

Graduation Speech- Marissa Jerina

Good afternoon, graduates, faculty, family, and friends.

Today is a monumental day in our lives. We have accomplished a great feat, and we should be proud of ourselves. We have worked hard, faced challenges, and persevered through obstacles to arrive at this point. This was a huge journey.

You know who else went through a journey like we did? *Dramatic pause* Shrek. That's right, the green, swamp-dwelling ogre. Hear me out, I am not calling everyone an ogre, but his debut just happened to be the same year most of us were born. Sure, there are plenty of jokes in these movies that gave us some relief from our stress, and you may have even seen funny Tik Tok edits of him. So, how does he relate to our journey here at Marietta College? Shrek may not have had the traditional education that we have received, but he certainly gave us many life lessons. So, just like the beginning, let's peel back some of those onion layers and see what we have learned.

The first thing he taught us is how to be true to ourselves. He never tried to be something he wasn't, even when others didn't accept him. And in the end, his authenticity won the hearts of those around him. When we all first came to Marietta, we had different reasons for being here. Whether that was for sports, leadership, or scholarships. Maybe it was close to home, or maybe you wanted to get away from home. Either way, this was a new start for everyone. Coming to college can be a transformative experience where you can discover who you are and what you want to do with your life. Maybe you stuck with the same major all four years or maybe you changed it as many times as your advisor allowed. It is a time when you can experiment with

different interests. Remember our first involvement fair? Maybe you signed up for 13 different organizations and clubs on campus, realized that was crazy, and only committed to 2. This was you being true to yourself. Now here you are in your cap and gown, ready to start the self-reflection process all over again as you take those next steps. Let's thank ourselves for those couple of organizations or clubs that we actually committed to for teaching us how to be true to ourselves.

Secondly, Shrek taught us the value of friendship. Despite his gruff exterior, he formed deep connections with Donkey, Fiona, and the rest of his companions. He showed us that we can't go through life alone and that having a support system is essential. Think about that first interaction you made as you moved in Freshman year. Whether it was your roommate who will be in your wedding now or your teammate who let you sleep those extra 5 minutes or your best friend who lived in a different hall, they all contributed to your success today. Yes, those late-night taco bell runs and pulling all-nighters can be apart of your support system too. How about the experience trip our first year? They suited us up with life jackets and helmets, shoved us on a bus, and pushed us down the river hoping we could make a bond tight enough to not let our boat flip. I bet some wonderful friendships came out of that, too. Our wonderful faculty and staff made sure to always point us in the right direction, especially Mary who never failed to welcome us into Gilman with her wonderful smile. Think about those frustrating times with your academic advisor when you got waitlisted from a class because you woke up 2 minutes late. Or think about a time when your coach pushed you to your limits that made you want to quit, but realized it was so worth it in the end because you learned you are stronger than you thought. These types of interactions may have been frustrating at the time and you wanted to let out a big ogre roar, but you overcame these challenges. We are lucky to have a community that puts us first. Our support

system will always cheer us on as we continue to grow in the future, and we will find new friends and coworkers who will always keep our heads high. Let's thank these support systems for making us the confident, smart, and driven workers we are today.

Lastly, Shrek taught us to take risks. Failure is not the end, and sometimes the rewards can be worth it. Shrek faced many setbacks and obstacles on his journey, but never gave up. He always found a way to adapt, even if that meant becoming best friends with a donkey. Taking risks means accepting that failure is a possibility, but it doesn't have to be the end. It's important to learn from mistakes and keep moving forward. I am sure we all made the mistake when 'studying' and saying "I'll know it when I see it on the test." Won't have to worry about that now. Some risks are more fun than others, though. How about the hypnotist? There was a huge risk of getting recorded and possibly being made fun of by your friends. The benefits, though? Getting an experience others can't relate to and having a story to tell. Despite the risks, Shrek ultimately achieves his goal and finds love in the process. Taking risks can lead to great rewards, whether its personal growth, new experiences, or achieving long-term goals. You may have went from stepping on this campus and having no clue what life will throw at you, to now being a team leader and becoming involved on and off campus. Maybe during the summers you found internships, that may or may not have been across the country, to show you what you do and don't want to do in life. Maybe your ultimate goal was to graduate, and it took you longer than expected. Or maybe you didn't get the first job you applied for, but it led to more open doors. All those mistakes we made that we thought would be the death of us, led us to this very point. Let's thank all of the risks we took and mistakes we made for leading us here.

So, as we graduate and embark on our own journey's, let's take a page out of Shrek's book. Let's be true to ourselves, form deep connections with others, and continue to take risks. And if we

ever find ourselves feeling lost, we can always turn to our favorite ogre for inspiration. So remember, you're an all star, get your game on, and go play.

Congrats class of 2023, here's to leaving the swamp.