



*Roanoke College Convocation  
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It's hard to believe that four years ago today, I was sitting where you are now. I cherish this opportunity to share with you my experience, and I hope it finds you well.

One of my most vivid first memories of moving to Roanoke was sobbing to my parents while sitting at a table in Mac and Bobs for the first time. Roanoke College was the last place I expected to be for my college experience. My dream was San Francisco and its limitless possibilities. Salem Virginia was dramatically different from everything I dreamed of as well as everything I was used to. I was used to fast paced Manhattan streets and outlets of self expression at my fingertips. The subway rides to school sparked my curiosity of behavioral patterns and how even the smallest interactions change us. To me, these quintessential New York City interactions were a fundamental aspect of my character. I was plagued by the adolescent confusion of what it meant to be me, and whether or not my identity was dependent upon the city I grew up in.

Before accepting my spot in the class of 2015, I found myself visiting Roanoke by chance through one of my father's business trips as well as a close friend's wedding. Both times, it was pouring rain and students were not on campus. Needless to say, I wasn't impressed. After a painstaking period of decision making and punching numbers, my family and I agreed that Roanoke was the most efficient place for me for my freshman year. I wholeheartedly intended to leave for San Francisco upon completion of my first year.

Freshman year was full of surprises including the realization of the beautiful campus I was on. Those rainy tour days were slightly misleading! The surprises kept coming, through the incredible relationships I formed. My hall, Marion 4th floor, grew extremely close and I found a great friend and supporter in my roommate, Bryanna. Even with these strong bonds, I still felt as though I didn't have a place at Roanoke; I didn't fit in. I didn't know anything about the culture of Salem and I assumed I couldn't be myself without my familiar surroundings fueling me.

Considering the extent of my closed mindedness that year, it's a miracle I was able to connect to Roanoke at all. A miracle I am eternally grateful for. I am thankful for my professors who encouraged me to get more involved through outlets such as the Social Psychology Research Lab and valued my thoughts on topics in and outside of class. I began to ask myself, "why not?". Knowing the genuine support of all the faculty and staff of the college, I was able to take a risk and apply myself to things I never thought I could be a part of. Today, I have found a family in the Campus Activities Board, a cause through Relay for Life, and a honorable responsibility through the residence life staff. As a member of CAB, I learned to value all that goes into creating a community. My position forced me out of my comfort zone and taught me that a great leader is someone who can effectively problem solve while listening to the thoughts and concerns of those around her. As a resident advisor, I have been given the opportunity to learn about members of the Roanoke community on an individual level, and to support students in similar phases of confusion as I experienced during my freshman year. The support I received my freshman year and still receive to this day in academics as well as my overall wellbeing has surpassed any expectation I had. Through work, research, and clubs I have gained the experience of belonging to something bigger than myself, even when I actively was not searching for such a feeling. To me this is evidence of a rare community; A community that can change and counsel a person so set in her ways without her even realizing it.

As a rising senior at Roanoke College, I am able to pursue an education in a community of not only learners but leaders. Just like the liberal arts education, each aspect of this community affects another. Such intermingled discipline and community creates a foundation and support system imperative in educating leaders of tomorrow. I have gained

perspective, confidence, and a home through the support I have found in the Roanoke College Community. Some of you here today may be feeling the same sense of confusion as I did, or you may even be excited or nervous. But one thing I hope you remember throughout this transition, is to not be afraid to reach out to the community that Roanoke College has so thoughtfully and genuinely provided. I am so excited for you to embark on this journey, and I can't wait to hear how Roanoke changes your life just as it changed mine.