

Hi everyone, thank you for being here, and congratulations to the graduating biology and marine biology class of 2023.

While each of us has our own unique set of experiences here, I think that what unites our class is a sense of resiliency and flexibility in times of change. A transition to college is never easy, but dealing with that during an even larger transition into a global pandemic is no small feat.

And yet, here we are!

Through incredibly uncertain and isolated times, we were able to find strength in each other and in ourselves. And while I may only know how to run an acid base reaction through a PhET simulation, I am extremely proud of all that we have accomplished, and I know that if we can get through that, this next step is nothing to worry about.

Whether adapting to a global pandemic or bouncing back from a fairly devastating grade on an ochem quiz (to speak from personal experience), college ultimately presents an opportunity for growth and exploration. We learned to navigate the many social and logistic challenges that come with living on our own for the first time. We pushed ourselves out of our comfort zones, and we faced failure and success. Through our experiences, good or bad, I believe we have discovered the qualities in ourselves and others that we truly appreciate. We have begun to understand who we are and who we want to be.

And our period of exploration doesn't stop here. If I have learned nothing else in college, what I will leave with is a desire to continue pushing myself to try new things. Aim to take advantage of any opportunity, big or small, and see where it takes you. Biology is a vast field, and there will be many opportunities to come. Set your sights high, but be patient and kind to yourself. Remember that no decision is final, and that success can take many forms, all of which are valid and important.

In this time of reflection, I can't help but recall the handful of nights leading up to my transition from my home in Portland to the University of Oregon that I spent crying. As someone with a decent amount of anxiety, I was terrified of leaving what felt familiar and comfortable to me – there was so much that was unknown about this new place. It's funny to look back on that now, because in some ways I'm equally sad about leaving this new home I have created. While there is definitely a part of me ready for this next step, I am incredibly grateful for the memories I have made here. I know that our collective experiences will in one way or another prepare us for whatever comes next. And again, I'm sure there will be some tears shed during this transition as well.

With all of that being said, I would like to express my thanks to the amazing professors, friends, and family who have supported all of us throughout this process. Of course, congratulations again to all my fellow graduates for this incredible achievement, and good luck with all your future pursuits. Thank you.