

Good afternoon. Thank you to Randolph-Macon and SCHEV for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Whitney Worthington Allen, I attended Randolph-Macon College and I'm a member of the class of 2011.

I live in Goochland County and work in Glen Allen. I am a Paralegal for the civil litigation law firm Harman, Claytor, Corrigan & Wellman.

I am a class agent for the class of 2003 for Chatham Hall boarding school in Chatham, Virginia. I'm a class agent for the class of 2007 at Randolph-Macon College. I'm an annual fund agent for Camp Seafarer in Arapahoe, North Carolina, which is affiliated with the YMCA of the Triangle in North Carolina. I'm a member of the DAR for the Virginia Frontier chapter in my hometown of Lexington, Virginia. I regularly volunteer for Habitat for Humanity builds. Lastly, I write freelance copy and social media marketing for small and local businesses throughout Central Virginia as well as on my blog *WorthyStyle*, as I am all about the Shop Small, Shop Local movement.

The education I received from R-MC prepared me well for seeking employment after graduation. I am going to include my on-campus employment with that term, "education," because while the Virginia minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, R-MC was offering between \$7.90 and 8.90/hour for on-campus employment. This meant it was often more rewarding for me to have one or two on campus jobs, and mine were with the Marketing & Communications and the McGraw-Page Library, than to worry about off-campus employment. That said, I didn't live on campus. I lived in Goochland County and commuted. Sometimes that meant 7 days a week. I think all of these different elements gave me a unique perspective as an R-MC student. I had to have a work ethic, I had to keep a schedule, I couldn't just blow everyone off – although it'd be unfair to say I was never tardy, late, or skipped classes on occasion – young adults do that – but I had more expectations as a 24-year-old who was returning to a campus to finish the biggest job of her life thusfar –

earning her Bachelor's Degree with not just one but two majors in a liberal arts setting. People want to hire people in this economy with work already on the resume. It's going to be hard to graduate with above-average grades with ZERO work experience, versus graduating with average to above-average grades and a ton of work experience that shows a person was hustling around outside the classroom to pay bills and/or be ready for a competitive market.

My programs, Environmental Studies and Political Science, utilized a model often used in professional settings – team projects. Whether I was preparing open statements for the National Model UN in Washington, DC, or determining the levels of *E.coli* in the Mechumps Creek watershed, teaching a county government how to comply with the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, or working with a non-profit to restore the Atlantic Sturgeon's population in the James River... all of these involved working with stakeholders, team members of sometimes more than a dozen people with different majors of study or interest level, and then local governments to make sure everyone was happy and kept abreast of the latest developments... all of these elements give a person speaking points and social skills that employers find highly employable.

The education I received at R-MC prepared me better-than-average for the work I have been engaged in since graduation. I would say that some professors were more committed to programs or projects than others in terms of correlating an assignment to life outside the classroom. Other professors might be academic traditionalists that want you to go around in circles on passages being read aloud in class, and don't want to think about you in a job, they want you to think about what's going to be on their exam and where you might go to grad school. Unrealistic idealists exist on every campus I'm sure, and I clearly had one or two while I was a student.

The professors that pushed back at me, knowing me well enough to know when I was overwhelmed or needed more clarification, those were the ones who taught me the most. My advisor and I regularly

exchanged emails from summer 2004 until I returned to R-MC in summer 2009. We both were highly emotional over the fact that I had returned to Macon to finish what I had started as a freshman. It was a great support system. These educators gave me skills for problem-solving, communicating with difficult coworkers, being unafraid to ask questions, initiate conversations on complex topics, having social skills, checking your ego at the door, and advise and influence others in a positive manner.... These are all things employers and recruiters want to see in a person and I learned them at my alma mater.

My major fields of study had a direct correlation to my post graduate life and work. I'm a paralegal now. Previously, I was a Legal Secretary and a Clerk working as a Paralegal Assistant. I knew majoring in Environmental Studies and Political Science, and going so far as to concentrate these studies in Environmental Law, was highly specific in the type of work I would do in an ideal situation. I took particular courses to continue to educate myself on current policy – Environmental Law, International Relations, Environmental Policy, Environmental Ethics, numerous civic studies classes with ties to political theory. The economy was not doing well when I returned to R-MC in 2009. And then the law school market started tanking, too. Student tuition at the undergraduate and graduate levels increased. I just knew I wasn't exceptional enough to make the study of law my life as an attorney. But that didn't mean I had to stifle my passion for the law. Paralegals get their hands in all the interesting nitty-gritty stuff. They help the attorneys find the evidence and background information needed to answer questions and issues raised in a case. I love to read, I love to write, I love the law. This job is perfect for me and is incredibly fulfilling.

All other aspects of my college experience have been incredibly relevant to my post-graduate life and work. For example – I did two internships. One was with the Southern Environmental Law Center in Charlottesville, Virginia, where I wrote memoranda and performed research for the Director of the National Forests and Parks division. My second internship was with Virginia Forest Watch. I interned with

the Director of this nonprofit by performing background research on current cases as well as highlighted cases in environmental history. I wrote case briefs and memoranda in that internship as well. Learning how to write concisely and review cases, case law, history of cases tied to a specific issue – these all relate to being a Paralegal. And R-MC is the one who suggested these internships and sought placement for me in these internships – even though they were typically given to graduate students.

If I could tell Randolph-Macon College one thing to improve, that would help students achieve success in work and life, it would be to increase the school-affiliated funding available for paid internships and to give additional school-affiliated need-based grants for international experiences. My one regret was being unable to afford and locate a study abroad that would not delay my earnings of credits. Additional funding directly tied to the school would broaden that field to more students within the R-MC community. Also, having a GPA requirement seems restricting when someone is still paying to be a part of a program, and wants to experience the world. If it's their money, shouldn't it be open to them? What if you're restricting people who may greatly benefit from study abroad, and could improve by leaps and bounds on their return to campus as a student and more cultured person in general? Particularly when there is no GPA requirement currently for J-term study abroad. It just seems hypocritical. 16 students abroad for spring semester is not a lot when one thinks of the student body of R-MC being around 1,400 students.

Other than that, my experience with R-MC was a journey. It had a few low points in my personal and social life, but the biggest benefit was returning to a supportive community. My advisor, Dr. Gowan, and many professors were cheering me on the whole time. I was challenged and given opportunities, and was never afraid to ask for more to make myself a stronger student academically, and to make myself a better post-graduate in the professional setting.

Thank you.