

Hello everyone, and congratulations to all of my fellow graduates! I am honored to be speaking for you as the marine biology valedictorian, but more than that I am honored to be in community with you all as the Class of 2024.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge that only a few weeks ago, this lawn was the site of the Gaza Solidarity Encampment. I am so proud to be part of a student body who stands up for what they believe in. We, as students and young adults, are the future, and whether we are fighting for a free Palestine or climate action for a livable planet and our futures, I admire my fellow students who are stepping up and taking action.

Many of us, of course, came in during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusting to a new period of our lives, a new place, new people, all within a virtual format. It wasn't an easy transition but we made it, and now here we are, graduates.

While getting to know people in a remote world can be tricky, I will never forget the people I have met throughout my undergraduate education. The faculty, staff, graduate students, and fellow undergrads, were truly what made these last 4 years what they were. I consider myself very lucky to be a part of such a supportive, intelligent, and persevering group of people.

Not everyone would stick through 6am field trips, late night study sessions in the dining hall for yet another invertebrates exam, and quite literally pulling each other up the trails of Middle Cove. Not only did we do it, but I think we had some fun along the way too. We made countless jokes about anything from commensal worms to the creative meals we'd have. If someone found something especially fun in the tidepools, the first thing we'd do was find our classmates to share the excitement or send fun photos to the group chat - I especially appreciated this when it was someone telling me they found a nudibranch when I was desperately in need of samples for my thesis.

I could go on and on, but all of this is to say that I am incredibly grateful to everyone whose paths I crossed and who shaped my undergraduate career. From every faculty and staff member, to every GE, to every classmate - whether it was in a Zoom Gen Chem lab or a lab partner at OIMB, it takes everyone here to make UO, the Biology department, and OIMB what they are. Thank you to all of the faculty and staff for their support, knowledge, and commitment to our learning. To our family, friends, roommates, and everyone else who has been there for us, thank you for your support. And to my fellow graduates, thank you for all of the memories, and of course, congratulations. I know you will all do amazing things, and I can't wait to see what the future has in store for you.