

## President Kaitlyn Steinhiser's Convocation Speech 2020

I'll be honest with you, I didn't expect the beginning of my senior year at Valpo to feel the same way as the beginning of my freshman year. Some of the nerves I felt my freshman year have returned thanks to COVID-19, as I wasn't sure what it would be like to take my classes on campus, I wasn't sure about what student activities I should participate in, and I was nervous about eating in Founders. Well, I've always been a little nervous about eating in Founders.

Nevertheless, this uneasiness began to fade away when I realized that I'm still just as excited to come back to Valpo as I was when my parents dropped me off at Alumni Hall three years ago. From that day forward, Valpo has been my home.

While I was so grateful for what I experienced in high school and continue to keep in touch with friends from my hometown, I found myself immersed in this wonderful community we have on campus. No matter what, I knew that people like my professors, RAs, and even my peers who were also new to campus were rooting for me and ready to help however they could. You will experience several milestones within the next four years, and you will find that there will always be a member of the Valpo community to cheer you on.

I remember getting a call about my first internship right as the chapel bells rang as I was on my way to class with a friend. As passers-by heard that I had just accepted a job, they congratulated me. Valpo is so ready to share those positive moments with you, so let it happen. Make Valpo your home by accepting help and support from those around you. Build those relationships by talking to your professors during office hours, getting lunch with your RA, and studying in the library way too late with friends from your classes. You will find that, years later, those people will still be members of your Valpo family.

While I hope that each and every one of you finds your home at Valpo, I challenge you to think a step further. Make sure that everyone feels welcome enough to call Valpo their home. To do this, you are going to have to step out of your comfort zone and learn about the perspectives of your fellow Valpo students. Every Valpo student, including all of you, already has a wealth of knowledge. Some of this knowledge comes from students' experiences, like traveling the world, working for different organizations, and leading research initiatives. Our students also have knowledge that is tied strongly to their identities, like their cultural norms, their faith, and their values. Don't miss out on

this wealth of knowledge. Take the time to listen to your peers about their experiences, and share your experiences as well. As you learn about your peers' values and ambitions, ask them what Valpo can do better to help them flourish. You will find that a lot of your growth here at Valpo stems from these crucial conversations.

As you grow intellectually, culturally and spiritually during your time here, make sure our university grows in the same ways. If you see a way to improve Valpo, pursue it. Use the resources that are available to you like Student Senate, your House Councils, and even other students making themselves heard like those outside of Brown Field right now courageously seeking to eliminate racial inequity on our campus.

Here at Valpo, students have been and always will be the drivers of positive change. Our campus is shaped by the students who lead it. So, throughout your time here, frequently ask yourself, "Am I doing everything I can to make Valpo a better place than it was when I got here?" When you engage in student organizations and campus communities, think "What can we do collectively to leave our mark at Valpo?" And when you find yourself in your last year on campus, remind incoming students to ask themselves the same questions.

Our university has literally made it its mission to ensure that we are prepared to lead and serve when we graduate. This preparation is best done through practice. Use your passion to lead and serve right here at Valpo. Make Valpo a place you are proud to call your home, and make sure that others feel welcome enough to do the same. Thank you, and welcome to the Valpo family.