

## **Bass Diakhoumpa '18 Talks Second Chances at School Meeting**

*April 27, 2018*

Class of 2018 member Bass Diakhoumpa addressed his fellow students and faculty during a school meeting April 27, recounting his unlikely return to Mercersburg this year as a postgraduate student following his graduation from Mercersburg last May.

Diakhoumpa, who hails from Dakar, Senegal, was the first member of his family to leave the West African nation of 15 million people. A soccer player since the age of four, he spent three years at Mercersburg as a standout member of the boys' soccer program, relying on his relationships with teammates to overcome his shy personality and language barrier.

Upon graduation in May 2017, Diakhoumpa found himself with some college acceptances, but with insufficient financial aid to matriculate at any of them. "I started putting the blame on myself and lost confidence," said Diakhoumpa, who ended up living with a friend in New York City and working odd jobs.

Diakhoumpa shared how he relied on his Islamic faith and the values that his parents taught him to persevere and to resist potentially dangerous or destructive alternative paths. And when an offer emerged from Mercersburg in the summer of 2017 for him to re-enroll for a postgraduate year, he accepted.

"I can always find myself if I stay true to myself," Diakhoumpa reflected. "You never know how strong you are until being strong is all you have."

Despite changes to U.S. immigration policy for some Muslim countries, Diakhoumpa braved the shifting American political winds to venture back to Senegal for a renewed visa. The risk paid off—he secured the visa and was granted readmittance to the United States.

Diakhoumpa noted that he never thought he would have the courage or confidence to return to Mercersburg as an alumnus, much less as a student, but that his "purpose is bigger than [his] pride." And the postgraduate year has allowed him to forge new relationships with classmates, dormmates, and faculty, and record an academic performance that earned him a full scholarship to Juniata College beginning in the fall of 2018.

"Even if you are from a different culture, language, religion, race, or background than someone else, you are all similar," Diakhoumpa told the audience. "By sharing your story, you give the person next to you the opportunity to be more open-minded and share their story as well. There is power in sharing stories, and I do not want you to feel bad about my situation. This is my destiny. This is my life."