

Emmanuel College Papers

by
Dr Alix Vann

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Acknowledgement

Emmanuel College acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the College is located, the people of the Turrbal nation and Jagera/Yaggera nation.

Our community lives, learns and grows together on these rich lands and waters that are, and have been, a place of gathering for thousands of years.

Emmanuel College is committed to honouring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the lands, waters and seas, and their significant contribution to society as the oldest living civilisation in the world.

Emmanuel College endeavours to promote reconciliation through education, respect and engagement.

Author

Alix joined Emmanuel College in November 2025, following 11 years in the private secondary school sector as a School Psychologist.

Alix holds a Bachelor of Psychological Science with first class honours, which she undertook at the University of Queensland and for which she was awarded a University Medal, as well as a Doctor of Psychology (Clinical), which she completed at Queensland University of Technology in 2012.

Alix brings over a decade of clinical expertise and leadership in student and staff wellbeing within organisational settings. She is now extending her professional impact into the higher education sector, where young adults are navigating identity, independence and community living. She is passionate about empowering young people to develop their own sense of self and find their own pathway to thriving in this world.

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This speech was delivered at the Emmanuel College Convocation Dinner on 14 February 2026.

Good evening. I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting tonight, and I would like to pay my respects to their ancestors and descendants, as we walk together on the path to reconciliation.

I would also like to formally acknowledge:

Stephen Peake, Principal of Emmanuel College

Tom Horn, President of the Emmanuel College Students' Club

College staff and students.

Welcome to Emmanuel College.

Like many of you, this is my first formal dinner at Emmanuel College, and not just from the Harry Potter vibes, but the energy in this room right now, feels pretty special to me. Some of the faces around you will become familiar very quickly, and some might surprise you by becoming important later. Right now, though, we are all standing in the same place: at the edge of something new.

Beginnings like this matter.

As a psychologist, I can tell you that beginnings are powerful. Our brains are especially receptive during transitions, with new chapters inviting us—sometimes gently, sometimes insistently—to re-examine who we are and who we might become. Today is not just the start of college. It is the start of a becoming, which is exciting, and also unsettling. Most meaningful growth lives right there, in that uncomfortable middle. And growth, as you will learn, takes courage.

Courage is often misunderstood. We tend to picture it as fearlessness, as confidence, as having everything figured out. But research—and lived experience—tells us something very different. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is showing up *with* fear. It is choosing to participate when you cannot control the outcome and staying present when you feel exposed. Courage is all about heart and having the inner strength and commitment required to show up as ourselves.

Some of you may have heard of Dr Brené Brown, an American academic and social worker by trade, whose TED talk on The Power of Vulnerability has nearly 25 million views. Brene's research focuses on the power of vulnerability, reminding us that vulnerability involves uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. By that definition, starting at college might be one of the most vulnerable things you will ever do.

New rooms. New rules. New people. New expectations. New versions of yourself.

And yet— in amongst all this newness and vulnerability, is actually where connection and belonging begins.

From a psychological perspective, we are emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually hardwired for connection, love and belonging. Your nervous system is designed to settle in the presence of safe people. You think more clearly, take healthier risks, and recover more quickly from setbacks when you feel you belong.

Now, belonging doesn't arrive fully formed in W-Week, but it is built slowly, through repeated moments of courage and vulnerability. And let's be really clear about the fact that belonging is not the same as fitting in.

Fitting in asks you to change yourself to match the room. Belonging asks you to bring yourself into the room and trust that there is space for you. And that's what we want you to know exists here at Emmanuel – a space for each and every one of you.

Many of you will experience what psychologists call 'imposter syndrome' this year—the feeling that you don't really belong here, that sooner or later someone is going to realise you're not as capable

as they think, or not good enough to belong. This is incredibly common, especially in environments full of high-achieving people such as yourselves.

But if we reframe feeling like an imposter as a sign that you care, that you're stretching, and you're learning, it allows us to feel part of something, rather than excluded from something.

