Good afternoon and welcome. I’m Clayton Rose, the president of Bowdoin College. I had the opportunity to meet some of you this morning, which was terrific. And I’m looking forward to meeting the rest of you at the reception that follows this program.

Let me begin with some important introductions. I am joined today on the stage by our dean for academic affairs, Jen Scanlon. Jen is also a historian and distinguished and long-serving member of our faculty, in the Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program. Sitting here are several people some of you have met and all of you should know. They are (could you each stand): Whitney Soule, our dean of admissions and financial aid; Tim Foster, dean of student affairs; Melissa Quimby, our dean of first-year students; and Khoa Khuong, our associate dean of first-year students. Melissa and Khoa are important “go to” people for your daughters and sons as they acclimate to college. And, last but not least, my wife, Julianne.
We know just what it’s like to sit where you sit today because it wasn’t too long ago that Julianne and I dropped our sons off at college. And I remember both of those days as if they were yesterday.

We realize what an extraordinary moment this is. What lies ahead for our daughters and sons is remarkable, and is something each of them earned through enormous effort, persistence, accomplishment, and a wonderful set of values.

It was 214 years ago—almost to the day—that Bowdoin first opened the door of Massachusetts Hall to a single professor and eight students; five from Maine, three from Massachusetts.

Today, with 204 faculty and about 1,800 students split evenly between men and women from nearly every state and thirty countries, we’re actually pretty close to that original 8:1 student-faculty ratio. And we also continue to honor the statement of purpose expressed by Bowdoin’s first president.

It was on that opening day—September 2, 1802, as Thomas Jefferson presided in the White House—when Joseph McKeen reminded those assembled that:
“Literary institutions are founded and endowed for the common good, and not for the private advantage of those who may resort to them for education.”

This timeless philosophy of education—to serve the common good—is a value infused in everything we do at Bowdoin. And, along with the words of another Bowdoin president, they continue to guide Bowdoin today.

“The Offer of The College” conveys William DeWitt Hyde’s view that a liberally educated person will be “at home in all lands and all ages” and will “count nature a familiar acquaintance and art an intimate friend.”

That they will “carry the keys to the world’s library” in their pocket; “gain a standard for the appreciation of other’s work and the criticism of [their] own;” and “make hosts of friends who will be leaders in all walks of life.”

And “The Offer” concludes with the promise that these will be among the “best four years” of their lives.

This remains Bowdoin’s ambition for our students—that four years in this place will be among the “best years” because they will form a solid and enduring foundation for lives of learning, achievement, fulfillment, and joy.

How does that happen?
It happens when students immerse themselves in an interdisciplinary curriculum that encourages connections among subjects and prompts exploration of the unfamiliar. It happens when students are challenged by faculty to dig deeper and to cultivate an ongoing love for learning. And it happens in our performance and gallery spaces, on our playing fields, and in our student organizations, as these young men and women experience success, disappointment, creativity, develop resiliency, and learn the attributes of leadership.

The Bowdoin faculty—they are the heart of our College. They are dedicated teachers and deeply accomplished scholars and artists. They will mentor, motivate, and inspire your sons and daughters during their four years on campus, and for many years after they leave. In a moment, you’ll hear from Jen Scanlon, and she will describe our academic program in greater detail.

Bowdoin is also blessed with a dedicated staff that takes tremendous pride in their work supporting our academic and residential life programs. These folks take care of our grounds and buildings, prepare some of the best college food in America, advise our students about career and health choices, offer counseling and support, provide top-notch technology, and simply underpin everything we do at the College.
And we are tremendously fortunate to be located here in Brunswick—home to wonderful neighbors who appreciate all that Bowdoin offers and who join with us to form a community that is welcoming and supportive.

As you’ve no doubt figured out, Bowdoin’s culture is one of respect, inclusion, engagement, and warmth. One unique tradition that dates back many, many years and speaks to this culture is “the Bowdoin hello.” When we pass one another on campus or in town we say “hello”; we acknowledge one another other. We all do it, and through this simple act, reaffirm our bonds and help to make the day a bit better.

Your sons and daughters will come to know and appreciate these traditions. They will live “The Offer,” they will practice “the Bowdoin hello,” and they will come to have a greater understanding of what it means to serve “the common good.”

They will also be challenged here like never before. They will explore and change. They will succeed and they will fail. Whole new worlds will open up, and old assumptions will fall away. And for most, if not all, of your daughters and sons who have done so well to get here, some of these struggles will be a new experience. This is an important part, an essential part, of a great education—
pushing ourselves, coming up short, picking ourselves up and figuring out how to move ahead.

In the end, they will discover new interests, find their passions, know themselves better, and leave here well prepared to enter the world, to make a living, and to make a difference.

Speaking of making a living, let me talk briefly about something I suspect is on your mind. We live in an age and in an economy where some question the value of a liberal arts degree, arguing at the extreme that a liberal arts education is somehow at odds with gaining the skills necessary for professional success. I can tell you unequivocally that this idea is wrong. A strong liberal arts education, a Bowdoin education, provides the range and depth of knowledge, capability for continuous learning, the critical thinking, the communication skills, and the ability to engage in deep analysis that are essential to adapt, evolve, and succeed in the workplace and in our society.

Now, I want to be very clear. While I have no doubt that a liberal arts education provides a great foundation and pathway for professional success, this is not the central reason for a student to come to Bowdoin. A great liberal arts education provides the opportunity, the privilege, to understand the world and our place in it, and to create
and live a life with deep personal meaning. And this education plays a critical role in creating informed and engaged citizens, which with all the challenges facing our country and the world, we need now as never before.

Today, you too become members of the Bowdoin community—and some of you are renewing that membership. Unlike some places that may want you to drop off your kids and fade away, and while we do invite you to leave this afternoon, we also encourage you to stay in touch. So, subscribe to the *Bowdoin Daily Sun* and the *Bowdoin Orient*. Read the alumni magazine. Follow us on social media, and visit in person.

But as you stay connected, my suggestion—my urging—is that you let your sons and daughters do their own thing. They will always need you, and your support, and your love, they also need to make their own decisions. You won’t agree with all of those decisions—and we might not agree with some of them!—but, the growth and discovery that comes with struggle and managing the consequences of decisions is essential to learning and to learning how to face what challenges the world will offer up when they leave here. Let them navigate college, make their own mistakes, figure out how to recover, and create their own triumphs.
As President Hyde said many years ago, for your daughters and sons, these will be among the best four years of their lives. They will be filled with learning, friendship, fun, challenge, and intellectual and personal discovery. I could not be more excited for them.

This is truly a wonderful day for you, your student, and the rest of your family. Julianne and I offer you much congratulations!

I am delighted to introduce Dean Jennifer Scanlon.