

December Graduation Speech  
Kelsey Neth

On Behalf of the Students

Every year around this time, online publications begin pumping out article after article about the “Best of” the past year. These include but are definitely not limited to The Best Movies of 2017, The Best Pop Songs of 2017, or even GQ Magazine’s Best Stuff of 2017. Good or bad, these listicles allow readers to reflect on the previous year and look forward to what is to come. So I decided, given our December graduation, it would be appropriate to make my own “Best of” list in order to look back not just at 2017 but our entire time here. So without further ado, I present, “The Best 5 Things About William Jewell College.”

- 1. It Provides a Quality Education**, which is great, considering that’s the whole reason we’re here. We came looking for a degree and leave not just knowing how to do our future jobs but also with a better and more refined sense of who we are and what we believe. Part of going to The Critical Thinking College™ meant that by taking some classes outside our main area of study, we learned to approach familiar and unfamiliar topics from new perspectives. It meant noticing how your religion and history and business and psychology classes were all starting to overlap and by the end of it all, you realize you know so much about so many things. College can’t prepare you for everything but Jewell taught us how to look at life’s challenges and begin to break them down into pieces we can conquer.

2. **Its Small Size.** Though we look at our friends that attended huge state universities and wonder what might have been, by going to a school with such a small population, we have had opportunities many of them only dream of. Our professors didn't just know our names but many of them would stand up for us or stand with us on the topics we cared about and they challenged our beliefs not to prove a point but so we could defend our views better for when it really counted. Because we were one of their few students, professors would give us pep talks after class when they noticed we were going through a rough patch or send us articles they came across they thought would be helpful for our capstone project. At a small school, we could also take on leadership roles from our first or second years and have more time to learn and grow in our positions. And if the position didn't exist, well, few things were stopping us from creating it.

3. **It Offers Unique Opportunities** Although I'm probably biased, the best of these opportunities came through the Journey Grant program. Having worked for the office for almost four years, I had the privilege of seeing the amazing things students did with their \$2,000. Our students literally crossed the globe every year and impressed me with their bravery to pursue noble and educational experiences from Belize to Zambia and Croatia, Russia, South Korea, New Zealand, and beyond. The political

science majors made their annual pilgrimage to Washington D.C. and business students traveled to various coasts for internships in big cities. Even closer to home, other students attended conferences in order to bring influential clubs to campus or committed two years to building a local garden that teaches kids the power of growing your own healthy food. My fellow Jewell students taught me that believing in something is the first step to making it happen and I'm thankful they had a college that also believed in their dreams enough to support them.

4. **It's Beautiful** Although jokes abound in regards to how much of our tuition goes towards keeping the grass green and perfect year round, there is nothing more beautiful than the way the steeple of Gano Chapel contrasts against a blue sky or the way the sunset paints Jewell Hall a perfect golden orange every night. Each season at Jewell looks beautiful in its own way: in the fall, we crunched down the hill while staring at flaming red trees, in the spring, we avoided high schoolers taking prom pictures in front of the blooming flowers at Grand River Chapel, and towards the summer, we watched from the PLC to see how many hammocks those people could stack on top of each other before a tree finally broke. And...
  
5. **It Has the Best People.** In speaking for myself, I hope I also speak for my fellow graduates in saying that at Jewell, in this formational time in our

lives, we were surrounded by a variety of people that each offered us different things. Some people used their talents and voices to fight with us against injustice, some people we lived with helped us form a new home to come back to everyday, some people hurt us in ways that made us stronger, and some people were sisters or brothers that supported us in every way possible.

Well, I think that just about sums it up. Just like with New Year celebrations, we've taken a moment to reflect on what is past. But midnight is approaching and we have to look ahead. Set some resolutions and work hard to actually accomplish them using everything you have learned here. This next year will be full of unknowns but also full of promise and opportunities. So grab a party dress, pop the champagne, toot a horn, and light some fireworks. Because...

5, 4, 3, 2, 1...Happy New Year! Best wishes to you.