

Soper Merrill Award Speech
Ashley Stagner

Good morning Hamilton graduates, students, faculty, and families. Welcome to the event that my fellow classmates and I have been struggling to get to these past four years. It should be a good show. And probably an emotional one as well.

It still seems rather surreal to me that I am standing before you wearing my cap and gown. My time at Hamilton went by faster than I was aware of, and I am sure that many of my classmates will agree with me. However, although some of us may dread leaving the safety of the Hamilton bubble, it is now time to leave Hamilton and enter into the “real world,” as scary as that may sound.

I was seven when I decided that Hamilton was the perfect college for me. However, at that age, my main attraction to this school was my belief that South dorm was a castle. My love for the college has evolved since then, extending beyond the aesthetics of the campus. It’s true that Hamilton offers an impressive Science Center, a library with an excellent interlibrary loan policy, a huge fitness center (where I used to have my Calc. class), a new addition to KJ, and even an outdoor ice rink; yet, to me these facilities do not make Hamilton. They are nice bonuses to the college, but what makes Hamilton Hamilton are the students and faculty. Here we have a wide range of students and faculty all enthused about education and who inspire one another to go above and beyond the norm. I love being part of such a strong community that genuinely cares about one another, both academically and emotionally.

I would never have been this successful at Hamilton if it were not for the professors and friends who helped me and guided me these past four years. Three of my professors truly stand out in my mind: Professor Debra Boutin who encouraged me to go outside my comfort level for classes—although I did so kicking and screaming—and who always had time to talk to me; Professor Bruce Muirhead who scolds me for my troublemaking ways and who is always a source of inspiration; and Professor John O’Neill who has been a teacher, a guide, a mentor, and a friend to me. I also do not know what I would have done without my friends Chelsea, Jamie, Jenn, and Kaitlin, all of whom I met before the first week of classes freshman year began.

I wish to leave you all with some self-purported words of wisdom that I hope may help after graduation. The first, since we are in an economic crisis, comes from my *Duel Observer* alter-ego Sarah Davenport: marry rich and spend freely. I am aware that this advice may not be possible for everyone, so my other advice is something that I live by: forgive, forget, and laugh. Forgive those who crossed you previously, forget about the little bad things that have happened, and learn to laugh at life. There is humor in everything that happens, and it is important to recognize that humor—otherwise you might start to go mad.

I truly love this college, and I am so grateful for all of the experiences I had. Dad—this is for you. We made it to graduation. Everyone here contributes to making Hamilton the amazing school that it is, and for that I thank you all.