



**BOWDOIN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS:
"MOVING FORWARD WITH THE COMMON GOOD AND BOWDOIN"**
By Ian F. Yaffe '09, Goodwin Commencement Prize Winner
Brunswick, Maine
May 23, 2009

Introduction by President Barry Mills '72

It has been a tradition at Bowdoin College since the first graduating class to have members of the senior class address their peers during these commencement exercises. In the 200 years since, those speakers have included literary giant Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; Thomas Brackett Reed, who would go on to serve as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; Alfred Kinsey, who gained fame as a biologist and researcher; and Robert E. Peary, who as an admiral explored the northernmost reaches of the earth and became the first man to stand at the North Pole. To this distinguished list we are happy to add two names today.

Our second student speaker today is Ian Yaffe, winner of the Goodwin Commencement Prize.

Ian is graduating with a major in Latin American Studies and a minor in Teaching. He is Class of 2009 representative to student government, serves on the board of directors for the Brunswick-Trinidad Sister City Association, and is co-founder of Food Forward, a student organization that partners with Dining Service and the McKeen Center for the Common Good to recycle food and deliver meals to the MidCoast Hunger Prevention Program, and that educates students about fighting hunger and its causes. He is also the

executive chef of Taste for Change, a non-profit restaurant that is part of Food Forward and that offers volunteer opportunities, educational events, and financial support for community partners.

Ian was one of five students from across the country selected last June to receive the Campus Compact's 2008 Howard R. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award for showing an extraordinary commitment to improving local and global communities. In addition to the good that it does, Taste for Change might also give even our famous dining service a run for their money with the meals they produce. The last one included fried plantains, pan-seared scallops, fresh ahi tuna, and New York strip steak—with crème brulée and molten chocolate cakes with caramelized bananas for dessert.

In addition to his cooking skills, Ian is also a CPR and first aid instructor. In fact, he is well-known on campus for his lifesaving skills. He has been a firefighter since he was 18 in Chilmark, Massachusetts, and he joined the Topsham Fire Department as soon as he arrived at Bowdoin. Since then, he has continued his training, learning how to drive fire trucks and run into burning buildings.

Ian spent a semester at the University of Havana in Cuba, which resulted in an independent study on Caribbean thought and identity. When he leaves Brunswick, he will take up a post he has held previously as Assistant Harbormaster and Firefighter for the Town of Chilmark—any of you vacationing on Martha's Vineyard can feel safe, I assure you! He has applied for a spot in the U.S. Coast Guard's Officer Candidate School and hopes to start that training in August.

“Moving Forward with the Common Good and Bowdoin” by Ian Yaffe ’09
President Mills, Members of the College, and Guests:

It is my honor to stand before you here today, just four short years after signing my name in Bowdoin’s famed matriculation log. On behalf of the Class of 2009, I’d like to begin by thanking everyone who helped make this journey possible. Without the support of our proud parents, trustees, professors, staff, alumni, donors, and friends, none of us would be walking up these steps today.

There are so many things that make this college such a incredible place and while many are institutional, most rely on the talented and dedicated individuals who work here to ensure that we have the best education possible: from (and especially) the Dining Service staff who feed us incredible meals before class and late through the night on weekends, to the events crew who work tirelessly to make this day and every event as special as possible, to our professors who commit not only to being experts in their fields but great teachers as well, and of course, to our very own president, better known as Barry because he seems to know everyone sitting on this quad right now. I’d like to give a very special thanks to our tremendous faculty and staff for dedicating their careers to the fulfillment of our dreams.

In just an hour, we will cease being college students and join the ranks of loyal alumni, many of whom are gathered here today. Some of us have jobs awaiting us across the world, some of us will continue learning through graduate programs, and some of us are simply ready to do something different—to see where the wind takes us, knowing that by having been here we are prepared for anything.

It didn’t take me very long to come up with the message that I wanted to guide this speech: the common good. This message is one that we’ve heard over and over again, but for

good reason. While graduating from Bowdoin means many different things for each of us, it also means something universal: a commitment to making the world a better place.

Being committed to the common good is not a chore, nor is it a choice. It is about treating people as you want to be treated and in that sense, commitment to the common good means more than community service. In that sense, the pursuit of the common good is a selfish aim for the very simple reason that improving the world for others means that we live in an improved world ourselves.

