

Samantha Rubadue

Who to Be

Good afternoon, everyone!

When I began my college journey, I used to think that I needed to have every moment planned out so I would know exactly what was coming. I felt like I had to do everything perfectly, and if I did, that automatically meant I would be successful. I was so focused on what I was going to do once I graduated that I didn't stop to think how I would manage it if everything didn't go exactly to plan. I'm sure you can see where this is going.

A month and a half before the COVID-19 pandemic completely swept through our lives, my grandma passed away. She was always one of my biggest supporters and she never stopped encouraging me to be the best I could be. Everything I did during my first three semesters, I did with the expectation that I would be able to tell her about it the next time I saw her. Whether it was dying my hair in freshman housing, joining a new organization, or just getting a good grade on a paper, I wanted her to know about it, and she loved to hear about it.

Every small victory I had in college was a celebration to her that she never hesitated to tell anyone she could about, and when I lost her, then subsequently lost my ability to be around 90% of the people I care about, I lost my stability, and I lost a lot of my confidence in what I was doing here. It was hard to be anchored when I felt like I didn't know anything anymore and nothing was going to work out how I thought it was, when I didn't know who to be. One of the hardest realizations I had was that she wouldn't get to see me on this stage, even after all the support she gave me to make it here. Fortunately, I had a strong support network that made

everything feel a little less bleak and made me appreciate the moments I had with them instead of focusing so hard on what I was missing.

I'm incredibly lucky to have parents, friends, and family that have always given me everything they have at home, and an amazing network of faculty, staff, and friends at Marietta College, but it doesn't change how difficult it is to feel like your entire world is upside down. Unfortunately, it would not be the last time that I or my fellow classmates would feel this way.

When we stepped onto this campus, it seemed like we knew what the future held: we were going to get through college, and it was going to be simple – or, as simple as it ever is. Sure, we'd experience all of the normal ups and downs, but it would be just that: normal. And for a while, it was. We went to games for all of our teams, celebrated the wins and pushed past the losses. We attended events like bingos, Doo Dah Day, and anything else that was available. We went to class through rain, shine, or below freezing temperatures. We mourned the loss of our WiFi, at least twice a month. We were the true definition of a campus community. And then, all of these things we did, everything that helped us feel normal and certain, came to an immediate stop.

All of a sudden, we were packing up our dorm rooms or stranded on campus, separated from our loved ones, and we had to adjust to an entirely new way of life. What was initially a spring break vacation that we had been so excited for quickly turned into a nightmare. We'd been so ready to get away until we were faced with not coming back. Our faculty and staff were doing their best to keep things as normal as possible, and they did a great job, but it was still incredibly difficult and scary. We only had digital events to attend, we couldn't see any of our classmates in person, many of us navigated health scares in our families, and finding any motivation to continue forward and push towards this moment we've all been waiting for felt

nearly impossible. I mean, when you lose access to everything that helped characterize you – your friends, your team, your organizations, your job – How do you redefine yourself?

But slowly, we figured it out. We did it. We began to find things to do outside of the norms, find ways to surround ourselves with others safely. We took wellness walks and watched movies on Harrison Lawn, we moved back into our classrooms and dorms and learned new ways to communicate when we didn't have half of our faces to emote with. We managed quarantines and isolation, we Zoomed our friends when we couldn't see them in person, and we found ways to appreciate the moments that we had, to find happiness in any way we could, to be adaptable and strong when we had every right to feel weak. Some of our closest bonds were formed during this time, some of our best friendships were given a chance to develop when we had to tighten our circles. Finding new solutions and placing importance in every moment is what's allowed us to be here, in person, sharing this moment with all of our loved ones and supporters who have helped us persevere.

The experiences we've had here have shaped us unimaginably. Whether it was living through a global pandemic, dealing with campus-wide tragedies, or getting the third parking ticket in a month from MCPD, we have had to find ways to push past and get through whatever has been thrown at us – and that strength and persistence has shaped the people we're going to be after we cross this stage. We learned how to live without a plan. As we step forward into an indefinite future, think about how your experiences in life and the time you've spent on this campus have molded you into leaders, collaborators, into people who have ambition and the potential for success. Think about how the bonds you've created, the adaptability you have developed, have made you compassionate and able to engage, have helped you find moments of community in a time of separateness. Bring that with you, whether you're going into a graduate

program, or a job, or something that you maybe haven't found yet. Our experiences at Marietta College have given us the tools to redefine ourselves, to make something stronger, so as we go on, be the person that you have worked to build.

Just don't get so caught up in moving forward that you forget the importance of the little things, that you forget who to be. I'd like to end with a quote from Helen Keller that I found to be appropriate for the Class of 2022: "Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved."

Thank you.