

Good evening everyone,

I am truly honored to be standing here today with the class of 2026, alongside our friends, families, instructors, and faculty who helped us reach this moment.

If I'm being honest, I don't think there was a single point over the last two years where any of us ever felt completely ready. Not on the first day of class, not in the simulation lab, and definitely not the first time we picked up a syringe in local anesthetic. Somehow, that feeling never fully went away. We were constantly being placed into situations where we thought, there is no way I could possibly do this. And then somehow, step by step, we did.

This journey was never just about reaching the finish line. It was built out of countless milestones along the way. We went from practicing on typodonts, to practicing on each other, to treating friends, family members, and eventually real patients. Every new stage felt uncomfortable at first. Every step came with uncertainty. But I think that is what this entire experience has really been about, learning to move forward even when we didn't feel completely confident yet.

There were sim labs where nothing felt natural, clinic days that seemed impossibly long, and moments where it felt like everything was piling up at once. And on top of all that, we had many snow days that somehow always landed on Mondays, and a strike that made everything feel even more uncertain. At the time, those moments felt like setbacks. Looking back now, they were simply part of the story. Because no matter what happened, we kept showing up. We kept pushing forward.

And the truth is, none of us did that alone. Somewhere between the stress, exhaustion, deadlines, and long clinic days, we built friendships that carried us through. The kind where one look across the room could say everything without a single word. The kind where people stepped in to help each other without any hesitation. The kind that could make even the hardest days feel manageable.

We all entered this program as completely different people, with different experiences, personalities, strengths, and stories. Yet somehow, over these last two years, we became a team. We supported each other, challenged each other, and helped each other through moments that once felt impossible.

And now, it feels strange to believe that we are finally here. For so long, everything in our lives revolved around reaching this moment, and after two years that somehow felt both long and short at the same time...we are here and we made it.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our instructors and faculty. Thank you for your patience, guidance, and for believing in us, even during the moments we doubted ourselves. Your

knowledge and support shaped us into the clinicians we are today, and the impact you've had on us will stay with us far beyond this program.

And, of course, thank you for what is both a blessing and a curse...because now it is nearly impossible for any of us to have a normal conversation without automatically looking at someone's teeth. So thank you for that.

To our friends, families, and partners, thank you for being the support system behind every one of us. Thank you for listening to us talk endlessly about things that probably made very little sense...for helping us study, quizzing us with flashcards, encouraging us when we felt overwhelmed, and taking care of us during the times when school consumed almost all of our energy. Your support carried us through more than you probably realize.

And now, in return, you get to spend the rest of your lives hearing us remind you to brush for two minutes, floss daily, and most importantly brush your tongue from back to front. So that is the trade-off.

And finally, to my classmates, for the last two years, we always had that blue tracker sheet telling us exactly where we stood and what came next. And now, suddenly, we don't. But I know that's because we no longer need one.

Because the most important thing this program gave us was not just clinical skills, or textbook knowledge. It gave us the ability to walk into unfamiliar situations, feel completely unsure of ourselves, and still find a way forward. That is what we have been doing this entire time. And that is exactly what we will continue to do.

So even if we do not always feel ready, I think we've proven that we don't have to be. We just have to keep showing up, keep trying, and trust ourselves enough to take the next step.

Congratulations, class of 2026.