D.C. Central Kitchen in Washington, D.C. exemplifies this vision. Founded by Robert Egger in 1989, the Kitchen recovers un-served food from area restaurants and transforms it into nearly 5,000 meals daily. Those meals go to partner community agencies so they can focus on their missions instead of using their already scarce resources on food. To prepare these meals, volunteers assist the trainees of the Kitchen's culinary job training program which teaches unemployed men and women the skills they need to get and keep jobs in the food service industry. As if that wasn't enough, the Kitchen operates a for-profit catering company, hosts a national forum for similar community kitchens, and has established the Campus Kitchens Project—an organization that inspired Bowdoin's very own Food Forward. As D.C. Central Kitchen's motto says: "waste is wrong, be it related to food, money, or the potential for productive lives." All of a sudden, the same amount of food reaches more plates and instead of worrying about their next meal, people and agencies can focus on the community change work that really matters. It's all about finding ways to make existing resources work better and go farther. It's all about being uncommonly committed to the Common Good.

You don't have to look very far around you to find someone who exemplifies these traits. Just about everyone here has done something and will continue to do things for others. Throughout the year, over 300 students volunteer consistently on a weekly basis. This past year, over 800 students contributed nearly 43,000 hours of service to different communities through volunteering, courses, research, internships, and philanthropy. People hold the door open for you even if that will make them a few seconds late. We debate our role as a leader in regional and national action on climate change whether it's about bottled water, carbon emissions, or what do to with food waste. Our collective spirit of service is what keeps the offer of the college alive and is something that people search for and recognize in others. It's no wonder that so many Bowdoin alumni become leaders in almost every field imaginable: politics, the arts, business, teaching, the sciences, and more. Entering this network of alumni means being connected to a world of people committed to the common good and of course, committed to giving back to future alumni and the College.

This very sense of community—easy to recognize but hard to create—is exactly the reason I knew Bowdoin was the right school for me four years ago. Well, that and Thorne's buffalo chicken burger... Seriously, I've never missed one of those ever since. Just being a visitor on this campus counts you as a member of the Bowdoin family: there are no gates to check in at and when you're walking around looking like you've never been here before—you all know what that looks like—chances are someone will stop and give you directions. Chances are that person will go out of their way, without thinking about it, to make sure that your visit here is as good as it can be. All of a sudden, you've made the connection—that is the strength of the Bowdoin community. The world would be a markedly better place if everyone pursued the values we strive to uphold everyday on this campus.

That brings me to another point: I cannot ignore that we are graduating from college in challenging times. In just the four short years that I've been here, the world has become a completely different place. In these four short years, we've seen wars waged around the world, hurricanes batter the Gulf Coast and Caribbean, trouble with the economy, millions go hungry, and schools fail despite heroic efforts. However, during those same times I've seen the spirit of humanity, from the heroes in our armed forces to the individuals just doing their part to help others. I've seen the hopeless look on people's faces when their homes are on fire, instantly transformed by the voluntary response of their community to drop everything and come to their aid. I've witnessed the power a teacher can make in the lives of students despite how high the odds can be stacked against them.

Instead of looking at the problems we face today as a negative, I am optimistic: challenging times will require the very best from our generation. We are going to be asked to sacrifice, but through our struggles we will become stronger and more committed to fighting for what we believe in. We are prepared to adapt to new situations yet remain committed to values and beliefs that are centuries old. As the future unfolds, we will ensure that it stays bright through dedication, hard work, respect, honor, friendship, and good spirits. The same traits that made us successful as Bowdoin students will continue to ensure our success in all of our future endeavors.

Those traits mean that we will never accept the status quo and instead solve problems with independent thinking and constant innovation. Here, the Cadet Maxim at West Point sums up my opinion: "Risk, more than others think is safe; Care, more than others think is wise; Dream, more than others think is practical; and Expect, more than others think is possible." Our education here at Bowdoin College has prepared us to achieve the impossible

with skill and grace. I look forward to hearing—as I'm sure everyone here today is—of all the great things that will be accomplished by the Class of 2009. Our future will offer continual evidence of the strength of a liberal arts education and in particular, of a Bowdoin education.

In closing, I'd like to remind everyone here to stay committed to the common good and connected to the college. Let's make the world a better place the same way we've made Bowdoin a better place during these past four years. I recognize that this is no easy task. In order to make it happen, we will have to be incredibly vigilant, with sharpness of mind and certainty of character. I'm confident that we are prepared to set forth on this endeavor and so very hopeful for the future. Thank you to everyone who has been and will continue to be there for us and congratulations to the Class of 2009!