Just a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of having the Class of 2016 to the house for dinner. Don’t be too impressed, parents: I didn’t cook, although I did make the key executive decision to have mashed potatoes and chocolate cake on the menu. This is one of my favorite things I get to do as president – not picking out the menu, but rather hosting our graduating seniors in my home. It’s so rewarding to learn about and celebrate your accomplishments. I stand in admiration and gratitude at how you’ve made an impact on this community, and I’m so very heartened when I hear you reflect on what your time at Bryn Mawr has meant to you.

I want you to know that your emotions are palpable, and they trigger a range of emotions for me too. Most immediately for our wonderful graduate students and our seniors, I’m sad to see you go. You have made a tremendous mark on this institution. You have changed the conversation about making Bryn Mawr a truly inclusive community. You have pursued excellence in athletics to match our culture of outstanding academic achievement. You have influenced how we think about teaching and learning at the undergraduate and graduate level. And you have re-invigorated student self-governance. In these and many other areas, you have made us better. Thank you!

We still have much work to do, but you’ve set us on the path. So when I say we’ll miss you, I’m expressing much more than a ritual pleasantry. I, we, this community, will feel your absence keenly, and will continue to look to your example for inspiration and guidance in the years to come. Based on how you’ve grown here, I know that wherever you apply your talents and education, you’ll make a difference there too. I have no doubt that you are ready for the challenges of that wider world – although I’m not entirely sure it’s fully prepared for you.

Yet even as I am filled with anticipation and confidence in your future choices, experiences, and accomplishments, I feel the need to share a hope with you, my deepest wish for each of you: that whatever you do, wherever you go, whatever path you follow, you find happiness. In this vein my own research field, psychology, has given us great insight into what constitutes a happy life. And my own experience has vividly affirmed these insights. So while you thought you had your last Bryn Mawr class, guess what: you haven’t walked across the stage yet. Don’t worry, though; this lecture won’t last 50 minutes.

Research has revealed three main life habits that, taken together, create a meaningful, sustained experience of happiness. The first is to seek joy. Make enjoyment a priority in your everyday lives. Cherish things in your life that make you laugh, heighten your awareness of beauty and bring you contentment, experiences you can savor and that nurture spontaneity and fun. In a word, let some hedonism into your life. Just don’t become a 24/7 pleasure-seeker, because studies assure us that you’ll end up getting arrested and I assure you that bail money is not among the services the College offers to its alumnae.
Seriously, though, we find joy not merely through pleasure-seeking, but also through pursuing things that are meaningful to us, challenge us and allow us to successfully use our full abilities to accomplish things. Spend your time on pursuits that you find compelling, engaging, and that stretch your abilities. The key here is the *you* do what *you* find compelling, what challenges and engages *your* particular skills. Now, what ignites the fire within you may or may not pay well. It may or may not be what a lot of other people would choose for you, or for themselves. Your choices and your path may not always be straightforward. Events may not unfold according to plan. You will make some mistakes and walk down some blind alleys, as we all do. But if you navigate by the stars of your passion and are engaged by your work, you will find meaning.

And that leads me to the third essential element: Seek out and connect with that which is larger than yourself. Staying in community is essential to making meaning. After today you may find yourself living on your own, in a new place, without the institutional structure and community support you’ve had during your time here. You might feel isolated or at loose ends. So I urge you to stay in touch with the wonderful friends you have made here. Continue the activism you started here by lending your time and talents to causes and organizations you care about – you will reap comfort, meaning, and community from such work. Anchor the freedom of independence in your relationships with family. And stay connected to us here, to Bryn Mawr. Your relationship to the College will change, but it will not end. All of these relationships that you’ve sustained with your labor and your love are here to sustain you as well. They are your happiness reservoir – tend to them and draw on them.

And so, as they say, *here endeth the lesson*. These are the elements of happiness – substantive, meaningful, adult happiness that I hope will fill your lives and your hearts in the months and years to come.

As you embark upon your engaged and joyful, journeys of purpose, you have my very best wishes. We’ll always be here for you, to remind you of just how much you are capable of, and why what you’ve done here is so important to you and for the world.

My heartfelt congratulations to all of you!