Assistant Professor David Lutz, a faculty member in environmental science, was the 2025 recipient of the Jack Jensen Award for Excellence in Teaching, the college's highest teaching award. In keeping with college tradition, as the Jensen recipient, Lutz gave the Commencement address, titled "Always be...," at the ceremony held on May 10, 2025. It appears below in full.

Thank you, Laura. I feel extremely humbled to be a part of this Commencement and to be able to give this address. I am very honored to receive this year's Jensen award and, accordingly, have some people to thank and congratulate.

The first is my family: my wife, Kate, and our dogs, Waffle and Tugboat. Many of the students know Tugboat — I often bring her to campus and students can "sign her out" and take her for a walk. I'm actually convinced that Tugboat is a major reason I'm standing here. Just earlier today, I heard two students talking — one asked who the commencement speaker was, and the other one said, "Oh, it's Tugboat's dad." Not Professor Lutz, the guy who uses satellite images to study the rainforest. Tugboat's Dad. Obviously, I would not be who I am without the three of them, so I'd like to thank them for supporting me along the way.

I'd like to thank my fellow Colby-Sawyer professors, who have enthusiastically welcomed me in the community and provided me with guidance, advice and collegiality along the way. After my first few weeks here, I remember thinking to myself, "Wow, these people really care about their students. They are so organized and put together. How on Earth am I going to fit in?" After pondering it a bit more, I thought, "Aha! I've got it. Maybe I can ask them to detail their process by generating a 257-question survey administered during Faculty Forum. Are they *enthusiastic* about helping their students or *very enthusiastic*?"

You know, this group of professors is constantly sacrificing and working hard to help their students. They are endlessly charismatic and enthusiastic about helping people. I really feel quite inferior. When Laura and Eden told me I had won the Jensen award, I had a hard time believing it. The only reason I thought I could have won was if students misspelled the name Brandon Arvesen as D-A-V-E-L-U-T-Z. But then I thought, "Well, that's Brandon's own fault for not correcting their spelling when he taught three sections of Writing 101."

Another group I'd like to thank and, really, to congratulate are the parents and family of this year's graduating class. Congratulations on reaching graduation! You have encouraged your children to seek a higher education and entrusted us with helping them reach their career and professional goals. I think I speak for the entire faculty when I say that we are

honored beyond description. I do have one bone to pick with you all though. At what point in their childhood did you create an intense fear and aversion of your kids to a course syllabus? Did you create evil puppets of syllabi and scare these kids when they were in their cribs? What's the deal? Actually, when I think about it, maybe I am glad that your kids don't read the course syllabus. It helps ensure that when students come to my office hours, I have an easy time, because roughly 70% of my answers to their questions are "It's in the syllabus."

Of course, ultimately, I want to thank and congratulate the graduating class of 2025 and my students. It has been a privilege to work with you and get to know you — or, at least, many of you. Congratulations.

One of the most difficult parts of writing this speech was that there are several students that I don't know since you all are in other majors. I thought to myself, "How am I going to make a joke that would land with students in programs other than environmental science?" For instance, nursing majors. I thought, "What would really make nursing majors laugh?" Then I thought, "Wait … *do* nursing majors laugh?" I thought about that question for a little while and then came up with an answer. I'll tell a joke and ask them to laugh only after promising that they'd get at least a B-.

I really have learned a lot here from the students. As an ecologist, my favorite piece of knowledge I have gained these past two years is to never, EVER turn the lights on right when I enter the classroom for an 8 a.m. class. You see, you all have taught me that your generation has somehow become nocturnal and prefers dimly lit rooms whose sole source of illumination is the blue glow emanating from your phones and computer screens. The first time I walked into Chem 101 and saw a set of ghoulish faces starting back at me like I was an outsider who had just walked into their forbidden ceremony of the dark arts, I almost called New Hampshire Fish and Wildlife to report a hibernaculum of a new species of cave bat.

Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to have been taught by a wide range of helpful, knowledgeable and caring teachers, professors and mentors. And I am so grateful for them. My list of teachers includes: Mr. Nelms. Mrs. Collella. Mr. Silknitter. Mr. Woodland. Mr. Van Leer. Mr. Wheet. Mrs. Byrne. Mrs. Bielli. Mrs. Kittle. Dr. Miles Silman. Herman Eure. Bob Browne. Hank Shugart. Howie Epstein. Stephen Macko. Robert Washington-Allen. And Richard Howarth.

You see, without any of these people, I would not have been shaped into the person I am today. I'm sure that many of them might not even remember me. But that is part of the joy and beauty of teaching; you can have a long-lasting positive impact on many minds, and the effect might not be noticeable for a long time. You might not even know the impact that you have had. But one thing is for sure — you do remember the teachers who helped you along the way. And I'm sure many of you remember your teachers. So, in honor of them, the ones who helped you get here today, let's pause for a few moments just to think about them and quietly thank them for helping us in our lives.

Graduation from college is an important stage in one's life. Graduating Class of 2025, you probably won't forget the feeling you have right now: reaching a stage of independence with the future ahead of you and so many paths to choose from. You are making your way from a somewhat sheltered existence in college to a wider world fraught with uncertainty. None of us, your parents and relatives, nor the faculty and staff here, can honestly tell you that what you are walking into is close to what we experienced at your age.

Life is now a series of contradictions. The world is seemingly more interconnected, yet people are more distant and separated from each other. All knowledge is available to us in an instant, and yet our leaders make decisions based on nothing but intuition and emotion. We preach to you the importance of serving the public and helping others, while we dismantle institutions whose job is to facilitate this aid. It's like we are living in the upside-down: a topsy-turvy era where it is hard to find one's bearings.

