

Suffolk University Sawyer Business School Commencement
Sunday, May 22, 2022
Leader Bank Pavilion
Taylor Monteiro, undergraduate student speaker

Thank you for that great introduction, Dean Zeng.

The emotion of this very moment standing in front of the Class of 2022 is surreal. I want to thank everyone in the crowd who has made it possible for us to enjoy this day together: The Board of Trustees, President Marisa Kelly, our dean, our assistant dean, faculty, staff, and administration.

A thank-you to those who have pushed us along the way: our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, our true supporters. And we all know that it would not be possible without the Class of 2022.

We all have different journeys on how we landed at Suffolk University, and I'm sure you can all relate that there has been no straight path to the very seats you occupy today. We unlocked versions during our time here that we may have never expected. We have worked relentlessly and have been tested of our patience and endurance.

The true test of endurance that we can agree on was experiencing our first global pandemic, COVID-19. The adjustment to Zoom, having to move out of the dorms, isolating ourselves from our family and friends: this was extremely difficult. But as a result, we became more independent. We discovered new passions. And we gained a new sense of normalcy.

I want to share my journey. It is not a usual one, and I'm sure yours isn't either. I'm a woman of Cape Verdean and Cambodian descent, a first-generation college student, a daughter of an immigrant, and a granddaughter of a Cambodian Civil War army veteran.

I grew up in a small town, New Bedford, Massachusetts, a town with no shortage of talented and resourceful individuals. Yet, it is a desert of opportunity. Navigating this environment was difficult. Nevertheless, it has played a vital role in my life, imprinted in the soles of my feet and shaping every step of my journey.

I went to a non-traditional high school, a vocational school where I was granted the opportunity to learn a trade and prepare early for the workforce. With that being said, I always dreamed of

attending college, but I didn't know if attending a traditional four-year college was a reality for me.

As a first-generation college student, you often don't know where to seek advice and what steps you should be taking, because you are the first to do it in your family. The odds are against you, and you are starting behind the line. I can vividly remember speaking with my high school guidance counselor about applying to college, and she highlighted the competitiveness and expense of the college path. She attempted to persuade me that the path of least resistance was to continue working in my trade, because I could make a living to support myself in the workforce. I was a straight-A student and top of my class, by the way.

Deep down inside I felt the path envisioned for me wasn't one in which I was looking to travel. In spite of the advice I was given, I went on to complete 16 college applications and was accepted into all 16 universities. I mention this not to brag. I *promise* you, I mention this not to brag but to highlight that attending Suffolk University was a choice for me.

I chose Suffolk University because this is the place I felt I belonged most. The Suffolk University body is composed of talent. Look at this crowd and look at the person sitting beside you. I want you to take a look to your left and a look to your right. We have students from every walk of life, from every corner of the globe. We have students of color, LGBTQ+ students, international students, students with disabilities, first gens, and students who belong to even more than one of these groups. Suffolk University has made it clear: We *all* belong here. Our campus grounds are built for real people with real circumstances.

Although we may have doubted ourselves at times, we never let it define who we are and what we are capable. You did it. You were the person who made it through a pandemic. You were the person who pulled an all-nighter for that exam. You were the person who started your own club. You made it to the finish line. You are the person about to walk across this stage today and receive your degree from Suffolk University.

Our university has challenged us and held us accountable for our quest to become better versions of ourselves every time we walk out that door. With no shortage of adversity, we have never let roadblocks deter us from completing our concrete goal of graduating from Suffolk University.

I want to leave you with four lessons that I've collected from my peers throughout my four years at Suffolk.

Lesson number one: Embrace failure and learn from it.

Lesson number two: Surround yourself with people who believe in you and push you to do better, the people who see the value in you when you may not even see it yourself.

Lesson number three: Never lose sight of kindness. The way you treat people is a representation of who you are, and you will always rise by lifting others.

Lesson number four: Your sense of identity will change. I promise you it will change. But when this happens, do not get worried. This means that you're growing into something much greater.

The lessons instilled in us at Suffolk University will forever follow us in the future. So remember who you are, remember the sacrifices you made, and apply these lessons to your next journey, whether taking a break after graduation, starting your first full-time job, attending graduate school to further your education, or simply thinking about your next step.

But what every one of us in this crowd should be sure of is that we have radically transformed every moment we've been in and learned from it, which is something to be proud of.

Congratulations to the Class of 2022, and I am honored to have been your classmate. Thank you, and give yourself a round of applause.