

WHITMAN CONVOCATION SPEECH

ASWC President Lily Parker - August 24, 2018

Welcome to the class of 2022! Congratulations on making it here today, it is my honor to welcome you to our beautiful campus.

For some of you, it may have been your plan to attend Whitman for some time. Perhaps your parent or sibling went here or you signed on early to participate in varsity athletics. Or maybe you hadn't heard of Whitman until the day before the application deadline. Or, you're just like me, and you really really enjoy planning ahead. Ask me after this if you would like to hear about my philosophy on using both a paper planner and google calendar simultaneously in order to ensure maximum productivity.

Suffice it to say that I came into Whitman with a plan. I was going to live in Anderson or maybe Lyman, study Econ or Gender Studies and do my best to meet other people outside of the many other students who I already knew from Seattle.

Spoiler Alert: none of these things actually happened.

First, there was the dorm situation. I got assigned to live in Prentiss, which was my third choice and I immediately began to stress out because I was worried about fitting into the quiet environment. I freaked myself out about being able to make friends and convinced myself I would never be invited to any parties. A little secret I will let you all in on is that I now have, in fact, been to a party. To women sitting in the audience who may be worried about living in Prentiss this year, don't be alarmed, you will probably end up loving it like I did. It turned out that I lived in Prentiss for not only my first year but my sophomore year as well because I enjoyed it so much. Within the first couple of months, I had formed a solid group of four best friends and we have stayed close since, now living together in a house off campus.

Next, If you all are anything like me at the beginning of first year, whether or not you want to admit it, you are probably stressed about finding close friends. As someone who attended high school in Seattle, I felt surrounded by people I already knew when I first got to campus. (To the five students who came this year from my high school I just want to be the first to tell you all that you will see each other everyday for the next four years so just prepare yourself for that).

Some of you may have come to college hoping to reinvent yourself or at least to differentiate yourself from who you were in high school. I too had plans of branching out and being a new person, surrounded by totally new people.

Again that did not exactly go as I had planned.

I have known my two best friends, Claire and Brahm, since I was in middle school. While this was technically true, Claire and I did play soccer together starting in 8th grade and Brahm and I have gone to school together since 6th grade - I hadn't had a substantial conversation with either of them until we got to Whitman. Through living with Claire in Prentiss, joining the same sorority and our mutual loves of olives and reality television, she went from "girl I kind of knew from home" to the closest friend I have ever had.

Brahm and I ran in different circles in middle and high school, as demonstrated when he told people on his scramble that he and I were not friends because of how intimidated he was of me. Against all odds, we started attending Feminist club meetings together weekly our first year and one thing led to another and we became close friends. We worked together as Co-Presidents of the feminist club, on projects on ASWC, learning to cook in the house we lived in together last year, and in coparenting our pet lizard, Kendrick.

So, the distancing myself from people I knew from home thing didn't really end up happening either.

Next, in terms of academics, I took Intro Econ and Gender Studies courses my first semester and quickly realized that I was not particularly skilled in either field. I then took a course from my pre-major advisor, Politics professor Susanne Beechey, who you will hear from later today. Her passion for the subject and extreme kindness towards me made me declare a politics major my first year. One piece of advice: Don't declare your major your first year, it is too early. There is no rush and you will likely change your mind. Soon after declaring I realized I really just liked Professor Beechey and didn't actually really enjoy studying politics. So I changed my major and once again my plans had to shift, but I ended up in the perfect area of study for me, and I wouldn't have known about it if I hadn't tried out politics first. That being said, don't do what my friend Brahm did and wait until the middle of your Junior year to declare either. Try out new classes and areas of study your first two years and you never know what major you might end up in, and if you don't feel like any of them are for you, you can create your own! One of the best parts of being at a Liberal Arts college is being able to take classes outside of our majors and explore a variety of paths. While taking Intro to Geology was outside of my comfort zone I did end up learning a lot. At the same time though, you do have to take Encounters, there is no getting around that one.

The biggest deviation from my plan happened at the beginning of my sophomore year. On my first day back on campus a large branch broke off a tree in front of Prentiss, crushing my friend Zoe and me underneath. I spent that semester in a neck brace, not able to do much schoolwork and I felt that my plan for that semester and honestly the rest of my time at Whitman was most definitely not going to go the way I had imagined. My professors, the people who took notes for me in my classes, Bridget from the health center who drove me to physical therapy daily, and most importantly the unwavering

support of Claire and Brahm got me back on track and to where I am today. At Whitman you will find that people will step up when you most need it.

And finally there's ASWC. I would never have even considered running for ASWC President before my junior year. I felt that people just saw me as the girl that the tree fell on, and I didn't think anyone would take me seriously if I ran. ASWC also had male presidents my first two years and it took having a female president my junior year for me to even begin to consider myself in this role.

My point in telling you all of these anecdotes is to demonstrate to you that your plan you have right now is going to change. Good things will happen to you in your time in Whitman but likely so will bad things and that is okay. As cliché as it is you will be stronger because of what you go through. If you had told me while I was bedridden my sophomore year that I would be standing here as the ASWC President in two years I would have absolutely not believed you. Basically what I am trying to say if a tree was to fall on one of you it is just a sign that you'll be the next ASWC President.

All jokes aside, I envy the position you are in, make your Whitman experience your own and enjoy every minute because it moves incredibly fast. Keep an open mind and learn from one another. Do things you are passionate about and make a difference on campus to prepare yourself to one day do the same in the real world. Come find me in the ASWC office if you ever want to chat and once again congratulations class of 2022!