

**Suffolk University Sawyer Business School Commencement**  
**Saturday, May 22, 2021**  
**Fenway Park**  
**Graduate Student Commencement Speaker**  
**Jennifer Barthelmy, MPA '21**

Good afternoon President Kelly, Provost Sandell, Dean Zeng, Board of Trustees, Dr. De Salvo, faculty, family, friends, and the Class of 2021.

Today is a day of celebration. We are celebrating obtaining our degrees, but more importantly, we are celebrating greatness. We have been in virtual spaces since March 2020, so to be here in person at Boston's legendary landmark, attending our graduation, is a cause for celebration.

This year and a half has felt like a decade. Life as we knew it changed overnight. It has been a year filled with loss. We lost life as we knew it, people we know and love, and jobs. We lost pieces of ourselves. Hearing myself say that, I feel the weight of my words.

And yet, I can't help but think that in all we've lost, we haven't lost our greatness. Greatness can come from anything, including a pandemic that has upended our sense of normalcy. It doesn't come from perfection.

Greatness comes out of the lessons learned from failures and the growth experienced through mistakes. Greatness can even come from the decades long reframing of systemic and institutional racism that has happened in the history of America.

Greatness is knowing that we are better today than we were yesterday because of what the past has taught us, both good and bad.

Being humble enough to learn from the mistakes that we make, and those that we see others make, is a part of greatness. Recognizing the beauty in our flaws, to continually refine who we are, personally and professionally, is part of being great.

Today, my charge to everyone here is this. Commit to purposeful power walking. That is, commit intentionally to walking in the power that you possess each day. Purpose power walking is a journey of intention, purpose, and power that is filled with destinations of greatness. It has carried me through my own destinations of greatness, such as obtaining my undergraduate degree from Howard University, to my application and acceptance to Suffolk's

MPA program, to being the first Haitian American and second African-American woman to receive the Commonwealth Suffolk Fellowship, to having an article published on my work on how to build an anti-racist government, to standing here as the 2021 graduate student Commencement speaker.

Just as I have purposely walked in the power that I possess, intentional in building my legacy, I encourage you to bring all of who you are to every destination, purposefully, without compromise, and walk in the power you possess destined to building a legacy predesigned specifically for you.

COVID has taken a lot from everyone. But more importantly, it has given us opportunities for greatness. Thank you.