

Sawyer Business School  
Suffolk University  
Commencement 2025

Graduate Speaker  
Christin Santiago, MPA '25

President Kelly, Dean Zeng, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty, guests, and fellow graduates, I could not be more proud to stand here representing some of the most talented and passionate people I've ever met, people who truly want to change the world.

For a very long time, I knew I wanted to pursue a master's degree, but I didn't know what path to follow. I've spent my career in the public sector, knowing that I wanted to serve, but unsure of really what I wanted to do. Five years ago, I rejoined state service, and Suffolk's Master of Public Administration program came up again and again in meetings and conversations.

Thinking my academic time had long passed—I completed my undergrad studies in 1999, before some of you were even born—I hesitated. But something kept me pulling me towards it. My supervisor recommended me for, and to my great surprise, I was awarded the Commonwealth Fellowship, a program that develops the future leaders of state government.

Because of the prestige of the fellowship and the reputation of this unique relationship between the Commonwealth and Suffolk—especially given that Sawyer Business School is the only business school in the nation with triple accreditation—leadership knew that during my studies and upon my graduation I would have the skills to take on whatever was needed to best serve the

citizens of Massachusetts. Being one of two state employees chosen for the fellowship, the pressure to get the most out of this program and to get good grades was on.

My first day of class was in person. I was surrounded by the buzz of young minds, people the same age as my son, and I panicked a little, texting my wife, “Where are all the grownups?”

Thankfully, one of those young people shuffled me into my classroom, and in there I found my path, and I found my community.

The MPA program was exactly what I wanted before I even knew what that was. More importantly, the Sawyer Business School is exactly what everyone in our town’s or state and our country needs now: connection, knowledge, service, challenge, and opportunity. Or as Dean Zeng puts it, business with purpose.

The MPA program, and I would say all the programs at Suffolk, challenge students to better themselves each day by learning something new, or using that knowledge in a different way than we did previously. The connections made between students and faculty are based on shared experiences, but also by exploring the vast differences between us to push us to think more empathically. Problems are presented as opportunities to see a bigger or smaller picture, and to find solutions that challenge the way we always do things. The MPA program showcases not just the importance of service, but the impact that strategic, collaborative, and inclusive service has on a population being served and often stretching far beyond.

Throughout my professional career I knew that earning a master's degree would help me move forward and grow into higher leadership positions, which it has already. What I didn't realize was the profound impact that it would have on my life. This program tickled the part of my brain that had been dormant for a long time because my path was well-worn and easy. Here I learned to think in a different way, organize in a different way, and strategize in a different way. I gained valuable skills, skills that I didn't realize that I needed and wanted.

The unique aspect of having the MPA program held within the business school is that business skills are a key element of the public administration academic program. And leaders are taught to think and strategize in modern ways. Finance and budgeting, organizational change, managing people, and utilizing technology to tackle the problems of tomorrow help Suffolk students become innovative leaders that will forge the path ahead.

My classmates taught me as much if not more than my professors. I spoke differently in meetings. I listened more and allowed ideas to marinate before rushing ahead. Not just at work, but at home as well.

Most importantly, I showed my kids that there's always value in trying something new, even if it's scary, even if it's really hard, and even if the outcome is not certain. And now more than ever, we need more of that. We need community and service, challenge, knowledge, opportunity, but more than anything else, we need meaningful connections with one another.

I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to complete the MPA program as a Commonwealth fellow. Before I entered it, I had a job. But now I have a career.

Congratulations on completing this step of your journey, and thank you all for being such an important part of mine, whether or not you knew that you were. Your passion, drive, determination, and hope did not go unnoticed. This world is better having you in it. Now let's go and do amazing things. Thank you. [APPLAUSE]