

# Commencement Orations Competition

## Undergraduate English Oration Submission

### Entrant Information

Please provide the following information:

<b>Full Name:</b>	Aldo Daniel Aragon
<b>Title of Speech:</b>	"What's In a Name?" (The Pre-Ordained Vs. The Chosen)
<b>Harvard Mailing Address:</b>	
<b>Email Address:</b>	
<b>Mobile Phone:</b>	
<b>School:</b>	Harvard College
<b>Degree:</b>	AB in History

### Speech

Insert the text of your speech starting on page 2 of this document.

**Note: text must be double spaced.**

When you are finished, save the document using the naming convention "lastname\_firstname\_undergraduate.doc," replacing "lastname" and "firstname" with your first name and last name, and upload the file to the Commencement Orations Competition website (<http://commencement.harvard.edu/orations-competition>).

## **“WHAT’S IN A NAME?” (THE PRE-ORDAINED VS. THE CHOSEN)**

Growing up, the last name assigned to me at birth never felt like it was truly mine. This *ill-fitting*, old last name-! I preferred keeping it private during icebreakers and introductions. But my discomfort disappeared last year when I made a deal with the devil – in other words, I became a lawyer. After representing myself in court<sup>1</sup>, I had a *new* last name: “*Aragon*,” or “*Aragon*,”<sup>2</sup> a revival of my Nahuatl-speaking grandmother’s surname, once-lost to patriarchal naming customs. She’s a formidable matriarch who has led my working-class, Mexican-American family for decades – & I’m so proud to bear this honorable namesake.

It’s a powerful thing – *the naming of one’s self*. Harvard has done it too. 385 years ago, this hallowed campus around you today<sup>3</sup> re-named itself *also* in honor of a beloved ancestor: Puritan clergyman “John... Harvard!”

The story of how *I* came to be named “Aragon,” & how “Harvard” came to be named “Harvard,” reminds us that what seems *pre-ordained* at first glance is really much more of a *conscious choice*. The clubs & sports we join; the problem sets & thesis chapters we pull all-nighters for: no one forces us to do any of these things! Every day we make *conscious choices* that tell others (1) what tribes we belong to, (2) what we care about, & (3) who... we... are.

But identities are tested by *tragedy*. We began our freshman year scattered across the world, taking classes on computers during a deadly pandemic. Now, we depart campus into a world where detractors try to *re-name* “Harvard” on their *own* terms – telling the story of a place supposedly rife with only turmoil, & only indifference.

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<sup>1</sup> Hold up hand, as if swearing in

<sup>2</sup> I pronounce “Aragon” first in Spanish, then in English

<sup>3</sup> I gesture and point around the Old Tercentenary Theater.

Being part of the Harvard community has always been... complicated. We all know that. But let's remember that here, people still *choose compassion* in the face of crisis. We *give* compassion when we work overnight shifts at the student-run homeless shelter; or fundraise for wildfires in Hawai'i and earthquakes in Türkiye. We *embody* compassion in moments of joy, like our Senior Assassins game, or formal dances like Spring Fete, hosted by my very own Eliot House. We *receive* compassion from loved ones - friends, professors, dining hall workers - as we struggle to answer life's hardest question – “*What on Earth am I going to do with my life after graduation!?!?*”

For me, Harvard's compassion has been life-changing. When I had a colon cancer scare my soph. year, it was a Crimson hospital worker – an alum from the Class of '86 – who told me things would be OK before I entered the operating room. And when loneliness threatened to derail my junior year, it was a group of Crimson students / *didn't even know*, practicing a religion *that I do not personally share*,<sup>4</sup> who noticed me in distress in a dining hall during a Holy Day & gave me... chocolate ice cream!

I'll never forget about these Crimson angels. I see them in the crowd before me today. Is it them – is it all of you – who gave me the confidence *this year* to inscribe my new, *chosen* last name – “Aragon” – on my Class of 2024 diploma.

As we leave Harvard today, what will the name inscribed on *your* diploma be? What values will that name embody? Outside these Harvard Yard gates, long after today's celebration ends, continue to embrace *friendliness* over fear; to share *community* over division; to give *compassion* over indifference. Like our names, these values are not *pre-ordained*. Like our names, these values are *chosen*.

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<sup>4</sup> Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints / Mormon Church



Aldo Aragon <adaragon@college.harvard.edu>

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## Harvard Orations Competition Update 2024

3 messages

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Commencement <commencement@harvard.edu>

Fri, Apr 5, 2024 at 2:57 PM

To: "Aragon, Aldo Daniel" <adaragon@college.harvard.edu>

## HARVARD UNIVERSITY

COMMENCEMENT OFFICE

**Writing/auditioning this speech was the highlight of my senior year, and it was so inspiring to see how many people came out in order to hear my message during practice sessions. I'm happy to share it with you in text form!**

WADSWORTH HOUSE

[COMMENCEMENT@HARVARD.EDU](mailto:COMMENCEMENT@HARVARD.EDU)

CAMBRIDGE, MA 02138

April 5, 2024

Dear Aldo,

Thank you for submitting a speech in this year's Commencement speech competition. I'm happy to report that you've been selected for the first auditions this Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, beginning 4:00pm EDT.

Please follow the link below to select your time slot, and sign up no later than noon on Wednesday, April 10th. Times will be established on a first-come, first-served basis, so signing up early will give you the best chance of obtaining a preferred time.

**(Per this redacted link, I was honored to be one of just seven Class of 2024 undergrads who was shortlisted/ auditioned for the College oration in English.)**

[REDACTED]

It is possible that the auditions will be recorded for the benefit of any committee members unable to attend online at that time.

A few things to bear in mind:

— You may make *minor* revisions to the speech that you submitted, but the theme and argument must remain the same. If you make alterations that might be considered of some substance, then you must submit to the Commencement office, double-spaced, your revised version with name, email address, and title of your speech on