

Suffolk University Sawyer Business School
Class of 2023 Commencement
Sunday, May 21, 2023
Leader Bank Pavilion
Commencement Graduate Speaker
Dr. Fatima Watt, MPA '23

Good morning, everyone. Oh, I think we can do a little bit better than that. Good morning, everyone!

ALL: Good morning!

FATIMA WATT: All right. Welcome faculty, guests, and fellow graduates. My name is Dr. Fatima Watt. I'm a clinical psychologist. I'm the CEO of a pediatric hospital. I am a daughter, sister, cousin, aunt, wife, and mother of two beautiful girls. [APPLAUSE]

[00:30] That is my most important title, by the way. And today, I get to add Suffolk graduate to that list. [APPLAUSE] Since childhood, my interests have changed over and over and over. When I was 5, I wanted to be a teacher. When I was 10, I wanted to deliver babies. When I was 15, I wanted to

[01:00] be a sign language interpreter. And by 20 I knew I wanted to be a psychologist. Now, when someone asks me what I want to be when I grow up, I say, I want to be a leader. I want to take care of people and communities. I want to change the world. And thanks to Suffolk University, I have the skills, confidence, and vision to do just that, one meaningful action at a time. We all do. [APPLAUSE]

[01:30] My life has not always been easy. I grew up in great poverty in a community filled with drug use and violence. My senior class in high school started with over 600 students. Yet only 354 graduated, not even 60%. Yet I was fortunate enough to attend college in Boston, propelled by the love and strength of my family, especially

[02:00] my grandmother. Thank God for grandmothers, right? Rest in heaven, Mama. [APPLAUSE] My first day of college—I should say my first day the first time around—was September 12, 2001. Overnight the world had become a very scary and unsafe place. I faced incredible uncertainty about my own future, and the racism and ridicule that plagued my existence felt like a backpack

[02:30] filled with bricks that I could never take off. But I knew I had much to offer, and I wanted to be a psychologist. I carried with me the trauma from my community that I was born into, and I wanted to do something about it. So I stayed the course, and I did not give up. I got my first real job at the age of 18. One day, I shared with my supervisor that I wanted to get my doctorate and run my own program someday. He laughed in my face

[03:00] and said, “Ha! Yeah, right.” That was the day that a fire was lit in my soul, and it has never been extinguished. [APPLAUSE] This was not the first time, and likely not the last time, that I would be told that I was not cut out to reach my goals. But I will not be deterred. One day, I may be the first black female governor. Or the first black female president.

[03:30] Or the mom of the woman who cures cancer. Who knows? But I do know that sky’s the limit for me, and sky’s the limit for all of you, too. [APPLAUSE] On this day, my message to you is to let your fire burn bright, no matter who tries to extinguish it. Channel all of your pain, all of your sadness, your grief,

[04:00] your hopes, your fears, your love into pursuing your dreams and accomplishing your goals no matter what obstacles may be seemingly in your way. Lead with love. Be compassionate and kind, because kindness matter, y’all. It really, really does. And go out and change the world one meaningful action at a time. Suffolk, thank you for a wonderful two years. The memories and the friendships that I have created here will stay with me

[04:30] forever. I am smarter. I am kinder. I am more confident and more compassionate because of my time here. Thank you all for your time, and thank you for listening. [APPLAUSE]