

Bard

To the Bard Community:

Today, Bard College enters a new chapter in its 166-year history, we will have new leadership for the first time in over half a century. As Acting President, I want to assure you that Bard will continue to fulfill its mission as a private college operating in the public interest. At a time of growing authoritarianism and neoliberal approaches to higher education that focus on narrow conceptions of “return on investment,” Bard acts ambitiously to fulfill its distinct mission as a steadfast advocate of the arts and humanities, academic freedom, democracy, and educational access for communities in which liberal arts education is underdeveloped, inaccessible, or absent altogether.

I am incredibly proud of the people in this community and of what Bard represents in the world of higher education. I am also humbled by the faith the Board of Trustees has shown in me during this critical moment in our history. I am certain that the Bard community—students, faculty, staff, alumni/ae, trustees, and friends of the College—is committed to preserving this extraordinary institution and maintaining its spirit of innovation. Much of that work will be undertaken by the excellent senior leadership team in Annandale, including many alumni/ae who know and love Bard. Together we are prepared to steward the College through this moment.

The core of Bard’s excellence remains grounded in the community created in the classroom, both undergraduate and graduate. In an age in which interactions are often mediated by screens, and AI threatens to replace critical thinking, Bard remains centered on what Fareed Zakaria spoke of at this year’s Annandale undergraduate Commencement, HI: “human intelligence,” “human imagination,” and “human interconnection.”

I still vividly remember several of the students who took my section of Deirdre D’Albertis and Karen Sullivan’s brilliant First Year Seminar, “Education and Its Discontents,” nearly 30 years ago, in my first semester on campus. We discussed Plato, W. E. B. Du Bois, and John Dewey with an intensity I could not have imagined when I was a first-year student at a large public university. Since that unforgettable first course—indeed, some of the students from that group were surprised when, at their 10-year reunion, I remembered their names—I remain impressed and inspired by Bard’s extraordinary students, from Annandale to Al-Quds.

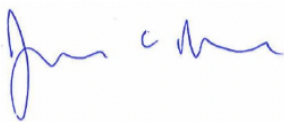
It has been a difficult year for our community. Yet I remain full of optimism, especially having spent the past six weeks working closely with students and alums in commencement activities and conferences across three continents.

In Annandale, I applauded three graduating seniors—with whom I worked daily for three years—as they received the Robert Koblitz Human Rights Award for their work at Election@Bard, and I cheered on two alums whom I taught and worked with at the Center for Civic Engagement, who received The John Dewey Award for Distinguished Public Service in recognition of their fight for justice for Bard student Ali Sajad Faqirzada. At Bard College Berlin, I witnessed a Ukrainian student, draped in her nation’s flag, call out to her class from the depths of her being about the responsibility of this generation to build a better and more just future. At Eastern New York Correctional Facility, graduates radiated a pride of achievement and also a poignant declaration of self- and collective worth that cascaded not just through the graduating class but among all of those who were gathered. In Chiang Mai, Thailand, I saw the first BA students of Parami University, an institution in exile from Myanmar in Bard’s international network, founded by a Bard graduate, receive their Bard degrees with transcendent pride in their defiance and accomplishment. And in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I joined Bard students from Annandale, Berlin, Bishkek, and East Jerusalem along with Bard global degree recipients who received special dispensation to leave the world’s largest refugee camp in Cox’s Bazar for the 13th annual Get Engaged: Civic Engagement and Social Action Conference.

Nearly 90 years ago, Eleanor Roosevelt made the case for Bard, speaking of how its professors created cultural opportunities that “stirred the whole rural community” and how Bard was “fulfilling its educational function so well it deserves the interest of the public.” Bard’s community now reaches far beyond our “whole rural community,” with classrooms and programs locally, nationally, and globally. It continues to deserve the interest of the public because of how it steps up and what it stands for.

I am grateful for the opportunity to continue the work and legacy of this institution at a time when its values and commitments are so deeply important.

With gratitude,



Jonathan Becker
Acting President
Bard College