

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Fiona Scruggs

Director of Communications & Marketing

413-644-4968

fscruggs@simons-rock.edu

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Michael Lawrence '98 to be Simon's Rock 2024 Commencement Speaker



GREAT BARRINGTON, MA— Simon's Rock alum Michael Lawrence will address graduates at the 55th Commencement ceremony of Bard College at Simon's Rock on Saturday, May 18, 2024, at 11:00 a.m. The ceremony will be held in person and live-streamed for those unable to attend.

A self-proclaimed 'word nerd' working at the intersection of language, design, and technology, Lawrence received his BA from Simon's Rock in 2002 (summa cum laude), building a concentration that combined cultural studies, critical theory, linguistics, art history, and graphic design — ideal preparation for his current job in the relatively new fields of content design and UX writing, which did not exist at the time.

He has worked with product and brand design teams at Meta, Indeed, and eBay, and offered freelance naming and content strategy for a number of creative entrepreneurs. His work allows him to craft the language that appears in apps and web interfaces to make digital products more useful, usable, and inclusive. Success requires careful attention to the metaphors and narratives people use to make sense of new technology, as well as close partnership with software engineers, user researchers, visual designers, translators, marketers, and policy experts.

After beginning his career in academia, Lawrence transitioned into industry. He served on the support staff of the first Bard High School Early College before going on to earn a PhD in rhetorical theory and criticism from the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Iowa. His dissertation explored discourses of 9/11 memorialization and national identity by examining the neoliberal epideictic practice of publicly reciting and reprinting the long list of names of the dead. The project earned the top dissertation award from the National

Communication Association's Critical Cultural Studies Division. He served on the faculty of Columbia College Chicago as a full-time lecturer in liberal arts & sciences, and acting program director for the college's First-Year Seminar program. He has also taught numerous courses on contemporary media and culture, as well as foundational courses in communication and critical thinking skills.

He continues to work with college students, currently co-teaching an interdisciplinary seminar at the University of San Francisco on generative AI and the question of human creativity.

Simon's Rock looks forward to honoring this year's graduating students. Read more details about [Simon's Rock Commencement here](#).

About Simon's Rock

[Bard College at Simon's Rock](#) is the only college in the country specifically designed for highly motivated students ready to enter college after the 10th or 11th grade. Simon's Rock offers a challenging program in the liberal arts and sciences, taught exclusively in small seminars by supportive, highly trained faculty, who are leading scholars in their fields. The College grants degrees in more than 35 majors. The Princeton Review's *Best 380 Colleges* rates academics at Simon's Rock higher than Harvard and Princeton.

[Bard Academy at Simon's Rock](#) is the nation's first two-year boarding and day program designed to prepare 9th and 10th graders to start college early. A student entering Bard Academy as a high school freshman will earn an Associate of Arts degree from Bard College at Simon's Rock after only four years and a Bachelor of Arts degree after only six years. The Academy curriculum is designed and taught by students' future college professors who are leading scholars in their fields.

[The Bard Queer Leadership Project](#) (BQLP) is a revolutionary, new Bachelor of Arts degree program designed for, and by, LGBTQIA+ college students to elevate LGBTQIA+ students and college graduates into leadership roles in school and across the workforce while serving as a space for actualizing educational practices designed for students to thrive. The centerpiece of BQLP is a four year dual major B.A. degree combining Queer Leadership with a second academic field.

For more information, visit simons-rock.edu and bardacademy.simons-rock.edu

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