

COMMENCEMENT – 2016

Brad McMurchie's Welcoming Remarks

Please be seated.

Good morning class of 2016.

Good morning everyone. My name is Brad McMurchie and I have the honor to serve as Chair of Whitman's Board of Trustees and the pleasure to welcome you here on behalf of my fellow governing board members. Today we gather as a community to mark the closing of the academic year and to celebrate together the accomplishments of the class of 2016. Most of you soon to be graduates, your families, and those closest to you became part of this community only 4 years ago. Today we bid you farewell from the physical confines of the campus, but you will always be a part of this place.

Students, like you, have always been the heart and soul of Whitman, but you are joined by a lot of other people in forming the Whitman community.

There are, of course, generations of alumni and friends with whom you will now share a bond. Their generosity and commitment to Whitman helped create what we see today. They are the people who helped build this beautiful campus. They helped fund our wonderful faculty and gave generously to create the scholarships that insured many of you would be able to complete your education at Whitman. They have names like Hunter, Garrett, Sherwood, Glover, and Feigin. Most of them have names we will never know. Very few of them could have imagined the Whitman that exists today. They gave generously as an act of faith and in recognition of what Whitman gave them. Your success affirms that they gave wisely.

Our community is also enriched by the roughly 300 people who serve as the staff and administration of the college. They're the ones who read your applications years ago and checked the accepted box. They cleaned your dorms, cooked your meals, aided your professors, and tended to you at the Health and Counseling centers. Most of them toil in anonymity, but in a thousand ways they keep this place working and they gather with us today to celebrate your accomplishments. Finally, we have the faculty sitting to your right. They have advised you, mentored you, opened their homes to you, engaged you with and in their scholarship, and yes, taught you. The friends among your fellow graduates and the others you leave behind after today will really always be with you. Whitman friendships work that way. But in this community, after those friends, the people you will remember and cherish the most are the faculty sitting alongside you. They are the bedrock of the college and they have devoted their careers to students like you.

Now being part of a community doesn't mean you always agree about everything. Rather, what defines us is a sense of common values. At Whitman those values include a love of learning, a quest for knowledge, and a deep respect and empathy for those around us. We share an understanding that the problems of the world are complex and will need critical thinkers like Whitman graduates if they are to be solved. We recognize that the way we teach and the way we learn at Whitman produces graduates like you with the opportunity to make a difference in the world when you leave.

Members of the Class of 2016, your families and friends- on behalf of the Board of Trustees-Congratulations and go seize those opportunities.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce the leader of our community, the 14th President of Whitman College, Dr. Kathleen Murray.

Dr. Murray's Opening Remarks

Good morning! As Whitman College's 14th President, it is my honor and privilege to open Whitman's 130th Commencement ceremony.

Thank you, Brad, for your welcoming comments and for your exceptional leadership of our governing board.

Thank you, also, to the Walla Walla Valley Band led by Director and Whitman Alumnus, Jackson Maberry.

Congratulations, Whitman class of 2016! You have worked very hard to reach this day, and you deserve to celebrate.

But before you walk across this platform and receive your diploma, I hope you will join me in thanking some very special people who join you for this celebration today, whether physically or virtually. First, let's turn to your parents, step-parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members who supported you throughout this journey. I know you will thank them personally later, but let's show them now our collective gratitude for all they have done.

Your most important guides during your time at Whitman have been the members of the faculty. They have challenged you, propped you up, nourished you both physically and mentally, and put their hearts, minds, and souls into teaching you. Please join me in thanking them.

And, last but certainly not least, there are the people who helped you to flourish in your life beyond the classroom, the Whitman staff, who understand that student

learning is at the core of all they do, and who do that work exceptionally well. Please join me in thanking our staff.

I would like to introduce the people who are with me on the platform today. Please hold your applause until all are standing. First, from our Board of Trustees, Board Chair Brad McMurchie and Trustee Emeritus Jim Robart. From our Board of Overseers, Jim Dow, Sarah Michelson, Michael Flannery, Matthew Ames, and Marshal McReal, and Whitman staff members, John Bogley, Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations; Peter Harvey, Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer; Tony Cabasco, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid; Chuck Cleveland, Vice President for Students Affairs and Dean of Students; Dan Terrio, Chief Information Officer; Pat Spencer, Interim Provost and Dean of the Faculty; Stacey Giusti, Registrar; Fred Moore, Professor of Physics and Secretary of the Faculty; and Melissa Clearfield, Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Faculty. There are three students seated on the stage: Commencement Marshalls Tara McCulloch and Nina Finley and Flag Marshall Mitchell Cutter. They all surround two special guests, Will Segall and Justice Mary Yu, both of whom will be introduced in more detail shortly.

