

## Valedictory Address to the Hamilton College Class of 2009

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A few days ago during the earliest part of the writing process, I decided to be proactive and ask my friends, “What do you want to hear me talk about for 5 to 10 minutes on Sunday morning?” The first answer I got: “Dinosaurs.” I never knew a plan could backfire so quickly. The second answer was equally helpful. This friend said I should just talk about her. While speaking about this friend for 5 minutes would have been an easy enough task, it wouldn’t be quite appropriate for such an occasion. That’s when it hit me. Graduating from Hamilton College is one of the most monumental achievements of our young lives. We should be proud, nostalgic, prepared, and for the first time in a week, sober. But this one success is not the only thing that we should be celebrating today.

College and life in general have been filled with many small successes. These are the ones we often overlook and never write about in speeches. They come and go almost daily, and afterwards you never hear a “congratulations.” You probably don’t even recognize the value of these moments for yourself. Think about it. When is the last time you took an extra second to appreciate getting an A on very minor assignment? Or patted yourself on the back because you ran one mile more than you usually do? Don’t forget that only minutes ago, you had a small success when you managed to get across the stage without tripping.

It is these little successes, however, that shape us as individuals in between the larger, more celebrated successes. For instance, we came to the Hill four years ago as bright-eyed 18 year olds. At Convocation in 2005, the same class in front of me today sat down in Wellin Hall and officially became

the Hamilton College Class of 2009. For the forty-six months since then, we have been students of Hamilton College. We have let that define who we are. Yet, it would be ridiculous to argue that we are no different than when we sat in Wellin four short years ago. If being students has been a constant, then something must have molded us slowly into the more mature, knowledgeable, and social people we are today. That's the part our little successes and accomplishments have been playing in our lives, silently and without praise.

But remember that achieving and appreciating these successes is by no means a lonely activity. The people around you shape how you approach new challenges and how your experiences influence you. I cannot recall how many times since starting at Hamilton I've been asked some variation of the question "Is Hamilton a competitive school or is it friendly?" and I answered, "Both." I never saw the independence of those two ideals. Why can't my peers at Hamilton be both competitive and supportive? It is in this type of atmosphere that we challenge ourselves constantly, seeking new opportunities with the encouragement of friends, teammates, and professors. They'll proofread your paper to give you an edge. They'll push you to take that voice lesson you always thought about taking. They'll sink the last solo cup to improve your winning streak to double digits. With their help, small successes will build faster than you can count them. Soon, they will make you the person you are capable of being. I know I am what I am today because of the support of my parents, sister, professors, and friends, and I would like to thank all of them for that.

So Class of 2009, I encourage you to appreciate the small triumphs and victories you experience on a daily basis. Don't lose sight of the tiny successes that have shaped you as you depart the Hill for

the last time. And though you may not have heard this as often as you should have for all your hard work that has led to this graduation, CONGRATULATIONS. Thank you.