

Commencement Orations Competition Undergraduate English Oration Submission

Entrant Information

Please provide the following information:

Full Name:	Aldo Daniel Aragon
Title of Speech:	“What’s In a Name?” (The Pre-Ordained Vs. The Chosen)
Harvard Mailing Address:	
Email Address:	
Mobile Phone:	
School:	Harvard College
Degree:	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 court¹, I had a *new* last name: “*Aragon*,” or “*Aragon*,”² 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 today³ 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.

¹ Hold up hand, as if swearing in

² I pronounce “Aragon” first in Spanish, then in English

³ 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 *I didn't even know*, practicing a religion *that I do not personally share*,⁴ 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*.

⁴ Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints / Mormon Church