Please join me in recognizing those on the platform.

Today's commencement is both an ending and a beginning for you who are members of the class of 2016, just as it was for the members of the class of 1966, who are back with us celebrating their 50th reunion. During their senior year, the soap opera *Days of our Lives* premiered, the Pillsbury Doughboy was created, American troop engagement in the Vietnam War escalated as did protests across the US, Fidel Castro announced that Cubans would be allowed to emigrate to the US, Robert C. Weaver became the first African American Cabinet Member by being appointed as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Gateway Arch in St. Louis was completed, and the first artificial heart was installed. They celebrated their commencement on June 5, 1966, and their commencement speaker was US Senator Henry M. Jackson. His address was titled "The End of the Beginning," and he used as his inspiration the Churchill quote from November of 1942, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning," and related that period of World War II to what was happening in the Cold War in 1966.

It will be interesting to see which global events that you members of the class of 2016 experienced as seniors will be remembered in 2066 when all of you return for your 50th reunion. Will it be that gravitational waves were detected for the first time (right down the road at the LIGO facility in Hanford)? Perhaps the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Summit and the resulting climate change pact will have resulted in dramatically reduced carbon emissions? Maybe tourist travel in space

will be commonplace following on the first successful upright landing of a SpaceX Rocket? Will you remember that Prince died this year? And, what will history say about the 2016 presidential campaign?

It is unlikely that I will be able to join you for that special celebration in 2066, but I encourage you to return often to your alma mater, the “nurturing mother” of your transformative undergraduate experience, whether it is a reunion year or not. You have formed special bonds here while you struggled to understand Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* and thought about your encounter with the movie *The Battle of Algiers* in many of your courses; while you prepared for, sweat through, and then celebrated the completion of your comprehensive exams; while you played golf, tennis, basketball, or ultimate Frisbee; while you rehearsed Chekhov’s *The Seagull* or Menotti’s *The Old Maid and the Thief*; while you prepared your applications for Fulbrights, Austria or French Teaching Assistantships, or Department of State Critical Language Scholarships; and while you relaxed in the sunshine on Ankeny. You will reconnect during unexpected encounters around the globe in some of the 36 states and US territories and 9 countries that you call home. And, you will rekindle special bonds when you return for your reunions back here in Walla Walla. You will always be Whitties, able to share memories, whether you graduated yesterday or 50 years ago. And, you will always be my first graduating class, and I will look forward to sharing that special memory with you.

Everyone who speaks with you today feels obliged to give you some sort of charge, advice as you move into the next great adventure in your lives, and I am no exception. I want to talk with you about two things, one I hope you will continue to pursue, and one I hope you will try to avoid.

I urge you to continue to develop your capacity for empathy, for the ability to understand, even to share the feelings of others, to experience life as if you were standing in someone else’s shoes. I hope that many of your experiences at Whitman have helped you to build this capacity, as you have lived and learned with people from different parts of the country and world, different racial and ethnic groups, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different political and religious views. William Sloane Coffin, Civil Right activist and a good friend of mine, defined the root of evil as “the absence of imaginative empathy for others.” Maya Angelou, who I wish I had had a chance to meet, said, “I think we all have empathy. We may not have enough courage to display it.” Our ability collectively to make the world a better place depends, at least in part, on having the courage to combat evil by displaying imaginative empathy.

The attitude that I encourage you to try to avoid is cynicism, which derives from a belief that people are generally dishonest and motivated solely by self-interest. I work hard, even if I am not always successful, to base my work on the assumption

that people are looking out for the best interests of others, and I hope people will give me the same benefit. The distrust and disillusionment that results from cynicism squashes creativity of thought, and creativity is essential if we are to make the world a better place. H.L. Mencken famously said, “A cynic is a man who, when he smells flowers, looks around for a coffin.” I hope you will look for the flowers.

Congratulations and all best wishes, Class of 2016!

Dr. Murray Introduces the Faculty Award Recipients

At Whitman College, our faculty members are on the front lines, supporting and engaging with students, and helping maintain the academic rigor and excellence that defines our students’ experiences.

At this time, we take a moment to recognize the recipients of this year’s faculty awards. At the end-of-year faculty reception held recently, the following faculty members were honored for their teaching and research, their dedication to our students and their academic work.

