

Commencement Speech

Good afternoon graduates, faculty, staff, family, friends, and foes alike. It's an honor to be up here today. I was a speaker at my 8th grade "graduation" ceremony, so not only is this a nice full-circle moment, it also means that I am officially two-for-two when it comes to speaking at my graduations. Perfect record.

I failed to mention my high school graduation in 2019 because I wasn't there. I was undergoing hospitalization for depression so severe that I was in the early stages of psychosis. Back then, everyone always told me that things would get better once I got to college, but I was doubtful. As someone who loves winning arguments, part of me resents everyone for being right all these years later. However, as someone who now loves being alive, I'm glad that I stuck around long enough for them to tell me "I told you so", as much as it annoys me.

If you had told me back in 2019 that Marietta College was one of the biggest reasons I was alive today, I would have broken out of my paranoid delusions long enough to laugh at you. At that point, Marietta was a random box on the CommonApp. Call it fate, an act of god, or a competitive financial aid package, but somehow, despite applying to 36 schools that year, Marietta ended up being the right place at the right time, even though it couldn't have felt farther from the truth back then. But, you know what they say: "When one door closes, another opens".

Coming to campus in fall of 2019 was daunting: it felt like an endless hallway of inaccessible doors. It seemed like everyone I met was recruited for some kind of sports team or was planning to join a sorority or fraternity. In the sense of arrogance and individuality I think a lot of us had at 18, I thought to myself, "That could never be me, I'm not that unoriginal". I remember texting my dad during PioSOAR that I was *never* going to belong here. I was convinced that I was going to transfer within the year. I'm glad that attitude didn't last long. Next thing I knew, doors began to swing open. Much to my chagrin, I ended up not only joining a sorority, but also the rowing team before my first semester was even over. For the first time in my entire life, things finally clicked into place. I was happy, a feeling that I didn't even know I had the capacity for.

When our first year was devastated by COVID, it felt like all the doors slammed shut at once — the first time I was really, truly, loving life and it was gone, possibly forever. I spent my entire life waiting for the chance to be happy, and I only get it for six months? What a rip-off! If when one door closes, another opens, we must've just opened the door on a submarine, and we were all swept out to shark-infested waters. But miraculously, we surfaced. We held our breaths, we fought the current, and we surfaced.

Though returning that fall wasn't the same, it's our resilience and our strength that allowed us to keep kicking and treading water until the universe would eventually open another door for us. When the universe didn't provide, we took matters into our own hands. When we weren't given a college experience, we made it for ourselves. But, you know what they say: "when one door closes, pry open a window". No one says that, but I believe it speaks to the character and the spirit of the people I see in front of me today. The class of 2023 is a group of people who are more ready, more capable, and infinitely more hopeful for the future than we could have ever thought possible. I have no doubt that the next time all of the doors slam in our faces, we will pry open a window. Heck, we might even knock down a wall while we're at it. This is a group of people who have learned to fight against every setback in their way. Even when the water rises, we always surface. And we pulled each other up along the way.

Even though the time we spent treading water felt like an eternity in 2020, it already feels farther away than I expected it to. I am nowhere near the same person as I was in February of 2020. Honestly, I'm not even the same person as I was in February of last year! I'm sure I'm not the only one of us who feels this way. It's scary at first, but it's also liberating. But you have to lean into it. You might not want to change, people rarely do. But if there's anything I've learned, it's that the universe doesn't care what you want. It will change you anyways. Don't delay the inevitable, embrace the inevitable! Take the inevitable out for a nice candle lit dinner, you might end up liking what you see.

However, this doesn't mean that you can't mourn the person you once were, or grieve for the eventual change of who you are now. In fact, you *should* grieve! Grief and growth go hand in

hand. You can grieve the losses while still being excited for what's to come. Change is one of the most beautiful things we experience as living beings. We may not change as gracefully or as interestingly as we hope, but change is going to be a constant in our lives no matter what. I encourage you all to see the beauty and the wonder in it rather than the loss and the fear. You're only as lucky as your expectations are few.

The four-ish years we've spent on this campus will feel like a lifetime away before any of us know it. Cherish your experiences here and hold them close. Even the little moments, like just sitting on your floor with your roommates, cracking a joke with a professor, or Sunday morning trips to Tudor's Biscuit World after a night out of questionable activities. Without these exact people ending up at this exact place, we might not have gotten the chance to make the memories that we all did. Without all of you, I might not have finally gotten the chance to be happy. I may have never surfaced.

With that, I am thankful for all of you for making the past four years the most unique, wonderful, and occasionally terrifying journey. While it hurts to say goodbye to the lives we've built here, and the people we once were, in the words of Winnie the Pooh, "how lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard". And for that, I thank you from the bottom of my heart, for being the right people, at the right place, at the right time.

To close, I would like to thank my family and professors for believing in me, Chi Omega and the Theatre Department for teaching me to believe in myself, and the Political Science Department for letting me pass Capstone. Finally, I'd like to thank the class of 2023. Thank you all for opening doors and prying open windows. Thank you for helping me surface. Congratulations, class of 2023. See you on the other side of the long blue line.