

Convocation Welcomes Class of 2023

SEPTEMBER 5, 2019

On September 3, 2019, the Bennington community gathered to celebrate the start of the academic year and welcome over 180 new students to the College.

Convocation 2019

At the start of the event, the College community was treated to a musical performance of *Playon* by faculty members **Josh Blackwell**, **Nick Brooke**, **Senem Pirler**, **Allen Shawn**, and **Michael Wimberly**; and students Tuva Eid '20, Colin Jones '21, Dion Nataraja, '22, Maria Salim '21, Nick Williams '20, and Christina Polanen '20.

Interim President **Isabel Roche** welcomed students, faculty, and staff back to campus by offering her thoughts on the shared trust, commitment, and responsibility essential to building the College's community.

"Critical to Bennington's approach—in our dynamic and unconventional way of doing things—is the understanding that each of us should try our best every day to arrive fully present for one another, undistracted and ready to engage," said Roche.

Eve Mefferd '19, who chairs the **Student Educational Policies Committee**, was the student speaker. She spoke about the multitude of ways in which Bennington students can get involved and make their voices heard

on campus and beyond. "As a Bennington student, protest and change-making are your inheritance," said Mefferd.

Mefferd called for students to listen and learn from one another and to respect each other's diverse experiences and viewpoints. "We're here because we want to make an impact," said Mefferd. "In each encounter we have, we make an impact in each other's lives and in the world at large. You can choose to make them positive ones."

Watch Eve Mefferd's full speech.

Rage Hezekiah, First-year and International Student Counselor, was the staff speaker. She shared her perspective as a relative newcomer to Vermont and the inspiration she finds in her daily work with students. She also urged the community to "be gentle with each other."

"I trust our collective ability to have hard conversations, and find common ground," said Hezekiah. "This doesn't mean we always have to agree, but that we can treat each other with tenderness, trusting that we are committed to sharing this space, and making this place our collective home."

Watch Rage Hezekiah's full speech.

John Bullock, Acting Provost and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs, offered his thoughts on the College's unique teacher-practitioner model, which means "the people you learn from are always at work in the world themselves, creating and learning and contributing."

"Bennington faculty will serve as your mentors and guides in your time here," said Bullock. "Until the day you graduate, they will challenge and push you...The observations and insights your teachers will offer about your strengths, habits, and opportunities for growth are a tremendous gift. They won't always be easy to hear, but they will make you better."

Faculty speaker **Dina Janis** then addressed the College, stressing the importance of preparation and action as necessary first steps to discovery and education.

"Regardless of how one finds oneself preparing for the act of creation, there is no substitute for time on your feet actually doing the thing, rather than thinking about doing it," said Janis. "There is nothing hypothetical about action."