Would the following faculty members please stand when their names are called and remain standing until all award recipients have been acknowledged?

Please hold your applause until all are standing.

BALL AWARD

This year's recipient of the George Ball Award for Excellence in Advising is Associate Professor of English Gaurav Majumdar.

EDWARDS AWARD

This year's recipient of the G. Thomas Edwards Award for Excellence in the Integration of Teaching and Scholarship is Associate Professor of History Elyse Semerdjian.

FLUNO AWARD

This year's recipient of the Robert Y. Fluno Award for Distinguished Teaching in Social Sciences is Associate Professor of Sociology Gilbert Felipe Mireles, Jr.

HOWELLS AWARD

This year's recipient of the Thomas D. Howells Award for Distinguished Teaching in Humanities and Arts is Associate Professor of Art History Dennis Crockett.

LANGE AWARD

This year's recipient of the A.E. Lange Award for Distinguished Science Teaching is Associate Professor of Biology Thomas A. Knight.

MARTIN AWARD

This year's recipient for the Suzanne L. Martin Award for Excellence in Mentoring is Assistant Professor of Politics Melisa S.L. Casumbal-Salazar.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

This year's recipient of the Award for Distinguished Service to the Alumni Association is Senior Adjunct Assistant Professor of Religion and General Studies Rogers Miles.

Please join me in recognizing the 2016 recipients of faculty awards.】

Dr. Murray Introduces Austin Biehl and Rose Gottlieb, the 2016 Class Speakers

Each year we ask a representative from the graduating class to address the audience. This year, we're lucky enough to have two!

Austin Biehl and Rose Gottlieb are our 2016 student speakers. Austin is a psychology major from Stanwood, Washington. During his time at Whitman he worked as a resident assistant, a student academic adviser and as an intern for the Office of Conferences and Events. He played on the men's club volleyball team and several intramural teams, and our graduating class will recognize his name from the humor section of our student newspaper.

Rose is a psychology major from Minneapolis who is also used to getting laughs, in her case as part of the campus improve group Varsity Nordic. During her time here, Rose worked at Walla Walla High School as a student adviser helping students with their post-high school career and college plans. She has also interned at Walla Walla's Juvenile Justice Center and worked with young people at an emergency shelter in Philadelphia.

Here are Austin Biehl and Rose Gottlieb.

Class Speech by Rose Gottlieb and Austin Biehl, "You Can't Guest Swipe Into Reality"

Austin:

Today, Rose and I would like to offer you the unoriginal suggestion that all of us are like butterflies.

Rose:

We came into college as larvae. Pale, unformed, and writhing around at inappropriate times and locations.

Austin:

At this very moment, we're in the critical period known as metamorphosis when the caterpillar just sort of hunkers down and to eventually emerge as a hot young butterfly.

Rose:

And what you might *not* know is that after the larvae builds a chrysalis around itself, it then releases enzymes that start to digest its own body.

Austin:

It becomes a liquid.

Rose:

Literally a flesh stew.

Austin:

So one could say that today, at Commencement, we are swaddled within the proverbial goulash chrysalis.

Rose:

A confused, quivering mush of anxiety and uncertainty

Austin:

I look out into the audience and all I see is a milieu of shapeless blobs. And maybe that's because we're all wearing these unflattering robes, or maybe it's because our lives actually are just a goopy mass.

Rose:

But here's the hopeful thing about butterflies. They don't entirely melt themselves down into goo. A few things remain intact including some neurons, holding fond memories from its days as a larvae.

Austin:

These are what the caterpillar will take with it once it finally pulls its life together and becomes a butterfly.

Rose:

So for now, since we are immobilized here in this uncomfortably warm, crowded cocoon, it is worthwhile to reflect: what are the memories and experiences floating

around us today? What are the chunks of caterpillarhood that will come with us into our lives as butterflies?

Austin:

For example, one thing that I'll carry with me is the time I spent as an RA. That year, I helped so many people, gained invaluable experiences, and lost contact with basically all my friends.

Rose:

That's so funny because one thing I'll be sure to hold onto is the time I *applied* to be an RA but was rejected. That year, I watched so much TV, I saw so little daylight, and *also* lost contact with basically all my friends.

Austin:

Yikes. Well, I'm, uh, sure there are other things that we'll carry beyond our time here.

Rose:

Right. Liiiike...one thing we'll take with us is the ability to embrace challenges. In fact, Whitman's official motto is, "Through Adversity, I Rise."

