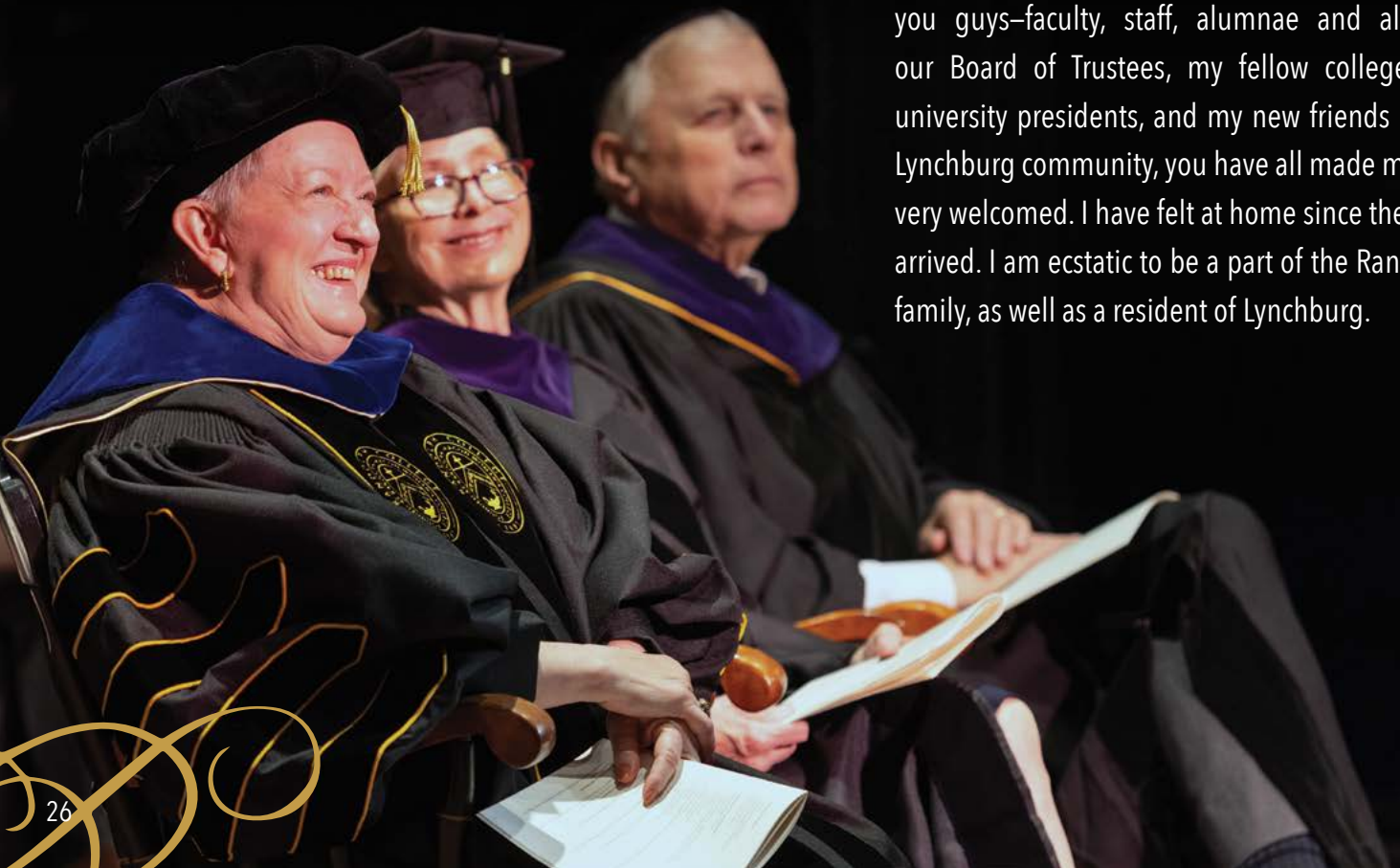


# THE Randolph PROMISE

Randolph College President  
Sue Ott Rowlands presented  
the following inaugural  
address on April 15, 2023

*T*hank you so much. I'm slightly overwhelmed. Let me begin by saying what a tremendous pleasure it is—not just a pleasure, an honor—for me to stand here before you today to celebrate this wonderful college. I am so honored to be Randolph's 11th president, and I would be remiss if I did not thank everyone for the warm welcome I have received since I arrived here last summer.

Students—my wonderful students, I love you guys—faculty, staff, alumnae and alumni, our Board of Trustees, my fellow college and university presidents, and my new friends in the Lynchburg community, you have all made me feel very welcomed. I have felt at home since the day I arrived. I am ecstatic to be a part of the Randolph family, as well as a resident of Lynchburg.



To all of my friends and family members who are here today, and to my colleagues here on the platform, thank you all from the bottom of my heart for being part of this very special occasion.

