On April 17, six graduate students of the Watson School of Biological Sciences received doctoral degrees at the school’s second Commencement Convocation. Thus, before a capacity Grace Auditorium crowd, Michele Cilia, Ahmet Denli, Elena Ezhkova, Zachary Lippman, Masafumi Muratani, and Ji-Joon Song became officially equipped to become leaders in science and society.

In 1998, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory gained accreditation from New York State’s Board of Regents for its first degree-granting educational program. The accreditation paved the way for the founding in 1999 of the Watson School of Biological Sciences, named after the Laboratory’s then-president, James D. Watson.

Led by Dean Lilian Gann, the hallmark of the Watson School is its innovative, accelerated approach to graduate education, which enables students to earn a Ph.D. in the biological sciences in about four years. The school’s intensive curriculum is designed for students with exceptional ability and a deep commitment to their graduate education.
Students who earn a degree from the Watson School graduate not only as experimentalists, but also as scholars who can pursue diverse career opportunities available to biologists in the new millennium.

Drs. Daniel Koshland and Bruce Alberts were both awarded honorary degrees during the commencement. Koshland is a professor of biochemistry and molecular and cell biology at University of California, Berkeley, and the former editor of the journal Science. Alberts, who gave the afternoon’s keynote address, was a pioneer in the field of DNA replication and is president of the National Academy of Sciences. Watson, now chancellor of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, delivered closing remarks in which he encouraged the graduates to “dream of doing big things not just for science, but also for mankind.”

CSHL president Bruce Stillman closed the ceremony by saying, “As graduates before us, you serve as the best examples of how and why an effective graduate program and rapid research independence can and must be the new standard. You stand today with years of scientific discovery and success ahead of you. The Watson School has provided the tools and given you the impetus and the freedom to reach your goals. I urge you, today, to pursue your careers using your experiences from the Watson School as a strong foothold, but also to never forget that our mission is not complete. Congratulations.” Jeff Picarello