As an eldest daughter, a student, a psychologist, and a mother – at all the different phases of my life so far – I have become very familiar with imposter syndrome and feeling pressured to uphold the façade of perfect. On paper, I have tended to look pretty good – I was a young ballerina and school captain of my primary school, graduated as Proxime Accessit to the Dux at a prestigious girls' high school, and finished my Bachelor of PsychScience here at UQ with first class Honours, topping my honours year and receiving a University Medal. By 26 I was a Doctor of Psychology, had bought a house, gotten engaged and was "on track" by all standards.

But this list of achievements doesn't tell the whole story – through all of that, not always, but consistently, I felt terrified. What if THIS was the time I failed? What if THIS was the job I didn't get, or the prize I didn't win, or the milestone I didn't reach? That fear of revealing the truth I thought I knew so well, that I was far from perfect and not worthy of what life had rewarded me with, was always there. Even in accepting the honour of giving this address tonight, especially with the knowledge that the speaker last year was not only a psychologist too, but is also the current Vice Chancellor and President of UQ – I mean, come on, how can I be worthy of sharing that same airspace?!

It wasn't until I was in my early 30s, experiencing significant life changes – a brutal new beginning, a heartbreaking loss, and the beginning of the end of a crucial personal relationship, that my built-in system of "achieve and appear perfect at all costs" became untenable, forcing me to face the reality that I was a real human, struggling with real life situations, and that there was no time for perfect when all you can do is muddle through. I struggled, with a Capital S.

But I also slowly allowed myself to be vulnerable and open about what I was experiencing – I reached out for support from specialists, my family, and my friends; I opened up online and had so many peers resonate with my words; and I've now chosen to share these experiences with 200 of you this evening, in an honest bid to connect. Through these struggles – which continue to show up in different ways today – and through the strength I gained from asking for help, I started to feel part of something bigger, and to find who I truly am, in my own unique and imperfect way.

Strength and struggle are not opposites, they are peers, often existing side by side. From my own experiences together with years of clinical work, I can tell you this with confidence: the students who thrive are not the ones who never struggle. They are the ones who allow themselves to be seen *while* they struggle.

Struggling is not a flaw in the process—it *is* the process.

One of the most important skills you can develop here is self-compassion. Compassion offered outwards comes naturally to us; but compassion towards the self has become tricky and rare. And yet, research consistently shows that people who treat themselves with kindness during failure are more resilient, more motivated, and more likely to succeed in the long term.

When something doesn't go to plan—and this is inevitable—ask yourself: *What would I say to a friend right now?* Then try saying that to yourself. Treat yourself with the same humanity you would offer a friend, and challenge yourself to allow failure to be information, rather than a verdict.

And please hear this clearly: asking for help is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of strength, and of insight. Whether that help comes from a friend, a tutor, a residential advisor, or a mental health professional, reaching out is an act of courage.

The notion of providing you with support underpins everything that we do at EMC, so let this be an invitation: use the resources around you. Talk to each other. Talk to your faculty. Talk to professionals whose job it is to walk alongside you. Asking for help is not a detour from success; it is one of the most reliable paths towards it.

As you begin this year, I encourage you to focus less on becoming impressive and more on becoming authentic. Less on becoming liked by others and more on becoming yourself. Perfection is brittle. Authenticity is resilient. And our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance.

Years from now, you may not remember every fresher name's origin story, every Blue Dog event, or every lecture or assignment. I'll be lucky if you remember even some of what I have said tonight. But you will remember how it felt to be welcomed, and to belong. You will remember the people who sat next to you when things were hard. You will remember the moments when you chose courage over comfort.

You all belong here. Not once you've proven yourself. Not once you've figured it all out. You belong here now.

Welcome to the Emmanuel College community. Welcome to this new beginning. And welcome to the brave, vulnerable, meaningful work of becoming.

Thank you.