



**RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY**  
**Office of Marketing and Communications**  
**Press Release**  
**February 21, 2020**

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## **Non-Binary Performance Artist Alok Vaid-Menon Conveys Message of Self-Expression during 14<sup>th</sup> Diversity Convocation**

MAHWAH, N.J. -- Ramapo College's 14th Annual Diversity Convocation was held on February 19 in the Sharp Theater of the Angelica and Russ Berrie Center for Performing and Visual Arts. Internationally acclaimed non-binary performance artist Alok Vaid-Menon (they/them) was the keynote speaker.

Following an introduction by Student Trustee Mariella Zijdel, Alok took the stage under a single spotlight. "I want to begin with a moment of silence for all the trans people that died from suicide. I want to begin with a moment of silence for all the losses that didn't make the news," Alok said.

Using poetry and a serio-comedic monologue, Alok broached themes of gender, race, mental health, fashion and society's perception of the "norm," ultimately conveying a powerful message of the need for acceptance and tolerance.

"The way you win is by loving yourself," they said. "Borders are illusions of the mind."

In a pre-performance interview, Alok said the most important message they hoped to convey to students was to "learn to live with intersectionality and understand the differences of all people."

"There are so many issues trapped in silos – race, gender, sexual orientation. Our lives are a mix, so we should learn to create our own narratives, have the difficult conversations," Alok said, noting that the most rewarding performances are to student audiences. "I love to meet young people who are merely looking for permission to be themselves. There are so many possibilities for a new generation to do it better."

Alok has appeared on HBO's "The Trans List" and "Random Acts of Flyness." They are the author of the poetry book *Femme in Public*, a meditation on anti-trans harassment, and *Beyond the Gender Binary*, a clarion call for a new approach to gender in the 21st century. In 2019, Alok was honored as one of NBC's 30 LGBTQ change-makers and one of *Out Magazine's* OUT100.

Ramapo's annual Diversity Convocation is sponsored by the College's Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Compliance, whose mission is to ensure the community celebrates diversity and to create a favorable campus climate for all through programs and peer education.

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Ramapo College of New Jersey is the state's premier public liberal arts college and is committed to academic excellence through interdisciplinary and experiential learning, and international and intercultural understanding. The College is ranked #1 among New Jersey public institutions by College Choice, and is recognized as a top college by *U.S. News & World Report*, *Kiplinger's*, Princeton Review and *Money* magazine, among others. Ramapo College is also distinguished as a Career Development College of Distinction by *CollegesofDistinction.com*, boasts the best campus housing in New Jersey on *Niche.com*, and is designated a "Military Friendly College" in *Victoria Media's Guide to Military Friendly Schools*.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, data science, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include business, education, nursing and social work. In addition, the College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels, and offers graduate programs leading to master's degrees in Accounting, Business Administration, Data Science, Educational Technology, Educational Leadership, Nursing, Social Work and Special Education.