



NEWS ADVISORY
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Languages, Linguistics & Literature Undergraduate Major Delivers Mānoa Commencement Speech



Imagine giving a speech in front of thousands of soon-to-become college graduates, and their friends and families—and volunteering for it! That is exactly what Catherine Gardiner, a second language studies major, did. In fact, as a natural achiever, this local girl jumped at the opportunity to serve in the honored role upon receiving an invitation to audition.

Auditioning was a unique and worthwhile experience in itself, according to Gardiner. She met and listened to other students who vied for the coveted role. “They have compelling stories of challenges and triumph over tragedy, and would surely be excellent speakers,” she thought to herself and aloud. In the end, though, there must have been something special about Gardiner, as well, because she was selected to serve as the undergraduate commencement speaker at the Spring 2017 graduation ceremony in the Stan Sheriff Center.

Humbled by the acknowledgement and carrying the weight of responsibility, Gardiner knew she had to represent her classmates with . . . class. Adding to the pressure she imposed upon herself, was the knowledge that she was also representing the Department of Second Language Studies and the College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature for whom she feels tremendous gratitude. Perhaps most of all, though, she wanted to make her mother (who home schooled her in high school), and her Sacred Hearts Academy principal, Betty White, proud as they listened in the Sheriff Center.

She labored over her speech, reminiscing about the previous 4 years, which began with her surprising choice to attend UH Mānoa. She had, after all, pictured herself attending school on the mainland—that is, until she realized that the second language studies program rivals those of many distinguished and more well-known institutions. One thought led to another and another, which when combined with a touch of contemplation and philosophy, resulted in this fine speech:

When I was a child, I loved playing in the sand, burrowing myself under crumbling grains pretending to be a crab; I loved building grand castles from misshapen piles that, within an instant, would be destroyed by a mini tsunami as it tumbled to shore.

Sand. As a child, I was entertained by it, but as I grew older, its immeasurable vastness became a confounding fascination. Taking a scoop of sand in one hand with fingers from the other, I would try to extract just one grain. I couldn't help but think how I was like that 1 millimeter speck. One among seven other billion humans on this planet. One among the 19,000 other University of Hawai'i students.

What potential is there in a single grain of sand? Probably none. But, as an aggregate, the ineffectuality of one grain transforms into a strong medium. When heated at extremely high temperatures, a mass of sand undergoes this metamorphosis assuming an entirely different chemical structure: glass.

When I look at a grain of sand, I see potential in the possibility to be used for a purpose far greater than its own. When I look at our lives, I similarly see the opportunity for our individual potential to be exponentially multiplied in our combined force. That's why I began my journey here at the university four years ago: to join a cohort of learners to somehow use my passions to make a difference in my community.

Just as the transformation of sand to glass does not come without extreme amounts of heat and shaping, our journey has not come without extreme amounts of pressure. Ask any graduate and they'll tell you that this academic journey has been an arduous one. We've long awaited this day during the all-nighters spent cramming at Sinclair Library, endlessly recalculating formulas, staring at blank Word documents—hoping the muses of creativity would join force in our favor—helping us with the final paper or class project we just might have left to the last minute. Through it all, we've been challenged to view the world differently. Within our distinct disciplines, we've been pushed to internalize theories and formulas, philosophies and methodologies. Although we surely don't know everything there is to know, we've learned how to learn and ask questions and, as graduates, we will remain seekers of knowledge.

Our experiences here have molded more than our minds, however; these experiences have also shaped our identities. The pressure of securing the means to finance our education, of balancing our academic and social lives, and even of finding ourselves has undoubtedly caused us to learn just as much outside the classroom as we have in it. With greater independence comes greater responsibility. Adulthood is hard, and maybe in the last few years we haven't always made the wisest decisions: you know Netflix binging or Facebook stalking our crush, spending a few dollars too many on that daily caffeine overdose, or maybe misjudging people's characters and sometimes getting hurt in the process. But it's been in those moments, that we've gained inconceivably more: we've learned to recognize our own faults and correct them ourselves; we've learned to become our own persons and are now hopefully better able "to adult".

But we haven't gotten here alone. During this period of reshaping, we've been surrounded by support. To our parents who have believed in us, our professors, advisors, and coaches who have driven us to succeed, and our friends who have provided the will to continue, thank you. It is your constant support that has helped us realize our potential and reach this milestone. Thank you also for braving Honolulu traffic and UH parking to celebrate it with us today.

And to the University of Hawai'i Graduating Class of 2017, we did it! We are not the same grains of sand that entered this institution. No, we have become much stronger: glass. We are teachers who have become corrective lenses, better able to help our students see the world more clearly. Scientists have become magnifying glasses, capable of enhancing our understanding of the minutia of matter that makes up this grand world. Historians have become windows into the past. Psychologists have become pitchers, able to pour into and refresh those who are in need. Whatever medium you have transformed into, you are now an instrument that can be used for good.

While graduation has always been our goal, it has never been the end. When we cross this stage, receive our diplomas, and turn our tassels from right to left, we have a unique opportunity to use the gift of our education to not only better ourselves, but to give ourselves to better humankind. At UH, our motto is "Maluna a'e o na lahui a pau ke ola ke kanaka" or "Above all nations is humanity." With our education, let us seek to perpetuate the legacy of the University of Hawai'i as a collective force. Each step that we take from this day on is an opportunity to apply the academic knowledge and personal experiences we've gained here to make a difference out there, impacting not only our community but our world.

Congratulations class of 2017! Let's go and make a difference.

Congratulations to Catherine Gardiner and her fellow *grains of sand*, who now form a refined collection. Indeed, she made everyone proud, especially her mother, and delivered with . . . class. If life goes as planned, Gardiner will soon be teaching English abroad through the Peace Corps.

The College of Languages, Linguistics & Literature (one of the four Arts & Sciences colleges) of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa offers a broad curriculum in English, foreign and heritage languages and literatures, second language studies, and linguistics. Its Asia and Pacific focused curricula is unique in the nation and its faculty regularly teaches more than 25 languages.

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