

College of Arts & Sciences
Suffolk University
Commencement 2025

Graduate Speaker
Alexandria Onuoha, PhD '25

Thank you for that introduction, Dean Sparks. Good afternoon, President Kelly, faculty, staff, administration, family and friends, and the illustrious Class of 2025. [APPLAUSE]

My name is Alexandria Chidera Onuoha, and I am honored to be the graduate Commencement speaker. I won't say this moment feels surreal, because to do so would imply there was ever a doubt. And we all knew from the start, given our dedication, that we were destined to be here with our caps, our gowns, and our embellished souls.

For many of us, this journey through Suffolk University began four years ago, but for me, it started after I graduated with my college degree in 2020, and enrolled in one of Suffolk's doctoral programs. One extra year might not seem like much, but think of me as your big sis for the next four minutes. While our journeys might not have been exactly the same, the lessons I've learned are no different from your own.

I am the child of immigrants, my mother, from the lovely island of Jamaica, [APPLAUSE] that's right, and my father from the beautiful country of Nigeria. [APPLAUSE] With a determination to work hard and live a peaceful life, my mother has worked in service and retail industries my entire life, and she came home with many stories filled with lessons about finding joy. My father came to Boston with a level of fearlessness and confidence that shakes any room. His unwavering belief in himself has taught me the power of standing tall. My parents have shown me to harness joy and be confident.

Here are two lessons that I learned from them that I put to use at Suffolk. First, actively create joyful and positive experiences for yourself and your community. If it's not there, be the person to bring it. I saw you embody this mindset when I was a teaching assistant in the Psychology

Department and watched you ensure that no one was left behind in class discussion. I also attended campus events you organized through the Caribbean Student Network, the Black Student Union, and the events you attended at the Center for Student Diversity & Inclusion. [APPLAUSE]

You've demonstrated that creating joy isn't just about this happiness for yourself, but about creating moments that bring light to others. It's not always easy to bring positivity, especially in our current socio-political climate. But you have shown me that my parents' lessons were very true—the act of creating joy is your power.

Second, remember that rest and recovery are a crucial part for sustaining joy. Be gentle with yourself. It's essential to slow down because everything will happen in perfect time. I've seen some of you read a book for pleasure, walk through the streets of our campus, taking full advantage of the activity periods. The truth is, when you make space for rest, you make space for joy.

I've found joy in the small victories. The long line to get a sandwich in 73 Tremont Café during rush hour, the crying sessions with my mother when I thought I genuinely could not finish here at Suffolk. Joy isn't something that happens when things are easy. We create it. We identify it.

As we prepare to embark on our next chapter, these values will continue to serve as our foundation for success and fulfillment. Although these tips are nice, I have to be honest with you. It won't always be easy to be positive. There will be people who will be intimidated by your greatness, people who won't understand the joy that you bring. Don't focus on them.

We stand here as the result of perseverance. We stand here with the belief that we could do it. If anyone hasn't told you, your big sister's here to tell you that you are your best thing. Let your joy remind you that you can rise. You can endure. And most importantly, you can thrive. Thank you, undergraduate and graduate Class of 2025. [APPLAUSE]