

Hello From
The Other
Side!



Dear Student,

Last year we conducted a series of focus groups with students to learn more about their social experiences at Amherst. In these conversations, students shared some of the difficulties they'd encountered here and said that if they'd heard more about students' social and academic challenges when they first arrived on campus, they would have felt more prepared and less alone. We listened to them and created a compilation of letters from upperclassmen to incoming students, describing how they had overcome social and academic challenges and what they had learned in the process. This reading is available at

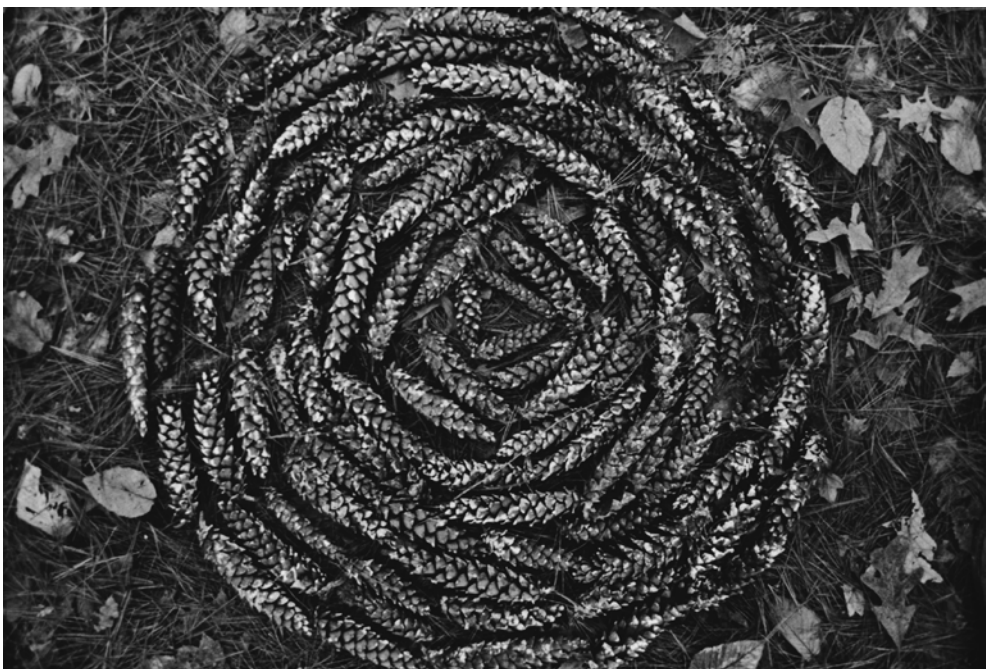
<https://www.amherst.edu/mm/490011>

This booklet is a selection of responses to that reading, that members of the incoming class wrote to themselves, and gave consent to reprint. We hope that you find meaning, commonality and encouragement in their words.

Sincerely,

The Mental Health and Wellness Committee and
The Wellness Team

You are fine, and you will continue to be fine. **Bumps and curves** along the way are there to make for an **interesting ride**. And you've never been one to give up a challenge.



Artwork by: Sarah
Jordan '16

Even if we try to prepare, we are never truly ready for change. Change is growth, and by definition it is going to be *something new*. You can never know what to expect, so the best thing to do is **be ready** for multiple possible outcomes.

As you begin to embark on your *adventure* at
Amherst,

You may feel nervous or even intimidated
By your newfound surroundings

And

The many talented and
different people you will meet.

However

I urge you to forget about
your concerns.

While you may not feel
ultra-confident or comfortable

In this strange environment,
Just know that you do belong here!

Always remember to **be** **genuine.** Rather than trying to fit into a standard in order to succeed, remember that everything around you has always been an assurance of the contrary.

People's differences are what, by definition, set them apart from everyone else, and these differences are what distinguish successful individuals positively.

You are no exception and that's beautiful because only within your anomalies you will be able to find the traits that can propel to reach whatever dream you may have in mind now. Remember that others around you may have the capacity to understand what you are going through and provide a helping hand.

Reach out, be honest.

Look for whatever it is you need, or more importantly be aware that it may be right in front of you.

You did it kid. You are going to Amherst College. I am never going to forget the first time you stepped onto the field; you were shy, weak, slower than everyone else, and you didn't seem to want to be there. You came to me after the first day saying, "Coach, I can't do this, I'm tired and scared". I looked into your eyes and told you that you could. I know you will feel that same fear the first day you step on campus as you did the first day on my field, but you succeeded and overcame this fear. I know You have succeeded in all your endeavors and I know you always will. I know you can reach out to the right people and make yourself the best version of you that you can be. I am *proud* of all you have done, and if you ever feel lost, just think about all you have done in the past and use it to continue making **progress** throughout your college career.

