

Remarks by Zulmarie Bosques '11
Scholarship Appreciation Luncheon
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Five years ago, as I set to apply for colleges, I was not sure what to expect. My guidance counselor and mentor, Courtney Pinto, was by my side. She told me to apply to Questbridge, a program that awards scholarships to its partner schools, which include Bowdoin. Through Questbridge's College Match Program, I ranked Bowdoin as my number-one choice. Ms. Pinto suggested it would be a great fit for me as it was small and my high school graduating class was composed of less than 100 students.

After much anticipation, I ultimately did not receive the College Match Scholarship from Questbridge. My application was entered into the regular admissions pool. I applied to colleges in New Jersey, New England, and even California. After receiving some acceptance letters, a letter from Bowdoin was nowhere to be seen. Ms. Pinto called the admissions department and spoke with a wonderful admissions officer who said that they had not received my application. Ms. Pinto managed to say such wonderful things about me over the phone that the admissions officer accepted my application via fax. A few weeks later, I received a Federal Express package with my personal acceptance letter from Bowdoin College and a generous "full ride," which I did not really understand the significance of then.

Making a final decision as to where I should go is another story. I visited Bowdoin during its annual Experience Weekend in the spring of 2007. It was 34 degrees and snowing in Brunswick. My flight from Philadelphia to Portland got delayed, then canceled, and later rerouted to Boston. I remember thinking that "There is no way I am going to attend if it is so difficult just to visit." After a long day of traveling, I finally made it to Brunswick. Of course, my luggage got lost and it was packed with snow outside. This was my introduction to Brunswick, Maine. I disliked what I saw, and immediately became anxious. I wanted to go back home and run away from all the snow. Departing Bowdoin was just as difficult.

But time is only granted to us for so long. The time came to make a final decision on where I would spend the next four years. I sat with Ms.

Pinto and my senior dean in an office at school going over the pros and cons of each option I had. Ms. Pinto asked me, "Where do you want to go?" "I don't know," I replied. I had visited other schools and did not have nearly the same visiting experience as here. After contemplating, I thought the dreadful traveling to Maine was not enough to keep me away from Bowdoin as an institution. I remember that President Mills even offered to have us stay at his home, that is to say that Bowdoin was more than just "great" — it was grand. So it was literally a coin toss between Bowdoin and Providence College. Providence won the toss and something inside of me made me say, "But I don't want to attend Providence." "Well, Bowdoin it is!" she said. "OK" was all that I could reply. Ms. Pinto probably thought I would never make a decision, hence leaving my fate's decision on a quarter.

My first year on campus was the most difficult. I felt as if I were a swimmer trying to keep my head above water as I stroked through academic rigor and social adaptation. As a first-generation college student from Camden, New Jersey, I found it hard to adjust to an environment so different from the one I just left. In Camden, drugs, violence, surrounded me. There were many days when I wanted to leave campus and go home, even transfer from Bowdoin. I wanted to give up, throw in the towel on this whole "college thing." I remember calling Ms. Pinto after an exam crying because I thought the academic rigor was unfair. I graduated valedictorian of my high school class and was now attending college with students of the same and above caliber.

Growing up in Camden, higher education was not a priority in my household. In fact, less than one percent of its residents are enrolled in a private college, much less a selective college like Bowdoin. A little over four percent of Camden's residents have completed a bachelor's degree. That is to say, the idea of college was a foreign concept to me. Even more than that, my friends and I did not have the luxury of talking about what schools we could go to or how far away from home we wanted to go. Ms. Pinto, however, made sure I had options; she made sure that I visited all the schools of interest; she made my college search dreamlike, easy.

Even after a hard first year, Bowdoin managed to grow on me. I met some wonderful friends, staff, and members of the Bowdoin and Brunswick community. I have many fond memories of my college years

that will stay with me forever. I was fortunate enough to study abroad in Lima, Peru, during my junior year where I was exposed to new cultures.

I was also able to attend in 2008 and then lead an Alternative Spring Break trip to Guatemala this year. I have grown close to professors and the Brunswick community. These and others are fond memories that I will never forget.

After four years, I stand before you today still in disbelief that I will graduate in two weeks. Without the generous donors of Bowdoin, I would not have had the chance to do what I've done for the past four years. When I looked at colleges during high school, the amount of financial aid I was offered was one of the deciding factors. Luckily for me, Bowdoin was not interested in how much I could contribute financially, but in my academic talents and contribution to its community.

Giving back to a community after undergraduate studies has never been a thought; it was an obligation in my eyes. Ms. Pinto, who has been a guardian angel in my life and is a huge part of why I am still here today, instilled values that prioritize "paying it forward." I was given a stellar education that has helped me grow, and now need to motivate others to pursue one.

This fall I will have the opportunity to essentially be a Ms. Pinto for another high school student in Chicago. I will be working as a mentor and higher education advocate to 25 male students in Urban Prep Academy Charter High School. I can now say that I am ready to pass the torch given to me five years ago by Ms. Pinto. Her words of wisdom and encouragement are priceless and I deeply treasure them.

I am no longer keeping my head afloat like I was freshman year; I am now an Olympic swimmer.

Thank you.