Austin:

And as two white kids, Rose and I know a thing or two about conquering diversity.

Rose:

ADVERSITY! Adversity. You mean.

Austin:

Adversity. Definitely, adversity.

Rose:

Or, another thing that's sure to make it through the cocoon smoothie is the way Whitman has taught me to have courage no matter the circumstances. Like when you keep running the naked mile, even though an elderly Walla Walla gentleman is definitely taking pictures of you and you've long since lost all feeling in your left buttcheek.

Austin:

Yeah! Or the courage it took for me to put on a program every Wednesday night in a sophomore residence hall in which my residents literally wrote AUSTIN SUCKS across a large poster. It was a... great joke.

Rose:

Yeah sounds...hilarious...Also coming with many of us is the ability to fake it 'till you make it. Like, if I wear enough Patagonia and take beginning rock climbing, maybe people will believe that I'm actually going to do something about global warming.

Austin:

Or speaking of faking it till you make it, those times when you go to that one class with that professor that assigns 100 pages of reading a night and you're like:

Rose:

"Well, I found certain aspects of the work problematic, though holistically it made a *compelling* argument about the pseudo-patriarchal post-neo-liberal patriarchy...hegemony...liberalism...you know?"

Austin:

Like, both of you are on the same page that you read literally nothing, but you just have to sell it, ya know?

Rose:

Another thing I'll take with me into butterflyhood is the 4 quintessential liberal arts hand gestures. So for example, "this perspective allows us to provide greater NUANCE"

Austin:

Or "over time we see the beginning of a TREND" or "the use of this rhetoric allows for a deliberate SUBVERSION".

Rose:

Or there's a certain "INTERSECTIONALITY".

Austin:

I'm not sure that's...no...okay we're gonna just keep truckin.

Austin (blinks rapidly):

And as we flutter out of Walla Walla, I'm sure we're obviously grateful to Whitman for teaching us how to be citizens of the world.

Rose:

That's right. We all bring different perspectives, cultures, and dialects from the various suburbs of the Bay Area. Very worldly.

Austin:

Yeah, I've enjoyed both Taste of India *and* Taste of Asia at Reid campus center.

Rose:

Yeah, I've read at *least* 10 pages of the Koran for Encounters. Not consecutive pages, of course. But you know, I get it.

Austin:

Hare Krishna.

Rose:

L'chaim. Our point is, we know that right now, in our gelatinous state, it may seem impossible that we'll ever get it together and become beautiful butterflies.

Austin:

Impossible. Like yesterday I drank four mimosas and convinced myself that it counted as my daily serving of fruit.

Rose:

But like the butterfly, when we emerge from our chrysalis and confront the world, we won't be starting from scratch.

Austin:

There will always be pieces from Whitman for us to hold onto.

Rose:

Things we've learned, memories we've shared, experiences that have shaped us in ways we might not even realize yet. These are floating all around us.

Austin:

And we trust that when we're ready,

Rose:

or when we're not ready but our parents decide that it's time for us to stop living in our childhood bedrooms,

Austin:

We will gather these memories from our time at Whitman and the lessons that have shaped us,

Rose:

We will resolidify our liquified mass of tissue,

Austin:

And eventually, we will take flight. Thank you.

Dr. Murray Introduces the Senior Fund Chair, Annie Boyenneh

Now it's time to introduce another member of today's graduating class, Annie Boyenneh.

Annie is the Class of 2016 Senior Fund Chair. The Senior Fund is a campaign organized by Whitman's seniors and marks the beginning of a lifetime of involvement with the college. For Whitties, it is the first step in the transition from student to dedicated alum.

Throughout the year, the Senior Class Committee solicits gifts that go towards the Senior Class Scholarship—a scholarship to further the education of Whitman students.

Annie is from Seattle, and she will leave today's celebrations with a degree in politics. The first in her family to graduate from college, Annie has been a mentor to both other first generation college students and our international students. But her engagement with her community extends even further than that.

She has held leadership positions with the Whitman African Students Association and the Whitman Events Board; she served on ASWC's Oversight and Finance Committee and within our very own Student Engagement Center.

Annie plans to pursue work in the field of public policy after she leaves Whitman, and the first steps on that road include a position as a communication fellow at World Vision, a cultural exchange to China and an application to the Peace Corps for 2017.

It's my pleasure to introduce Annie Boyenneh as the 2016 Senior Fund Chair.