Right now, you are an enormous block of marble.
Smooth, untouched; no visible damage or chips.
You are now poised to embark on an **exciting** journey.
Your life will change completely and that's okay. It's
normal to shy away from change and be scared. It's even
okay to be terrified.



Artwork by:
Norah Oteri '18

Your smooth exterior will become chipped, chunks will be taken out. Someone will beat on you with a stick and a rock until you no longer resemble the block that graduated from high school. It might hurt, you might feel as though the blows are malicious and that you don't deserve to be permanently altered; however, when it's all said and done, you'll be able to step back and see a **magnificent sculpture** unlike any other in the world. Each of the blows was unique and each of them contributed to your final shape. So when you put on a cap and gown again, this time to walk across a different stage, you will not be exactly like the 500 others.

Stay committed to the person you are, the person you want to be, in all aspects of the next four years. If there are any means by which to beat your fears, it is to be real, to **be genuine**. This means tossing aside the fronts, the masks, the insincere gestures, doing so in all situations, the highs and the lows. It is in this authentic connection to yourself that you will find the authentic help, the authentic people you so wish to surround yourself with during the next four years and beyond. While this may not be the path of least resistance, it may very well be the path of best results. You will be forced to confront and voice your fears in the process of being true to yourself, but at the end of confrontation is **reward**, true **fulfillment** of academic and social **dreams**, a fulfillment never to be gained if you sell yourself as someone you are not.

Having weaknesses and vulnerabilities is a given--everyone has them, but what you do with them is what makes the difference. It's important to recognize your feelings, your weaknesses, and your vulnerabilities and *accept them*. I mean REALLY accept them. Recognize that you have these so-called "flaws," for it is the only way you can start to do anything about them. You can't move on in your life if you are ignoring underlying problems--whether that is feelings of doubt, hopelessness, or really anything that you feel like is a problem. It sounds crazy, but **just do it.**



Artwork by:
Norah Oteri '18

Remember your *past*, your *roots*, where you came from. Remember these things but do not let them be a weight on you. Do not let yourself be roped into the narrative of **The Despite** (the idea that I have succeeded "despite" being from a rural town, "despite" being from a big family, "despite" being gay "despite" being poor). The Despite implies that these were bad things in the first place. It is true that sometimes these things were hardships, but your family, your home, and yourself are not things to be ashamed of, not things to overcome. These things have given you a unique *perspective*, have shaped you into who you are. Use that perspective to your advantage, always carry it with you. Just don't let yourself be defined by it.

Sometimes after the orientation programs and activities, I just feel too tired to join others in the common room or to go to a cool party where I can make more friends. Whenever that happened, I felt afraid that I might be left out and become an *outsider*. I would sometimes push myself to be the guy who enjoys party, someone who can just bond deeply and that "guy" who is always surrounded by many supportive friends. This process was stressful and I realized that the more I pushed myself to fit that "**mold**" the more I felt unhappy. Reading these letters just helped me realize that I don't have to be that person who I'm not. I should feel free and comfortable to be myself. The letters gave me assurance that things will work out and even if they don't I will have many people around me who could support me.

All I have to do is **reach out**.

Depression and frustration with circumstance always looms quietly on the horizon. A dedicated malcontent, you never seek out but always find the rot beneath any gilded surface. It will weigh heavily on your shoulders. Some days in class you will sway, and some days you will be a very specific kind of tired, and some days you'll feel lonely and sad. But everyone else is having those days too, and they are **necessary**.

Always remember that this journey is bigger than "*now*". It's easy to bask in the pain of the obstacle that has tripped you, but you are running a marathon. Not a race, but a marathon, and the end is what you've spent all of this time working for. Not for any place or any title, but because the finish line will be an **honor** that most people only dream of. Falling over once does not make you unfit to stand and **continue** running.

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Artwork by: Ludia Ock '19

Time for you to drink the Kool-Aid and fully immerse yourself in the experience. You're going to do great things and don't let anything hold you back!

You are **strong**. You are **authentic**. You are **powerful**. See that. Know that. Remember that. Live your truth. Don't let anyone take who you are away from you. Let your light shine on through all. Find your inner peace, in a wild mind. Connect that peace to your heart, and you shall find creativity. *Determination for inspiration*. You know who you are, so shine. You are **fearless**. When you are who you truly are, you will set the world on fire.

The biggest weapons you have in your arsenal are hard work, determination, discipline and the will to keep going when everybody has given up. They served you well in high school and they will serve you well at Amherst too.

Just make sure to work your hardest and everything will be fine. **Go for it**. Take risks, but never over-commit yourself. Do your best at whatever you do; there is nothing you cannot do if you put your mind to it. Be **humble**, be **creative** and never lose your desire to be the best version of yourself. Those are all you need to **make your dreams a reality**.

Be Well

