

Commencement Speakers



Bennington College - Laura Walker <president@bennington.edu>

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BENNINGTON COLLEGE

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Bennington community,

I am pleased to announce that the 2021 Senior Speaker will be **Soumya Rachel Shailendra '21**. Soumya, who studied Drama and Literature during her time at Bennington, has not only focused on social movements and politics while in the classroom, but also helped create inclusive communities outside of the classroom. She was a founding student of the Consortium of Forced Migration, Displacement, and Education, and she encouraged meaningful conversations by starting an interfaith club for her peers. Soumya's passion and fierce dedication to equity and freedom—particularly in today's challenging climate—will continue to shape the College and community for years to come.

I am also delighted to share that Music faculty member [Michael Wimberly](#) will be this year's faculty speaker at Commencement. He will address Bennington's class of 2021 during the Conferring of Degrees on Saturday, May 29, at 10:00 am. Wimberly is a celebrated and prolific composer/sound designer, and percussionist who has scored films such as *As An Act of Protest* and *Atlantic City Lights* for HBO. Wimberly has performed with funk legends Parliament Funkadelic, Brit songstress Joss Stone, and Steve Coleman's 5 Elements. He received his MA in Percussion from the Manhattan School of Music in New York, NY, and his BA in Percussion from Baldwin Wallace University/Conservatory in Berea, Ohio. Music of the African Diaspora and improvisation has become key components of Wimberly's musical excavations and explorations. He released his latest album, "Afrofuturism," on the Temple Mountain Record (TMR) in 2021.

We very much look forward to hearing Soumya's and Michael's reflections at Commencement—we know all will be inspiring. We will be announcing the 2021 Commencement Speaker shortly, and stay tuned for more information regarding access.

Warmest Regards,

Laura Walker
President