

[In Shrek voice] WHAT ARE YE DOING IN MAH SWAMP?!

Oh right, you're here for the Marine Biology Ceremony.

Ehhem.

Good midday everyone. It is amazing to be here, in person, talking to your faces and bodies for once, instead of zoom. To those of you who know me, hello. For those who don't, also hello, and thanks for coming to see me *Bows* Please, please, hold your applauses till the end.

It's honestly crazy that I somehow ended up here, it was not a place I expected to be. If I went to past me, and told them about my life right now, I would not believe my future self and think I was pulling some sort of joke. Being valedictorian, having a rich social life and many friends, doing dungeons and dragons, going on cruises and travels to rainforests; for research purposes, of course. It all adds up into a crazy tapestry I could have never foreseen. College life didn't end up like we were expecting.

This is especially true with my expectations in coming here. I thought I'd be lost in a large school like the UO. Yet what I found here surprised me. I found a community, a college community. A true home away from home. I stand on

the shoulders of giants. I learned the importance of the three f-words. Family, friends, faculty. You have all been incredible, and I am deeply thankful to you all.

Despite my discovery of my college community, nature decided to rip up the script and make the last two years a real drag. The pandemic made traditional friendship difficult, and drove home how important it was to me, and I assume to you all. Friendship, fellow graduates. It will get you very far in life. I know I'm happiest when I'm around people I know, trust, and enjoy hanging with. Don't forget the impact even one person can make on your life, and on your future career.

Now, let's talk about us graduates a little more, because it's OUR TIME! Let me set the scene of the trials we had to face as a class, and the trials we pushed through to get to where we are now. A sort of "look back" to the darkest days of the pandemic.

[In Epic Narrator voice] When school began, the new freshmen Marine Biology class of 2022 came in just like any other year. They all assumed that, as had been before, their schooling career would be (pause for effect) **normal**. And then disaster hit. The world changed with the emergence

of a dark threat. COVID. Lockdowns, mask mandates, the loss of in-person events challenged every student in ways no other college students had been challenged in past years. It was the truest manifestation of the phrase: "You never know what you have until you lose it." Two years later, the opportunity for normal life comes again, though things will never go back to the way they were.

Some of us may never recover from this pandemic, and it saddens me. The impact has been felt unequally, and I know it hit many very hard. I deepest condolences to those of you who had to struggle the hardest to get here. I would like to take a five-second pause for a moment of silence to honor the 6.28 million people who have died from the pandemic.

Thank you.

Through it all, we have continued to learn. Learn about what science has in store for us. What we are as marine biologists, as fellow animal-loving nerds, as contributors to the wide world of research. Our experiences and our education at the U of O are invaluable in figuring this stuff out. Science is not an easy road to go on. Yet, I believe out of anyone, our class, and those who pushed

through the educational difficulties wrought by the pandemic have the tools to take on these challenges. Consider. Whatever trouble lies ahead, whatever challenges you may face to your dream, remember that "it's not a pandemic." I truly do hope we don't face another...

Approaching problems like this doesn't minimize the difficulty of these challenges, but it should give you confidence in taking them on. If you can make it through a pandemic, you can make it through whatever life throws at you! We are inevitable. The world is an oyster guys. And we? We are the scientist doing a thesis on it! Feel proud of what you all have achieved getting your diplomas. I sincerely hope that all of you find a path that makes you happy. Live long, and prosper.

Now, [Shrek voice] GET OUT OF MAH SWAMP!