

**Matriculation Remarks, UWC-USA**  
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**UWC-USA**



Names matter.

In cultures across the world there are important rituals around naming a child. The importance of these rituals goes beyond the identity of the child, and even beyond the importance attached to the name by parents and extended family. The importance is communal.

Names in some cultures are linked to initiation into a particular religious faith. In other cultures names mark the moment of birth and reference something happening at the time, for example the flow of a stream or the strength of the wind.

Some cultures consider names so precious that they are only used during special ceremonies. In everyday life, individuals are referred to based on their role in the family structure: sister, brother, aunt.

Some cultures consider names to have mystical powers, bestowed by the gods in dreams, signs, and visions. Many cultures distinguish between “good names” and “bad names”.

In many cultures, there are whole ceremonies dedicated to the naming of a child. Naming ceremonies often come with sacrifices of an animal and a communal meal, bringing the one who is being named into the community.

Today our first years matriculate at United World College USA. To matriculate is to be admitted or enrolled into a community, usually a college or university. Our matriculants, (or “firsties” as our second years have affectionately named them), are asked to sign the school register. Their names will be added to the names of each and every student who has joined the UWC-USA community over the 35 years that this campus has been in existence.

In past years, our matriculation ceremony has taken place in the home of the president. Groups of 20 or 30, over several evenings, would come to sign the register.

Today, we are trying something new. We are matriculating our first years publicly, before our second years and members of our campus community. The reason is simple. Matriculation establishes a lifelong relationship between the matriculant and UWC-USA. But UWC is more than a school, and more than your two years here. It is an idea, a vision really, for how we might find a way to bridge our differences in the name of peace. But before we can bridge our differences, we must acknowledge them respectfully.

What better way to do this than to speak one another’s names? And by so doing, begin to acknowledge publicly the different languages and cultures each of us carries with us, begin to acknowledge publicly that we have work to do to understand one another, starting with learning how to pronounce one another’s names?

I will begin by calling the first name on the list. By so doing, I call this person into our community. By signing the register, this person accepts a place in the community. Then this person, and each person after, will call the next person on the list and she or he will in turn sign the school register. One by one our first years will join our second years on the knoll after signing the register, becoming one student body.

When the last person has signed the register, (s)he will call all of our students to stand so that we can celebrate their place at UWC-USA. After that, I will come back to the podium to offer further instructions. A communal meal in the backyard will follow.