



BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Commencement

2026



EVAN GERSHKOVICH '14, Doctor of Humane Letters (LHD)

Citation by Reed Johnson, *Senior Lecturer in Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies*

Evan Gershkovich, author, journalist, alumnus and friend of Bowdoin College: welcome home.

Almost exactly twelve years ago today, you stood here under the bright Bowdoin sun to receive your undergraduate degree—and now, in what must be evoking a strange sense of déjà vu, you stand here yet again to receive another. In between, you've launched an acclaimed career in journalism, working at *The New York Times*, *The Moscow Times*, Agence France-Presse, and *The Wall Street Journal*. You moved to Russia, where you reported on COVID-era lockdowns, the erosion of civil liberties and press freedom, and—as one of the only Western journalists reporting from inside the country—on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Such courage has long been a hallmark of your journalism. For one dispatch in 2021, you spent four days in a tent amidst Siberia wildfires. When the coronavirus pandemic flared, you roamed overcrowded hospital wards around Moscow, interviewing exhausted ambulance drivers and first-year medical students pressed into service as doctors. Empathy has been at the core of your work, whether reporting on migrant workers in makeshift camps in Dagestan, an epidemic of loneliness among Russia's elderly, or the plight of the country's trans community. In your writing, you've often shone a light on the stories of ordinary people caught up in the machinery of a repressive state.

Then, on March 29, 2023, you too became caught up in that machinery. While in the Ural Mountains to report on workers at a weapons factory, you were tackled by Russian security agents and thrown into the back of an unmarked van. After spending more than a year in prison, you were sentenced to sixteen years in a labor camp. Two weeks later, thanks in part to the tireless advocacy of your family, friends, and colleagues at *The Wall Street Journal*, you were freed as part of one of the most complex prisoner exchanges in history.

Today you stand before us as a reminder of the power and privilege of a free and independent press. As the autocrats and would-be autocrats of the world seek to intimidate and control the media, you have dedicated yourself to finding and reporting the truth, even when—and perhaps especially when—this truth poses a threat to the powerful. In this, you join a distinguished tradition. In the words of Soviet writer and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, a former prisoner of the same Lefortovo prison where you were held, “One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.”

For your words of truth, and for the weight they have carried and are yet to carry—thank you. President Zaki, on behalf of the College, I am honored to present Evan Gershkovich for the degree of doctor of humane letters, *honoris causa*.