

**2022 Valedictorian Speech**  
**Claire Boileau**

Good evening faculty, family, friends, and the GRADUATING CLASS OF 2022!!! We did it!

It is an honour to be speaking on behalf of our graduating class tonight. There are a lot of new faces in the room, and even for those who have known me for the last few years, this may be your first time seeing me without a mask on, so I will briefly introduce myself... My name is Claire Boileau, and I am from Halifax. I was lucky enough to have attended dental school just down the street from where I went to elementary and high school. I love this city and I hope it felt like a home away from home for many of you here.

For the longest time it didn't feel real that we were going to be graduating and becoming dentists so soon. And then in April it all kind of hit me – almost as hard as the taxi hit me in the crosswalk last November. These last four years went by so quickly!

But it didn't take me four years to figure out how great our class is. In fact, I found that out on day 1. For those who don't know, I joined this class... a little... late. I actually was accepted off the waitlist two weeks into classes, so I had a bit of catching up to do and it was very overwhelming. The main thing I remember from that time was how welcoming everybody in the class was when I showed up. So many of you came up to me individually to introduce yourselves, several of you reached out to me online the night before I arrived to introduce yourselves, and you guys organized a night out on my first day in order for me to meet you. I remember thinking – this is a solid crew of people I can't wait to get to know. And now, I'm lucky enough to consider many of you my second family. Our class is full of kind, intelligent, and hard-working people who are all going to make great health-care providers.

One of our class's strengths lies in our diversity. I want to recognize those of you who traveled across the globe in order to be with us at Dal and here tonight. We have folks in our class from almost every corner of the earth: Kuwait, South Korea, Maine, Malaysia, Texas, New Jersey, Iran, Pennsylvania, Utah, Nigeria, India, and... Yarmouth. Each one of us has our own strengths and weaknesses and come from different walks of life, and we've been able to lean on each other and offer our individual experiences in order to support one another.

Now to bring things more locally... Nova Scotia is known for its friendly people and hospitality, and there's no difference when it comes to the profs and staff at Dalhousie. Our instructors exemplify compassion, commitment, and what it truly means to be a dentist. They have really fostered an environment at the school where we are comfortable to be ourselves, ask questions and learn. It almost felt like high school again with us having such a small class of only 44 students, and because of this we were lucky enough to get to know all of our professors. This had its perks and its downfalls as I'm sure we often got on the nerves of many of our instructors, but they dealt with us well...

For example, Dr. Mello knew when to yell at all of us to “wake up wake up” after 6 hours in the SimLab. Dr. Ackles and Dr. Kraglund always had the tissues and sweets at the ready any time we had an issue at school, and I’m sure they became familiar with which students would definitely need the tissues ... (me)... Dr. Gregoire learned to just shake his head at us any time he posed a question to the class and nobody answered. Our instructors became familiar with Jubal’s consistent tardiness to class, but they always knew he’d show up eventually. Dr. Garland took time out of his weekends to come in to the SimLab to help anybody who needed it. Plenty of the staff at the school went above and beyond their job descriptions to support us and contribute to our education, and so many deserve recognition.

We were lucky enough to have a number of amazing specialists at the school who imparted their wisdom to us, many of whom are here tonight: Dr. Cook, Dr. Doyle, and Dr. Price provided their invaluable guidance in prosthodontics. Dr. Wright, Dr. Batista, and all of the grad perio residents helped us navigate the treacherous waters of perio. Dr. Erickson could always bring a lightheartedness to orthodontics. Dr. Doyle, Dr. MacLellan, and Dr. Shaw shared their wealth of knowledge and advice when it came to pediatric dentistry. Dr. Davis and all of the oral surgeons helped us transition from absolutely clueless to competent clinicians when it comes to oral surgery, and Dr. Lee provided his sometimes blunt, but always helpful, instruction in the GPR clinic.

Many of the instructors who are here tonight were with us in day-to-day clinic and in the Simulation Lab, including Drs. Kraglund, Seth, Boran, Steeves, Bannerman, Ackles, and Garland. You, and all of the professors who aren’t present this evening, contributed immensely to our success and getting us to where we are today, and we are all so grateful for your guidance.

