diploma in hand four years later. The 18-year-old version of myself not only rejected this statement but was also relatively angry that the term 'girl' was still being thrown around. I listened to Joni Mitchell, owned three bras, drank my coffee black, and had just been accepted into the prestigious institution of my choice. All of that sounded like 'woman' to me and none of it seemed to need changing. The words and the parents were quickly dismissed and I comfortably sat in my 10' x 15' room for two with the fresh taste of independence on my lips. Well, safe to say that the dean was spot on.

I can't remember the exact moment when I no longer felt the same as the pre-Middlebury me.

Could have been when I started using words like quinoa, croquies and social entrepreneurship. Or maybe just when I started receiving more e-mails from Bob Smith than from my own mother.

Either way, it happened and this transformative campus proved to be one the greatest places to grow up.

Often, Middlebury will be referred to as a 'bubble.' And while at some point, we have all felt trapped in this cozy chamomile scented sphere, I attribute our immense growth to this close confinement. Coexisting in such a community changed the way that we lived, socialized, worked, played and grew. Once we were given those 8 digits to our Middlebury name, we became an immediate addition to a strong, pre-existing community. Previously, we were members of other communities — our families, our high schools, our teams, the Philharmonic Orchestra, the United Nations, NASA and a few more activities that maybe I made up for the common app.

However, the meaning of community changed drastically when all of these separate elements were combined and tied together with a 350-acre all inclusive resort replete with a perimeter of rolling mountains, one of which we own, a few townhouses, some *curious* sculptures, a taxi service, billiards, a beach, books, strangely beautiful people, and a whole bunch of avocados which we are one Taco Tuesday and a few pant sizes away from finishing.

At once, being a part of the Middlebury community meant so much more than being one of the lucky chosen 625. It meant contributing to the betterment of the whole. It meant figuring out what our role would be in enhancing the already thriving community. This was tough! At times, it felt like every role had already been accounted for and that there was little left to add. I met four other Alyssas just in orientation and we all had identical Hunter boots and the exact same hair cut.

But that was a vital push, a necessary impetus to dig a little deeper. Living in a bubble challenged us to stop looking to the outside for the answers, we couldn't escape to a city or a different community when we felt uncomfortable but rather, were forced to look within and ask the hard questions, figure out who we were, who we wanted to be and what would make us happy. We were compelled to dig and determine how *we* could make ourselves better, rather than searching the exterior for *something* better.

I'm thankful that we weren't allowed to run and find the next success or beauty that might fulfill us but rather we were forced to dive inward and bring the successes and beauty that were already inside to the surface. Middlebury kept us for just long enough that we couldn't evade its power and its prowess to push us and that we were obliged to stop, to soul search, and to figure out what made us stand apart from the rest and why we were selected to be part of the class of 2012. There aren't many spots, which meant that we didn't get a free pass and that we owed it to our community of Middlebury even more than to ourselves to prove our worth. Which we did. We took the time to discover ourselves and then shared it with the rest and delivered our contributions to this cohesive community. We watched 1,875 other incredible role models do the same before us and we are sitting here today with the knowledge that we, too, have done it.

When we came to Middlebury, there was global warming, we built a better house. There was social injustice, we took poets and spit fire at it. There was silence, Wonnacott Commons brought in Ryan Cabrera.

We have added to the Middlebury community in such a way that we will never be forgotten but rather, will be remembered by the 1,875 under us as incredible role models.

And of course, there will be immeasurable amounts of change and constructive impact that will begin happening the minute we leave here tomorrow by each and every one of us.

The amount of undeniable power that can be felt on this quad is chilling. We are surrounded by not only some of the most passionate and brilliant peers but also, by the very individuals who created them. What an incredible feeling.

It is saddening to know that soon, our communities will begin to split and grow and that once we pack our bags and French-kiss goodbye, we will be leaving the exact community that we have shaped and worn for the past four years. We will leave brilliant professors that have molded our minds and patiently guided us through this voyage of immense intellectual growth. We will no longer be in walking, often touching, distance from the dear friends that have become our lifelines and companions. We will part with our teams, troupes, groups and guilds that have provided us with an outlet to persistently pursue our passions.

So tomorrow, we will no longer physically be here as a part of this tight knit community. But so what. This community that we have created here with each other doesn't disappear because we drive away, it simply relocates and spreads.

As we spread our community further, we should remember this feeling, of not just being an individual but being one of many. Remember what it felt like to be pushed to be excellent, to be pushed to figure out our place, to be pushed to give more of ourselves than we thought we had. Because sure, today, our lives at Middlebury College end, but our education does not. Neither does our drive, our investigation, our imaginations or our zeal. As we move forward, let's keep Middlebury glued in our minds and use it to push us to decipher what our role in the world is, to decide what makes us different, and what makes us stand apart from the rest and most importantly, to figure out what we can do to better the whole community.

We came here four years ago as individuals. Gifted, smart, talented, Joni-Mitchell listening, bra wearing, coffee drinking individuals. But today, we get to leave here as a community. We get to leave with 624 incredible mentors, friends, role models, dining hall bowls, and peers. The bond that we share is indestructible. I never used to believe the crazy statistic about some 80% of Midd grads that marry Midd grads. Well now I just feel badly for the 20% of you who will mess up.

Sure, I'm sad. I am equally excited to move forward with you all. We are ready, we are ready to take this Middlebury community and this extraordinary energy elsewhere. There *are* only 625 coveted spots. We were lucky enough to grab one of them. But now it's time to share. We are compelled to leave 05753, drop our 8 digit ID numbers that have encompassed our identities here, cash in our panther points and blow this bubble outward. I'm so excited to see what we do. So congratulations and thank you for being much more than any of those numbers.