

Good evening. My name is Greg Buckles, I am the Dean of Admissions here at Middlebury College, and on behalf of the entire admissions staff over at Emma Willard House, but more importantly, on behalf of the entire Middlebury community, welcome Class of 2019.

This convocation is a high holiday in the admissions world, whether here in Middlebury, VT or over these past few weeks in Brunswick, ME, or Hanover, NH. It's one of our happiest days of the year – to have the work we've been at over the past year and a half or so manifest itself in the appearance of the 600 of you. You're finally here. Plus, so far you all like me and think I make good decisions – there are 7500 applicants out there this year who truly believe I have no idea what I'm doing.

The Class of 2019 and 19.5 is indeed a unique class and special class. Selected from a pool of 9000 applicants, sitting amongst you now are classmates and friends from 45 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, 48 countries, from Brazil to Egypt, from China to Kenya. 20 of you are coming in after having done a gap year. Middlebury continues to evolve as an institution committed to access and diversity, and that commitment is reflected in this class: we had the highest number of applications ever from students of color this year, and those students represent over 25% of this class. You have the largest percentage and number of first-generation students ever in the Class of 2019 and 19.5: 103 first-generation students representing 15% of the class. You are artists and athletes, editors and presidents, first responders and community volunteers.

There are remarkable individual stories in this class. You have a young woman from Florida who was the captain of her high school football team. There is a young man from VT who is an Eagle Scout and Order of the Arrow member who also won the 2014 VT Poetry Outloud Championship. We have an entrepreneur from Wyoming who started a clothing company and was named one of Time's 25 most influential teens of 2014. There is a student from NH who made it to the top 100 of American Idol when she was 15. There is a young man who went to school in Shanghai, joined a small monastery in high school, and spent a month in self-imposed solitary confinement while there in order to deepen his understanding of spirituality. Another young woman from Great Britain works with the Amnesty International Street Theater, creating performances specifically geared at addressing the difficulties faced by Middle Eastern immigrants settling into new countries, a timely endeavor if ever there was one.

Finally, Class of 2019, you have one particularly interesting, one particularly impressive, one particularly special new freshman classmate. This person applied Early Decision, and so last November picked Middlebury College as her next destination. She's written some great essays, and her interviews went exceptionally well. While normally we don't permit transfers, let alone ones already with advanced degrees to begin as first-years, we felt it would be OK in this instance. I'm referring to your newest first-year friend and classmate, Middlebury's 17<sup>th</sup> president, Dr. Laurie L. Patton. I believe she will be an honorary member of all five Commons. You are entering a new stage in your lives together with President Patton, and you will be forever linked with this chapter in the history of Middlebury College because of that – you will be the first class to go through the four year educational life cycle with President Patton.

And do you know who else is in this class? A lot of just great, all-around kids. A lot of goofy, anxious, excited teenagers. And every one of you deserves to be here, whether you founded a non-profit or whether you elected to take that more challenging AP class and grind your way to a B rather than play it safe and protect your gpa with a less interesting course. Whether you wrote a novel, or whether you passed up an opportunity to do something that might look good on a college application to be a good friend to someone in need. Rest assured each one of you presented something interesting, something unique, which caught our attention.

If you were here last spring for admitted student Preview Days, you heard me in my welcome address emphasize that this process is not a treasure hunt with one perfect prize at the end. We're not looking for fully formed 18 year olds - we're not looking for perfection – nor should you get wrapped up in finding perfection, because the truth is you are not going to find perfection at Middlebury – but you can and will find your best versions of your selves here eventually. In many ways your generation lives in a world where outcomes override living in the moment, and I acknowledge that your acceptance to Middlebury could be seen as just another goal that you've worked hard to achieve and can now check off the list. As the person who signed his name on that letter representing that outcome, I want to remind you that what you do and experience here at Middlebury in every moment must be more important, for now, than the next outcome – the next internship, the next job, grad school. Remember what it was about Middlebury that made you want to apply and come here; relish that as you set about on your path and find your way.

And so now I am honored to help mark an important transition in your lives, whereby on behalf of the Middlebury Office of Admissions, I symbolically hand off the Class of 2019 to President Laurie Patton, entrusting the faculty and staff of Middlebury College with the care of your minds, bodies and spirits over the next four years. You are in good hands.