

Suffolk University College of Arts & Sciences Commencement
Sunday, May 23, 2021
Fenway Park
Student Speaker
Alexia Baugniet, BA '20

Thank you Dean Toyoda. Good evening all, and congratulations to the 2020 Suffolk University graduates. What a way to celebrate this achievement in Boston's legendary ballpark.

We can all say we graduated during a global pandemic, where toilet paper was a valuable as gold. But in the end of this pandemic, our degrees are more outstanding. We not only have Suffolk University on our LinkedIn accounts, but now we have Zoom university.

It is a great feeling seeing you all here today, considering the last time we met as a class was at the Bell In Hand Tavern at our 100-day remaining until graduation celebration, shortly before our lives were forever changed.

Working in the hospital industry, studying for a Master's in Healthcare Administration at Suffolk University as well, I first want to celebrate those who are able to give our class, Suffolk's Class of 2020, the opportunity to graduate in person: Healthcare heroes, frontline workers, volunteers, educators, and researchers. Please join me in applauding all these heroes whose efforts have allowed us to celebrate with our families and our friends today.

My dad taught me, no matter what life throws in your way, keep going. Born in Belgium with a goal, but less than \$500 in his pocket, he took a leap of faith to start a career, with learning a new language as well. My dad became an executive chef in the World Trade Center and many well-known hotels, and now, for the last 19 years, has co-owned a restaurant with my mom. With a blessed family life and with persistence, I was able to do just that as a first-generation graduate."

We, the Class of 2020, started our journeys at Suffolk separate but together. Some of us came in as grad students. Some of us came in as transfer students. Some came in as freshmen boasting our yellow t-shirts through the bustling streets of Boston.

We found new ways to adjust to the life. We all then learned that the best Sodexo food was made by Maria in 73 Tremont. And we also went to the Involvement Fair, where there were one too many people on Somerset plaza, now known as Samia.

That fair introduced me to many of you, and all your diverse backgrounds and goals. I got involved and became a leader with the Suffolk Dance Marathon benefiting Boston Children's Hospital, the Honors Council, Wicked's hip hop dance team, and the women's club lacrosse team.

My sophomore year I felt disconnected, moving off campus, something many of you probably experienced. With the help of off-campus housing and President Kelly, my colleague Brian Hatch and I were able to create the Commuter Student Lounge, which serves about 75% of the student population at Suffolk.

My takeaway would be to highlight the importance of connections. Whether you found your connections with athletics, service work, or your classes, Suffolk University has linked you to fellow graduates, faculty, and staff. You're graduating from an institution that will support you and your education with a well-developed alumni network, which has led me to my current job today.

My second takeaway for you during these unprecedented times: Remember to never step back, and always be bold and brave. My dad faced numerous challenges, and I know we all have. For me, one challenge was learning to adjust to college with dyslexia.

More recently another challenge was having 100-plus job applications I made returned with a message: "We are unable to move forward with your application due to COVID-19." How many of you have experienced this? Frustration I don't think emphasizes our feelings.

Or maybe it was being mailed the diploma last spring and having mixed emotions knowing we would not have a graduation at that time or say goodbye to our friends and professors.

But Suffolk taught us differently. As Rams, we persevered through these challenges. We, as a Ramily, are motivated and ambitious. We adjust to what is thrown in front of us, like we did when we started our education in this big city.

For me, my persistence meant continuing my education. For you, persistence could be something different. But now we have the skills to make change through difficult times.

Again, thank you to our healthcare heroes and Suffolk University faculty and administration, trustees, for providing our Class of 2020 with this Commencement ceremony in this beautiful Boston landmark.

Everyone stay healthy and safe. Graduates: Aspire, lead, and create change. I congratulate you all again and wish you all the very best. Cheers to you all, and play ball.