I am not going to tell you that everything is going to be OK, to follow your dreams and reach for the stars. I'm not that kind of Commencement speaker, or person. But what I can tell you is that you have a supportive community available to help you. Look around you. All those teachers you thought about earlier? Well, they're likely still out there. Some of them may even be here in the audience — dressed in silly outfits, yes, but here nonetheless. Your friends and family are here, or perhaps watching the webcast or wishing they could be here, but they are thinking of you. And if you asked any of us for help, I could guarantee you that all of them would gladly help you in an instant. They, we, would be happy to.

Now, I may not know the best way to help you all individually, so the way that I thought I could help, in some small fashion, would be to offer you a framework that has helped me. This framework takes a moment to explain.

In ecology and the environmental sciences, our goal is to understand and document how our natural world is changing. Now, the trouble with an ecosystem is that its parts are

inherently interconnected and there is a LOT going on. If we want to, say, know how water quality in a lake is changing — well, we have to consider lots of things. We may take a water sample in one location, but what if something about that location is influencing our results? What if the time of day is impacting what we see?

What if the season, or a recent rainstorm, is having an effect? You see, there are so many variables that we don't know exactly what is happening unless we account for them all. And the way we can do that is by taking more samples. We can take them at many different times of day, across many different days and locations, before and after rainstorms, in the summer, winter, fall, and spring. Ultimately, to *truly* know if the lake water is changing, we must be sampling constantly. And my motto for this process, which I often relate to the environmental science students, is a simple acronym: *ABS*. *Always*. *Be*. *Sampling*.

In a way, it is relatively straightforward — the more we observe, the better we understand. As I considered the theme of this speech, I realized that this general framework could help you as you walk out into this big uncertain world.

ABS — Always be sympathetic. The world is made up of people. Busy people. Stressed people. Upset people. Sad people. Angry people. And each one of these individuals may or may not have a good reason for being the way that they are in the moment. But, we are only seeing them in one instance. We have one sample of their overall being.

Perhaps there is an event that is impacting them that is out of their control. They've had a bad day. They just lost a pet. They were in an argument with a friend. We cannot know with just one measurement. So, it is important to be sympathetic and forgiving, to hold space for the unknown reason. And this is true for how you approach yourself.

I have met many students who think that they're not smart. Or good with math. But, more often than not, I find that there is a reason why they feel the way that they do. They had a grumpy teacher in elementary school. They didn't grow up with a computer around all the time. They got in trouble once for forgetting their lines in a school play. In those cases, being sympathetic towards oneself can help you realize that you are basing a judgement on one sample.

Give yourself a chance. See what happens with another try. Another 10 tries. Another 1000 tries. I've watched students who were petrified of programming their junior year turn around and win the Capstone award for computationally analyzing tens of thousands of rows of data, and all because they kept trying. If you remain sympathetic, I think you'll find

that you will be much more comfortable with yourself, especially when working to accomplish difficult things.

ABS — Always be selfless. It seems that we are in an unparallelled time of greed. More for me. I am owed this. And it is easy to fall into the trap of wanting more; after all, we've been designed to look out for ourselves. But what I have come to learn is that acts of caring and selflessness are what keep our species persisting on this twirling, chaotic rock.

I didn't get into this job because I wanted more for myself. I wanted to help others, regardless of whether it helped me. And all of our faculty, and all of your teachers, the ones who you thought about a few minutes ago — they all embodied an element of selflessness in helping you along the way.

Being selfless is a powerful activity and dismantles the overwhelming message we are getting that we need to compete with each other, and turns it on its head. Adopting an attitude of selflessness will provide you with a sense of purpose that will orient you toward your true path.

ABS — Always be savoring. What do I mean by savoring? Well, to savor something is to enjoy something fully and intensely. Using all your senses. In full and complete appreciation of the moment.

A little game I sometimes play with students in office hours is to ask them the average number of times they have picked up their phone over the past day. The numbers are sometimes staggering. I had one student who picked up their phone 140 times between 8 a.m. and noon. That's 35 times per hour, or every other minute.

The world wants us to look away from what is around us — to look at content, to try to buy things and to be distracted. But what you will find is that doing so will make you feel disconnected, discontent and dissatisfied. Putting down your phone, taking out your earbuds. Remaining in the moment. These are the keys to taking advantage of the gift that we have to be alive, to be with our friends and family, to be thankful and grateful for what we have done.

Savoring an experience is a transformative action — it keeps you mindful and present and makes you feel appreciative, even in the darkest moments you will face.

The very last ABS stands for *always be sailing*. This last acronym is guidance I received from my maternal grandmother. She gave me this advice when I graduated from high school and, at the time, I am sure I did not understand its impact.

You see, when my grandmother wrote on a card for me on May 9, 2000, almost exactly 25 years ago today, she was 85, a Hungarian immigrant who had survived the Holocaust in Hungary — escaped approaching Soviet tanks and rifles in the Hungarian Revolution, who had come to New York City with her young family and who took a job on the docks in New York to start everything over again in a strange country with nothing but a suitcase.

On my graduation card, she wrote:

> *Dearest grandson,*
> *Be a good sailor on the sea of life. A sailor who knows his destination, keeps his direction and does not let himself be swayed away by winds and waves*.

No matter what the world threw at her, she maintained her internal compass, and the end result was that she made it to safety, to freedom and to a happy life. I find this to be priceless advice: Know your destination, your direction, and keep your head up, and you can go anywhere you want.

And so, I say to you, Class of 2025, congratulations. We are proud of you. We love you. Happy sailing.