To our SGP instructors, Dr. Tompkins, Dr. Power, Dr. Champoux, and Dr. Raftus, I had a very difficult time coming up with the words to express how thankful we are for you all. We have learned so much from you, and you have all really helped us refine our clinical skills and become the dentists we are today. Not to mention, you are all just really great people. I can speak for all of us when I say we appreciate and respect you all so much, and we are excited to transition from being your students to being your fellow colleagues.

Aside from our instructors, there were many staff at the school who worked behind the scenes to contribute to our success. All of the dental assistants, lab technicians, and admin staff. Without all of them, we wouldn’t be graduating tomorrow. Special thanks is owed to Tricia for helping us so much with patient management, and to the dental assistants, Mama Leanne, Melissa, Jen, Catherine, Donna, Sharlene, Debby and any I forgot to mention. These ladies seriously all remarkably improved our experiences at the school, and they will be one of the things I will miss most when I leave.

Our class has been through a lot in the last few years. We survived COVID, Hurricane Dorian, jam-packed exam periods, cycling through the same five pairs of blue scrubs for four years, perio rotations with Dr. Matthews, and just dealing with Sal in general... But in all reality, I know many of you went through some tremendous hardships during our four years of school, and I

respect and admire each and every one of you for getting through it and to be walking across the convocation stage tomorrow. Our class has shown our versatility and ability to adapt to challenges, and I have no doubt we will succeed as we enter the workforce.

Although dental school has brought its challenges, there are many things I will miss about it too. I'll miss showing up an hour before clinic to set up for an endo, only to see three other classmates doing the same thing and all of us silently knowing we're going to have a doozy of a day. I'm going to miss being in the senior lab pouring up impressions at 6pm and looking across seeing Matt and Lloyd doing the same thing. I'll miss sitting down for exams and making eye contact with some of you and just giving the "may the odds be ever in your favour" salute. I'll miss Nayt and Joy's relatable memes. I'll miss hearing Hannah MacDonald and Ryan's belly laughs from across the clinic. I'll miss lunchtimes in the Cavity hearing everybody's stories over samosas. I'll miss listening to Jay... well actually everyone, picking on Sal and Sal being the best sport about it. I'll miss watching Alec and Zaid tear up the dancefloor at Live at 5s, and I'll miss having all of my classmates to lean on going into a stressful test or procedure, knowing we're all in it together... you have all made an impact on me over the years and I will cherish the memories we shared.

As we near the end of the graduation dinner, some thank yous are in order. First, I'll start by thanking everybody who helped organize this wonderful evening: to the grad dinner committee: Kathryn, Kiran, Amy, Evan, Alec, and Zaid. Thank you all for organizing this amazing event on behalf of our class! I'd also like to thank the sponsors of this event for their support and for being here with us this evening.

I'd also like to thank all of our family and loved ones for being here to celebrate this milestone with us. You have been our rocks, sounding boards, and cheerleaders throughout this journey. We could not have gotten through this without your support and encouragement. I would also like to specifically acknowledge Kayla's parents – who are attending their 3<sup>rd</sup> Dalhousie dentistry grad banquet this evening, it was neck and neck with Gavin's parents, but you guys took the lead! A big thank you also goes out to Anthony for dropping out two weeks into dental school and allowing me to join this class. I hope he was successful in optometry school. Finally, for my classmates. I'd like you all to take a moment and look around the room at each other. You guys are all so amazing – you've all been through so much to make it to this point and I am so proud to call all of you my colleagues and friends. It breaks my heart that this may be one of our last times all in the same room, but as I'm sure all of us have found out these last few years that in this day and age, it's possible to keep in touch far and wide on Facetime or Zoom. So, as we all part ways, equipped with thousands and thousands... and thousands of dollars' worth of knowledge, don't forget that you have 43 colleagues you can reach out to for advice, venting or just a chat. It's a new start for all of us, but we've done it once and I'm sure we can do it again. I can't wait to see where everyone's careers will take them.

I'll finish off with a quote from the late Steve Irwin also known as the Crocodile Hunter (and no, I'm not going to do this in my Australian accent):

...” Whatever you want to do in this world, it is achievable. The most important thing that I've found that perhaps you could use, is be passionate and enthusiastic in the direction that you choose in life, and you'll be a winner.”

Thanks everybody!