One of the things that strikes me every time I enter the Red Brick Wall is the rich history that permeates our entire campus. Many days when I come to campus, I just can't help but wonder what these grounds must have been like when the College first opened in 1893. There were no paved roads. Horse-drawn carriages and a trolley traveled along the street that is now Rivermont Avenue. It is said that in September of 1893, during the early days of the College's opening, our first president and founder, William Waugh Smith, helped carry the young women who arrived here across the muddy road and through the gates. The brick walkway that had been planned between the road and the College wasn't finished yet, and a torrential rain fell as Randolph-Macon Woman's College opened its doors for the first session with 36 residential students and 12 professors.

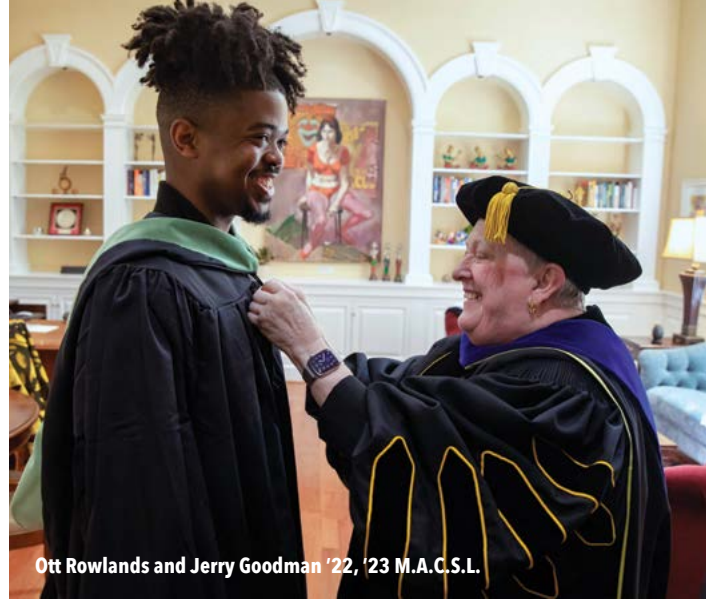
Dr. Smith was known as a man who believed failure was not an option. And despite not having the money to finish Main Hall, despite pushback from those who said women were not suited for—or capable of—earning a college degree, despite an endless supply of challenges, he and the rest of our founders worked tirelessly to welcome these young women to what was an unheard-of prospect: a college committed to providing women the same educational opportunities that were available to men.

Their hard work paid off. By 1905, a guidebook described the College as “conscientiously and splendidly academic”—I love that—and as providing “added breadth of culture” to the women who came here to learn.

Well, times have changed. Higher education has changed. Our students have changed. And yet, in this small corner of the world, so much of what made this College special in its earliest years, remains the same.

When I first arrived last summer, I challenged everyone on campus to take on the role of educator/leader. We cannot simply look to the faculty to be educators or to the administration to be leaders. Every individual in our community must embrace their roles as mentors, teachers, problem solvers, and creators. Our campus community embraced this challenge and has brought to the table a great sense of pride in the campus.

Our staff are extremely dedicated to our students. Our faculty was just recognized as 12th in the nation



Ott Rowlands and Jerry Goodman '22, '23 M.A.C.S.L.



Ott Rowlands and Zeinab Elkhansa '23



Ott Rowlands and family and friends





for Most Accessible Professors. Our students matter to faculty and staff, and they are available to students inside and outside of class. They cheer them on at events. They push them and challenge them. They applaud them and encourage them. And all of this makes a difference.

Randolph College is a place where people know each other and care about one another, and this is a big part of what makes Randolph so special. Perhaps it began all those many years ago when William Waugh Smith and faculty and staff members welcomed those first courageous women as they crossed the muddy road that is now Rivermont. I am proud that this welcoming and accepting culture continues today as we begin the next chapter in Randolph's history.

As I stand here today, I feel that same pioneering spirit, courage, and innovation that Dr. Smith and his colleagues must have felt 130 years ago. Most importantly, I feel that complete dedication to providing students with the chance to expand their worlds, to explore their passions, and to broaden their perspectives.

The promise that Randolph College offers today is, indeed, not unlike the promise it offered from its earliest days. The Randolph promise, well, that's a commitment to being a place where students will find a close-knit community that welcomes their unique perspectives. The Randolph promise, well, it's a commitment to academic excellence, career empowerment, and community engagement.

Randolph College lives and breathes academic excellence. We have always strived to create access for individuals wanting to have a better life, an abundant life. We are dedicated to helping our students find their purpose, and, today, we do that for young women and for young men. We're proud of our diverse community and how many first-generation students have chosen to call our campus home.

Academic excellence resonates with me on a personal level. My father grew up shuttling between family in San Francisco and Denver. He was never able to finish high school, much less college. And yet, he was a teacher at heart

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— Sue Ott Rowlands, Randolph College President

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and though he had no degree, he taught at Oklahoma State University at a regional campus in the electricity and electronics department.

