

2019

## 2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Graduation Speech (English)

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### Abstract

2019 Outstanding Undergraduate Graduation Speech, Commencement Speech. Video footage 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

**Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas**, Western Oregon University

Faculty Sponsor: **Dr. Molly Mayhead**

Juan (Carlos) Chairez Casas, recipient of WOU's 2019 Outstanding Graduating Senior Award Commencement Speech, English Version

I am honored to be a WOU commencement speaker for the graduating Class of 2019. I hope to find a message that resonates with everyone. Phrases like: “crap, that’s due tomorrow”– to when we used to say “YOLO” in 2015 to other current themes & phrases like “climate change is real,” “Trans Rights and Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” “the Pay Gap exists,” “less discrimination, more acceptance,” and, of course, (by my girl, Ariana Grande) “Thank U, Next,” were all candidates. Ultimately, I realized that there is no way I can think of a theme that can resonate with all of you; which is what makes it so beautiful. We are so diverse with our own experiences and backgrounds that one size does not fit all. Finally, I realized that the theme was right in front of me: Authenticity. Diversity. Journey for Self-Identity. Once you know yourself and establish a personal code, nobody can take that away – just like our degrees that we are receiving today. Not only did WOU give me the opportunity to challenge myself academically, but it allowed me to question my beliefs, values, the status-quo, social constructs, and anything or anyone.

As a first gen cis male from a low-income Mexican family, whose parents migrated to Hood River, OR from Colotlan, Jalisco, Mexico for a better life, I was instilled with rich ethnic culture that my parents shared with me, with traditional Latino values & norms of service, tradition, familia, machismo, and quality work ethic – and in the same time – shared insight on sociocultural and economical gaps and deficiencies that I slowly understood. As my two worlds collided between Mexican and American life – I realized that my self-identity was preordained. But, this allowed me to embrace my hardships and transform them into drive, motivation, embrace diversity even more and ask myself “why not me?” when it came to the question of attending a 4-year university. Eventually, WOU welcomed me with the Diversity Commitment Scholarship. I was momentarily derailed by an obstacle that challenged my inherited beliefs and values and emerged a third world that

ultimately tumbled me into self-alienation, depression, and suicidal tendencies. I had to hide my sexual orientation due to not wanting to feel outcasted, judged and rejected, as I grasped to the terms. This was the most brutal self-to-self battle that I ever endured. I don’t say this for empathy, but to create awareness about these hardships and help eradicate prejudice about the LGBTQ+ community that exists in all cultures. And I am mad at myself for letting a bigoted, small mindset potentially derail my path, and stand here with PRIDE representing the LGBTQ+ community.

Which leads me back to the elements that helped me get to this spot: Authenticity. Diversity. Journey for Self-Identity. Many of us are still like “I do not know who the heck I am or what I wanna do after graduation.” I challenge you to be comfortable with who you are, be open minded and pursue your authentic passions. Ask questions and do things that you have always wanted to try. Find what makes you intrinsically motivated, celebrate it and use it as a personal code.

We have all made an impact on Western Oregon University and we will do the same on whatever endeavor we embark on. Failures are unavoidable in life, but how we bounce back is what determines our path with resilience. We’ve all had our fair share of obstacles and mistakes along the way throughout these 4 years, yet we learned from them, and now graduating with a degree. Remember, we have the power to create change and shape a life and democracy that we’re proud of.

Get ready class, we have work to do out there.

Congratulations to the graduating Class of 2019, we made it!