

2019

## 2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Graduation Speech

BillyAnn Stempel

*Western Oregon University*, [bstempel14@wou.edu](mailto:bstempel14@wou.edu)

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## 2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Graduation Speech

### Abstract

2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Graduation Speech, Commencement Speech. Video of the speech available at [https://wou.edu/include\\_files/iframe\\_apps/graduation/2019/commence19\\_welcome\\_students.mp4](https://wou.edu/include_files/iframe_apps/graduation/2019/commence19_welcome_students.mp4)

## 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

**BillyAnn Stempel**, Western Oregon University  
Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Molly Mayhead**

BillyAnn Stempel, recipient of WOU's 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech

It is no secret that in order to get to this point in our educational careers, we have made mistakes. It is also clear that following today, we are all destined to make many more mistakes in our lives. It is inevitable. I would like to share a brief story with you today. In 1928, Alexander Fleming made a mistake that would change the outcomes of millions of lives. A researcher at St. Mary's Medical School in London, Fleming was preparing to leave his laboratory for a two week vacation. In haste, he left a petri dish with a type of staph bacteria out in the open rather than placing it in the incubator. To his surprise, this oversight led to a monumental discovery. A type of mold in the *Penicillium* genus had made its way into the petri dish where its secretions inhibited the growth of the bacteria. Fleming had discovered the antibiotic, penicillin. This antibiotic has saved millions of lives from previously untreatable infections and diseases. And, it was discovered because of a mistake. All humans, regardless of background are susceptible to mistakes. It doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, each of us is connected to all other humans through our flaws, our missteps, our oversights. It is in these very moments, when we open our eyes and realize that something is not right, that we must capitalize on the opportunity at hand. That opportunity, is growth. We are so lucky to know, right now, that our learning does not end when we walk across this stage. We get to leave here today and continue our journey through life trying, failing, learning, and growing into whomever we want to be. Some say our failures do not define who we are. I have to disagree. How we react to our failures, learn from them, grow because of them, and keep trying despite knowing that we might fail again, shows who we are. After we leave here today, we will all have two things in common that we cannot deny. We are all graduates of Western Oregon University. And we will all make mistakes. My hope for us is that we are each brave enough and courageous enough to try. Mary Tyler Moore once said, "Take chances, make mistakes. That's how you grow. You have to fail in order to practice being brave." So, my challenge for us is this: be brave, fail epically, and never stop learning.