

May, 2008

Friends of the Baldwin Scholars

Duke University

Commencement Baldwin Scholars Class of 2008

From the moment we chose the inaugural class of Baldwin Scholars, we have been imagining their graduation with a mixture of pride, anticipation, and sadness.

On Friday, May 9, we celebrated the contributions of the Class of 2008 with a ceremony and reception.

In this special edition of the Friends of the Baldwin Scholars e-newsletter, we include Donna Lisker's commencement address, highlight Scholars' accomplishments, and share photos of the event.

To the Baldwin Scholars class of 2008:

We knew this day was coming. Nearly four years ago, after we'd carefully chosen the 18 of you from the 78 who applied, after we read and interviewed and decided that you were the ones, the first Baldwin Scholars there would ever be, we thought – briefly – about what it would mean to bid you farewell. We couldn't really conceive of it. We didn't yet know you that well, and the program was so new. All we could see was the firsts that lay ahead of us: the first retreat at Aqueduct, the newly-designed first-year seminar, the first residential section in Crowell. Even the summer internships and senior seminar seemed too far away to grasp. We knew we would deal with them when the time came, but first our focus was on getting you, and the program, launched successfully.

We could not have launched the program, of course, without many of the people in this room. All of us owe much to the Duke administrators who understood our vision and



Co-Director Donna Lisker
delivering the commencement
address

lobbied for the program, and to the Duke Endowment and the President's office who funded it so generously. We're also grateful to the faculty who designed your courses, got them listed in the course catalog, and eventually taught them, and you. And we are thankful most of all for your families – your parents, grandparents, siblings and friends – who shaped you into the young women that you are, and who greeted your announcement that you wanted to apply to this brand-new women's leadership program not with skepticism but with unqualified support and enthusiasm.

For you, being first had its advantages. We had no one to compare you to, so like new parents with their first child, we thought most everything you did was spectacular. All you had to do was tell us you had applied for summer study abroad, or that you had made a connection with a faculty member, or your Giles Mentor, and we melted. You had our undivided attention – there were 18 of you and three of us and we could actually keep tabs on your lives. You attracted a lot of notice: a long profile in Duke Magazine, a reception at the President's House, not to mention newspaper articles and lunch invitations. You were Baldwin Scholar celebrities, and you enjoyed

it. At least one of you objected – only half-jokingly – when we started talking about recruiting the next class, like an older sibling who did not want to share her doting parents.

Being first had its disadvantages as well. Every thing we did, we were doing for the first time. Because the far-sighted and remarkably efficient Colleen Scott was in charge, we rarely devolved into chaos, but nonetheless we made all our mistakes with and on you. You were the first to take both the first-year and the senior seminar. You were the first to live in the Baldwin section in Crowell, and the first to do paid internships. All these things sound wonderful, and they were, but you also had to be patient while we figured out how to pay you for your summer work, or how to devise a fair room selection system, or how to juggle 18 schedules and diverse majors to design a class that would be meaningful for all of you. You were pioneers, and though pioneers get all the glory, they also get all the hardship. Venturing out into new territory is a messy business. Your feet hurt from all the walking, and you don't always know where your next meal is coming from, and you don't know who you might meet along the way, and whether they will be friendly or hostile. Those of you who had dinner with a famous artist (who shall remain nameless) know that sometimes the hostility even comes from unexpected directions.

You also felt the burden of being first. If there's one thing we could do differently, we would try to lessen the pressure you felt to change Duke's culture right now, all in one fell swoop. The Baldwin Scholars program was founded, in part, to counteract the climate of "effortless perfection" we'd heard so much about during the Women's Initiative research of 2002-2003. Undergraduate women told us that they felt pressure to succeed both academically and personally, to get a 4.0 and to be thin, pretty, and fashionably dressed. What's more, all this perfection was supposed to look effortless; as one student told us, the goal was to give off the impression that "I just rolled out of bed looking this good." It's an impossible standard, and one that wreaks havoc with self-confidence, body image and relationships between women. How can you admit that you are struggling when no one else seems to be? How can you feel solidarity with other women when you're not honest with one another about how hard this all is?

We wanted our Scholars to help create a different climate, one in which women supported one another through difficulties and encouraged one another to keep striving for their dreams. And you have done so, beautifully; you made those wonderful "Effortlessly Imperfect" t-shirts and you have encouraged one another through Chemistry and Physics, through bad break-ups and bad hair days, through spiritual crises and fears that you would not be able to measure up. You have loved one another, inspired one another, and been spectacular role models of courage and honesty and mentoring. Have you single-handedly changed Duke's entire social culture? No – of course not. No one ever expected you to, except possibly yourselves. Social change is a painfully slow process, as even a passing knowledge of the Civil Rights movement and the women's movement will teach you. But did you make change? Did you "say something?" Did you leave this campus, and this program, better than you found it? You bet you did, and if you aren't proud of yourselves you haven't been paying attention. We're proud of you; Emily and Colleen and I, and all those mentors you listed in the program, are right now competing with your parents and families to see who gets to be the proudest today. You have made a huge success of your college careers, and of this program, and we could not have asked for a better first class.

