

Good morning! My name is Theresa Carr and contrary to most other students, I've spent my high school experience living at my high school. I'm a senior from The Madeira School, a single-sex, independent day and boarding school in McLean, Virginia. While I'm originally from Coral Springs, Florida, my past three years have been steeped in school involvement, rushing from club meetings to class, auditioning and running the Madeira's best and only a capella group, Sweet Ti, playing any role I could get on the stage, and caffeine-fueled weekend study sessions with my roommate. The residential life aspect is something I've been incredibly involved with as well. Last year I was an RA; this year I was elected to be the head of boarding and run our student committee on residential life. When I arrived at Madeira 14 years old, I began the experience of living away from home that many only encounter in college or later.

I never quite understood the significance of a single-sex education until I started the college process. So much of what I expect of the world is a product of what I know: that women not only deserve the same equality as their male counterparts but are equally qualified to hold the same positions often reserved for men, if not explicitly.

At Madeira, gender excludes you from nothing. Our strongest athletes are women, our fiercest advocates are women, our most steadfast leaders are women.

The moment you step foot on Madeira, these same sentiments are echoed in our mission statement: launching women who change the world. Looking back, Madeira's status as an all girl's school was incidental to me. In fact, it was the only single-sex school to which I applied. Now, as I begin the same search again, this time for college, I'm surprised at how many current

college students speak with dismay about their high school experience. I'm even more surprised to learn that many female college students describe high school as a period of shyness, of apology. They talk about college as if it was the moment they found the courage to raise a hand or become confident. I'm surprised because that isn't my experience at all. My classes are packed with a mix of chatter about everything from Prom to geopolitics. I'm rarely the only one with my hand raised and we are not women who apologize for having diverse ideas and beliefs.

My education at Madeira is more than academic: my experiences with faculty members and my fellow classmates have empowered me beyond the classroom. I learned how to succeed outside a classroom at Madeira, partially through our internship program, Co-Curriculum. Every student at Madeira has an internship relating to community service, civic involvement, and their own personal career goals. My junior internship on Capitol Hill infused the history and English curriculum I learned that year while at the same time giving me practical office work skills, insight into national politics, and greater self-confidence. Now, in my senior year, I know nothing holds me back from seeking even the most ambitious internships because I know that I am prepared for the 21st-century workplace.

Ultimately, my favorite things about Madeira aren't so easily defined. In fact, many students at Madeira generally aren't defined by one singular aspect: you can be a singer, a chemist, a debate champion, and still spend your afternoons in field hockey cleats or dancing. Each year, the student government experiences this same diversity in the growing number of new clubs. Last year, the robotics club competed in their first competition just a year after its creation prompted by a student and friend of mine, Maria. The debate club, while in its second year, is well on its

way to league status after being launched last year by another friend of mine. The students at Madeira see a gap and they fill it, if with nothing but tenacity and pure will. The school newspaper is launching its first community podcast series and our Makerspace Club teaches others how to use the recently installed laser cutter and 3D printer. We aren't just launching women to change the world. We're a little too impatient for that. We've decided to go ahead to start building the new world we wish we saw.

Above all, I'm extremely grateful for the many opportunities Madeira provides to young women, including me. It is a privilege to receive the kind of education I have. But it shouldn't be. It should be the norm.

Every student should have access to an education that invigorates a student's mind, challenges their intellectual ability, and provides a diverse, inclusive community to feel at home. They should have the resources available, school supplies available, encouragement and empowerment so that they can experiment, where you can try something without fear of failing because you're safe, physically and emotionally. That's where learning happens. Not every student has that in the United States, and a lot of that depends on whether you can afford to attend private school or pay for tutoring or extracurricular activities to excel. Most of all, we need a shift to focus on equity so we can lift up the students who need help the most.

That's the real value of any school, public or private: to provide a safe place where students can dream, where they can grow in both success and failure, and where they can dare to change the world, one woman at a time. Thank you.