Annie Boyenneh's Senior Fund Presentation

For the past year I had the honor to work with the amazing and dedicated senior fund committee as the Senior Fund Chair. The committee planned class events and fundraised for scholarships and other programs for current and incoming students.

Fundraising this year was a great learning experience. Some classmates were appreciative of our efforts to provide them with free food, some were irritated by our efforts to have them support the Senior Fund or some were annoyed about the many emails from me. As I reminisce on my fundraising experience with the committee, I remember a night in the library when Senior Fund committee member Kangqiao Liao went in the quiet room and convinced seniors to give to the senior

fund. His effort embodied the spirit of the committee and our commitment to Whitman.

With the tireless help of the senior fund committee and the generosity of the senior class we were able to raise \$_____ from the class of 2016. These gifts were made by _____% of the senior class, and will be going towards scholarships. With the help of parent and alumni contributions, we raised a grand total of \$_____ to support scholarships and other programs.

I want to thank all of the members of the senior fund committee for their hard work and dedication: Cali Goldberg, Kangqiao Liao, Karen Vezie, Kelsey Peck, Jini Valence, May-Lannie Lozano, Madeline Duppenenthaler, Draco Liu, Wenjun Gao and Phuong Le

Finally, I want to thank all of you soon-to be- graduates, your parents, and alumni for their generosity and willingness to support students. My experience at Whitman was only made possible through the generosity of others. As we become alumni it is important to continue to make Whitman accessible for other students, allowing them to have the same opportunity we had in shaping our own experience this past 4 years at Whitman.

Thank you

And Congratulations class of 2016

Dr. Spencer Presents the Distinguish Teaching Award

Whitman College has a tradition of acknowledging and recognizing elementary, middle and high school teachers that have made a difference in the life of a graduating senior.

Members of the graduating class are invited to nominate by letter, an elementary, middle or secondary school teacher who had an especially significant impact on their development. Based on this year's nominations, a committee of Whitman faculty and students selected William Segall to receive the Distinguished Teaching Award.

After studying Arabic in Jordan, Will Segall began his teaching career in Iraq, moving from there to Woodstock International School in India. Will has said: "A great history teacher must know about the places that they teach, so that they can inform students with stories alongside Socratic questions about why empires were formed and why nations rise and fall."

After returning to the United States, Will taught at a public school in Chicago and completed a master's degree, his thesis focusing on the representation of other cultures in American textbooks as well as the fact that the Egyptian and Arab Islamic Empire—which influenced the formation of western knowledge—are often excluded from textbooks on western civilization. He has also taught at Bridge House School in South Africa and made a return trip to teach at the British International School in Iraq in 2013.

In Seattle, Will has taught western civilization and history seminars on Africa and the Middle East at Forest Ridge School for 11 years. Most recently, he has returned to public education, working at Denny International Middle School within the Seattle Public School system with students who have a wide range of learning challenges.

Dr. Spencer presents an honorary degree to Justice Yu

President Murray, I have the honor to present for the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, Justice Mary Yu.

Dr. Murray introduces Justice Mary Yu

I would like to introduce our honored guest, commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient, Washington Supreme Court Justice Mary Yu.

Justice Yu was appointed to the Washington Supreme Court in 2014 after serving as a trial court judge for more than 14 years.

During those years, she heard a wide variety of criminal and civil cases and presided over hundreds of adoptions and other family law matters.

Justice Yu is the first Asian, the first woman of color, and the first member of the LGBT community to serve on the Washington Supreme Court. She performed the first same-sex marriage in Washington state and she is, like some of you here today, the first member of her family to graduate from college.

Justice Yu is the recipient of a number of professional awards, including Judge of the Year from the Washington State Association of Justice, Public Official of the Year from the Municipal League Foundation, and the 2012 Difference Makers Award, presented to her by the American Bar Association.

She also has a deep record of service both on and off the bench, and has mentored young attorneys, law clerks and students. In fact, it was while mentoring a Whitman alumna that she was first introduced to our college. Thanks to that relationship,

Justice Yu agreed to be our keynote speaker on campus in honor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in 2015.

We are deeply honored that she is here with us again today, providing us an opportunity to recognize her passion for social justice, a passion that many of you, our graduates, share. THEREFORE, BE IT KNOWN THAT THE TRUSTEES, UPON RECOMMENDATION of the FACULTY, HEREBY CONFER UPON Mary Yu the degree of DOCTOR of humane letters, honoris causa with all the rights, privileges and honors appertaining to that degree.

Justice Yu will now give our Commencement Address. |