So now what? Now you leave us (after all we've done for you!), headed for graduate school and actual paying jobs and foreign travel and a million other adventures none of us can really see yet. You are pioneers all over again, but on a far bigger stage than Duke University. It's exciting and sad and anxiety-provoking and none of us knows whether to laugh or cry. What do you need to know? How do you prepare? I want to remind you of what you have learned here, at Duke and from the Baldwin Scholars that will support you through the new experiences ahead. It won't be easy and it won't always be fun, but you are more prepared than you know. Here's what you will be bringing with you as you begin your new lives.

Your **passions**: if there's one message we've tried to give you, it's that you should let your abiding interests guide your choices. There are certain career paths that are well-laid out and financially lucrative, and when your interests naturally carry you down those paths that's wonderful. But if they don't – if you find that you are more interested in being a pastry chef than a pediatrician, an architect instead of an attorney, a screenwriter instead of a scientist – we want you to find the courage to pursue your dreams, even if they seem unconventional or risky. Don't sentence yourself to a career that does not stimulate and challenge you, that does not sync with your talents and with what you love to do. No career will be satisfying all the time, but all of you know the difference between temporary stress and doing work that frequently bores and frustrates you. Remember too that your interests will change as you grow and develop; the career you find satisfying for 5 or 10 or 20 years post-college might grow stale, or you might want a different balance between your career and your personal life. Your best touchstone will always be within you, and you should learn to hear and listen – really listen – to that voice that guides you down your most authentic path.

Each of you is fortunate enough to also be surrounded by cheerleaders. First and foremost you have your families, here today and prouder of you than they can express. But you also have one another, and the great success of this program lies in the sustaining **friendships** you have formed here, and in your willingness to turn to one another. Over the years you've told us about your hilarious and philosophical late-night conversations in the residential section, about dinner at Chai's and weekly get-togethers to watch *Grey's Anatomy* or *The Office*, about trips taken together and visits to one another's homes and small group gatherings that turn into sleepovers. In a few days most of you will no longer live within a few hundred yards of one another, and your contact will be via email, text-messaging and phone rather than in person. That's a huge loss and you will feel it, even though over time you will make new friends in your new cities.

As those new friendships form, don't let the old ones go. Remember how important these other 17 women have been to you. Take the time to stay connected to one another. When you are at a loss – trying to sort out a problem at work, or frustrated by your dissertation, brokenhearted at the end of a relationship or feeling discouraged – these women will be there for you. They'll commiserate and tell you about the time they felt the same way. They'll remind you that you've been through similar experiences before and come through them. They'll make you laugh about old stories and they will remind you who you are. And when you have something to celebrate – a fabulous promotion, finishing your graduate degree, a new relationship, even a new baby (in the far distant future, I am sure, so your parents can now start breathing again) – they will send chocolate and flowers, drop everything to come to your wedding, and offer to babysit. You will also become one another's professional networks; when I think about the Baldwin Scholars 10 or 15 years hence I imagine

program alumnae helping one another find jobs and places to live in new cities, finding internships for our students (the Baldwin Scholars class of 2020), making generous donations, and generally building the old girls network that you've begun here into a powerful force.

Part of what has made your friendships work – and gotten you through the stresses of your Duke experience – has been your individual and collective **senses of humor**. You're all familiar with the litany of despair Duke students sometimes recite: I have three papers due on Friday and I haven't started any of them, I haven't slept in two days, my car won't start, I don't have a date to the semiformal, and I can't shake this cough. All of us have days and weeks like that, and you will have them in your new lives too, sometimes with far more serious problems involving health, money, relationships or work. Many things are not funny in the slightest, but if you can approach your more mundane worries with a sense of humor, can laugh at yourself instead of wringing your hands, you will bear your inevitable ups and downs better. I know I can count on you to make one another laugh, since you've been doing so from your first meeting. Personally, I will be drawing on the laughter from your recent senior dinner for many years to come.