My mother attended Abilene Christian College in the early 1950s for one year. Yet, she taught piano for her entire life, inspiring hundreds of children and adults over the years.

So, yes, I'm a proud first-generation student who comes from a long line of teachers, professors, superintendents, and educators, and who believes that access to excellent academic opportunities and dedicated teachers is an essential component for an abundant life.

Randolph College empowers our students in their preparation and pursuit of meaningful careers.

At Randolph, we prepare students

for life today and for life tomorrow. We are committed to offering our students transformational experiences.

At Randolph, we are not limited to the old model of liberal arts education. We are not stuck on doing something because it has always been that way. Instead, you will find us offering programs that speak to the needs of today's youth, to today's workforce needs, and to the global world we live in.

Our students engage in extracurricular opportunities that help them take what they learn in the classroom and extend it beyond the Red Brick Wall. They find preparation that speaks to the world of work, a world that is so rapidly changing, it's difficult for us to imagine what it will be like in five or 10 years.

All we know for sure is that our workforce will need to be made up of people who are

incredibly creative, flexible, adaptable, tenacious, innovative, and entrepreneurial. Without a doubt, a liberal arts education remains the best preparation in the world to help someone develop those qualities. Skills can be taught, but it takes a liberal arts education to instill into an individual the characteristics and abilities that have the power to transform society.

In addition to academic excellence and career empowerment, community engagement must be a vital part of the Randolph experience. Increasingly, we find ourselves compelled to reach out and connect to our surrounding community.

Lynchburg and the central Virginia region needs our spirit, our energy, our adaptability, and our students—as volunteers, as activists, and as social justice change agents. We contribute greatly as



an institution to the economic health and well-being of our region, and we are aware of our responsibility to take our place in the community, and to help our students do the same.

I am a proud owner of a liberal arts education. I fear we often make the mistake of thinking that the liberal arts are defined by a clear, narrow category of curriculum. This narrow definition focuses on specific kinds of courses—a kind of “liberal arts ideal.” One hundred years ago, or even 75 years ago, colleges like ours may have had some version of that ideal curriculum. But we sometimes forget that the liberal arts curriculum of the early 1900s was very different from the curriculum of the 1950s.

The liberal arts curriculum has changed, again and again, and it will continue to change. There are parts of the curriculum that women were expected to take during the College’s early years that would baffle and embarrass us today.

This is why the liberal arts can only partially be defined by a curriculum. The liberal arts, I would argue, are best defined, not by the curriculum, but by the people who embody the liberally educated life. As many of you know, I am a theatre artist—I’m an actor, director, and producer. I’m also a lover of art and a traveler of the world. These identities have come to be a part of me because of my liberal arts education. I am curious, I am creative, I’m a critically-astute communicator

and consumer of the world. It wasn’t my college curriculum that made me who I am today, but a compilation of academic exploration, excellent mentors and teachers, and a family who supported education as a transformational life experience.

Yes, the curriculum matters, but I promise you, whether we are educating tomorrow’s computer scientists or English professors or tomorrow’s philosophers or film directors—we are going to ensure that Randolph College students embody the abundant life. Our College’s mission says it quite well: Randolph College prepares students to engage the world critically and creatively, live and work honorably, and experience life abundantly.



To me, a life more abundant means living life to the fullest—whether that is in the workplace, at home, or wherever we find ourselves. It is using our talent, our intellect, and our innovative spirit to seek out life, meet it head on, take everything it has to offer. The life more abundant means not waiting for life to come to you, but catching hold of every moment, and filling it with curiosity, energy, and wonderment.

What a gift it is to be doing this challenging work together right now—a time when, more than any other time in history, we see that the liberal arts are not a specific set of curricula or a specific set of sanctioned careers. The liberal arts at Randolph College are perhaps best exemplified in our alumnae and alumni, whose lives are full of meaningful relationships and meaningful work to build a better world. Indeed, as we continue to grow, our direction will remain focused on educating creative, intelligent, and ethical leaders for classrooms, courtrooms, research labs, corporate offices, museums, theatres, and the world.

So, the Randolph Promise is that together we will work toward Academic Excellence, Career Empowerment, and Community Engagement.

My promise within that Randolph Promise is to honor our past—those rich traditions of Randolph-Macon Woman's College that have given us a pathway to who we are today. But the other part of my promise is to position Randolph College for a thriving future as we create teams of educator/leaders who work together to support each and every one of our students.

As our former president, Theodore Henley Jack, once said, "No college is ever completely (built), any more than an individual's education is ever finished."

Just as the potential of our students seems limitless, so does the potential and the future of this beloved institution.

I promise to work tirelessly towards these efforts, and I join as your president with humility, curiosity, and a deep appreciation for my role in our promise to you.

*Vita abundantior!*

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