

Marine Biology Valedictory Speech 2025

Good afternoon, faculty, family, friends, and fellow graduates.

Today marks a milestone we've all worked toward — sometimes in boots, sometimes in the classroom, sometimes waking up at four a.m. to climb down a muddy, treacherous cliff for a low tide in the freezing rain. We've studied everything from nematocysts to the songs of blue whales, and somehow, we've made it to this moment.

When I started my marine biology degree, I didn't expect that sea urchins would become the topic of my research. Let's be honest — they're not the cutest creatures. They're not dolphins leaping from the waves or penguins waddling on the shore. And when I mention sea urchins, people usually say, "What's that?" But spend around seven hundred hours around them and you'll learn they're more than meets the eye. Sea urchins are small but mighty. They can transform entire kelp forests. They adapt. They persist. And in their own spiky way, they remind us that impact isn't about size — it's about finding your niche and making a difference.

The world presents us with many challenges, just as many animals throughout the world's oceans are facing right now, suffering from the increasing acidity and warming of oceans, an increased number of storms, and the pollution of the oceanic waters. We must all find our ways to navigate these troubled waters. However, like our urchins, we must find our way to survive and thrive during these times. Whether we're trying to find an advisor for grad school, funding for our new research projects, or a job, the situation sometimes looks bleak and makes us wonder if we can do this.

However, it's important to realize that none of us got here alone. Science — and life — are both team sports. For every urchin I hauled back to the lab, some of you got up at a very early hour to drive me to the coast. Some of you even helped me weigh, measure, and sacrifice many of my sea urchins when finishing my experiment. Your sacrifices and support made my work possible. I'm standing here today because of that help.

We've all had our own version of this experience. Whether your research focused on tidepools, the coral reefs, or the depths of the ocean with ROVs, we've all leaned on each other to get here. And as proud OIMB graduates, we know a thing or two about perseverance — whether it's surviving rough seas on the Megalopa or swimming after getting stuck at Middle Cove during a low tide.

So as we head out into the world, I hope we carry a few lessons from sea urchins and from our time here:

One – Adapt. To the changing tides.

Two – Persist. Through the storms and challenges of our past, present, and future.

Three – Thrive. When given the opportunities that define our careers and our lives.

Congratulations, Class of 2025. Good luck on all your future expeditions around the world, and I wish you fair seas on all your future journeys.