The last thing I want you to take with you is an unshakeable **belief in yourselves**. We started this program because our research told us women at Duke had less self-confidence when they graduated than when they entered. We hope and believe that your experiences have been different, that you know today – beyond a shadow of a doubt – that you are brilliant, beautiful, and accomplished young women. I say this not to swell your heads – because you also need a healthy sense of humility for your adventures ahead – but because we want you to move through the world knowing your own abilities so that you can resist the people and the forces that try to tell you otherwise. I wish I could promise you that you'd never face discrimination, or people who don't want you to succeed for their own petty reasons. I wish that you'd never experience hardship or failure. But you will – because everyone does – and when you do I want you not to internalize it. Acknowledge your own mistakes when you've made them, but understand deep down that you have the brains and the talent and the drive to accomplish the things you dream about. Of course you do: you are the inaugural class of the Baldwin Scholars. Approach every obstacle, even the big ones, with that attitude and you'll be fine. So, in sum: go forward, take care of yourselves and one another, challenge yourselves, and give back to your communities. And keep in touch, or Colleen will hunt you down. We love you. Congratulations.



Co-Directors Donna Lisker (L) and Emily Klein (R) with Assistant Director Colleen Scott at the reception

Seniors Rachel Shack (L) and Megan Braley wait for the ceremony to begin



The Class of 2008

Aislinn Affinito from Tucson, Arizona
Major: Environmental Science and Policy
Minor: Earth and Ocean Sciences
Internship: Children's Environmental Health Initiative at Duke

Kelley Akhiemokhali from Houston, Texas
Major: English
Minor: Education
Internship: Hillary Clinton presidential campaign
Graduation Honors: cum laude
William J. Griffith Service Award

Nathalie Basile from Johnson City, Tennessee
Major: French Studies
Minor: Art History
Internship: Karama Program to end violence against women
Graduated with high distinction in French

Regan Bosch from Annapolis, Maryland and Houston, Texas
Major: Visual Arts
Minor: Women's Studies
Internship: AGV Sports

Megan Braley from Oakton, Virginia
Major: Public Policy
Major: French Studies
Internship: American Teachers Federation

Kamaria Campbell from Tampa, Florida
Major: Computer Science
Major: History
Internship: Feminist Majority Foundation
Graduated with distinction in History
Alex Vasilos Award in Computer Science

Andrea Dinamarco from Davie, Florida
Major: International Comparative Studies
Major: Political Science
Minor: Women's Studies

Internship: Feminist Majority Foundation
Graduated with High Distinction in International Comparative Studies

Sarah Gordon from Iowa City, Iowa
Major: Public Policy
Minor: Economics
Internship: Public Policy research at Duke with Professor Ananat
Graduated with high distinction in Public Policy
Graduation Honors: summa cum laude
William J. Griffith Service Award
Betsy Alden Award for Outstanding Student Service-Learning

Pallavi Kansal from Memphis, Tennessee
Major: Biomedical Engineering
Internship: Catalyst (organization that expands opportunities for women in business)
Graduation honors: magna cum laude

Claire Lauterbach from Arlington, Virginia
Major: Political Science
Major: History
Internship: research on girls' education in Kenya with Professor Sherryl Broverman
Graduated with distinction in Political Science
Graduation honors: summa cum laude
Faculty Scholar in Political Science/History
Alona E. Evans Prize in International Law
Elizabeth G. Verville Award in Political Science
Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award

Rachel McLaughlin from Fenton, Missouri
Major: Public Policy
Minor: Political Science
Internship: Booz Allen Hamilton
Graduated with high distinction in Public Policy
Graduation honors: cum laude
Sanford Ambassador Award in Public Policy
Fulbright Scholarship

Anita Pai from Nashville, Tennessee
Major: Biological Anthropology and Anatomy
Internship: research at Royal Veterinary College in London
Graduated with distinction in Biological Anthropology and Anatomy
Graduation honors: cum laude

Alison Perlberg from Atlanta, Georgia
Major: English
Internship: McKinsey
Graduated with distinction in English
Graduation honors: summa cum laude

Lisa Richards from Los Gatos, California
Major: Biomedical Engineering
Internship: Collegiate Athlete Pre-Medical Experience (CAPE) at Duke

Rachel Shack from Andover, Massachusetts
Major: History
Minor: Spanish

Internship: Octagon Sports
Graduation honors: cum laude

Vanja Vlahovic from Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Major: Art History
Minor: Biology
Internship: Metropolitan Museum of Art
Graduated with distinction in Art History
Graduation Honors: magna cum laude

Laura Welch from Baltimore, Maryland
Major: Psychology
Minor: Women's Studies
Internship: Citigroup

Meng Zhou from Portland, Oregon
Major: Public Policy
Minor: Religion
Minor: Economics
Internship: Mayor's Office in Portland, Oregon



(L to R) Kamaria Campbell, Kelley Akhiemokhali, Andrea Dinamarco, Aislinn Affinito, Megan Braley, and Sarah Gordon at the Baccalaureate service