

Sawyer Business School  
Suffolk University  
Commencement 2025

Undergraduate Speaker  
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Good morning, friends, family, and anyone who wandered in here for the free snacks.

Today's a celebration—a day of caps, gowns, and enthusiastic handshakes. But more than that, it's a tribute to the improbable journeys that brought us here, each as unique as the cobblestone streets of Beacon Hill.

My own journey began back in 2008 when flip phones were king, and Dunkin' still handed you coffee in a Styrofoam cup. Seventeen years later I'm standing here, diploma finally in sight. Some might call that timeline a marathon. I like to think of it, really, as the scenic route.

After 13 years in the Marine Corps, stepping into the classroom sometimes felt as foreign as stepping onto the yellow footprints at boot camp. Remember walking into one of my first SBS classes and realizing I was older than the professor, and maybe even than the projector. But what could have been awkward became inspiring, because at Suffolk, your story matters. And it doesn't matter where you started. It just matters that you showed up, ready to work.

And work is exactly what we did. Now, outside the classroom, I'd come home sometimes after ten-hour days at school, and I'd find four of my biggest supporters: my dog, Finnegan, who was wagging his tail as if he was trying to redecorate the living room; my kids, Malachai and Maddock, always supporting me by asking me how my day went; and my wife, Kelly, whose patience honestly deserves its own honorary degree. In those moments, with Finn break dancing in the hallway, I'd think to myself and reflect, am I really doing this at 37?

But I didn't just do it—I did it while working a full-time job, three part-time jobs, and two seasonal gigs. So if you're counting at home on the Zoom link, that's six full-time jobs. But if you told me back in 2008 that I'd be juggling all this while chasing this degree, I probably would have laughed, and then asked if you were hiring.

It wasn't easy, but when it got tough, I'd think of Rich Hill, the lefty from Milton, taking the mound for the Red Sox at 44. He was the oldest active player in the majors. And he wasn't out there just for nostalgia. He was there to compete, to win. He showed me that age is really just a number, another statistic on the back of a baseball card. So if Rich Hill could keep firing fastballs at Fenway and getting the win, I could push through at Suffolk.

That kind of grit isn't something you just pick up. It's in the bricks of the city here. You can feel it in the echoes of Faneuil Hall and roars of the Garden and the quiet strength at Sargent Hall.

To the Class of 2025, Boston remembers. This city has a long memory and a short fuse.

And that spirit isn't just part of the city. It's part of each and every one of us now. It's in every block we've walked, every classroom we've studied in, and every setback we've overcome. And right now, I can see it in every single graduate sitting here today.

We learned business at Suffolk, sure. But most importantly, we learned how to build something. We learned how to grind, how to push through, and how to get back up when things didn't go our way. It was the professors like Jorge Riveras, Allison Hawke, and Regina O'Neil, who drove you just hard enough to realize you did have more in the tank, even though you didn't want to give it.

Suffolk University stands in the heart of Boston as a testament to the relentless pursuit of progress. This place is where the walls hold stories of those who pushed back against the odds and demanded better. Like Harry Hom Dow, Class of 1929, who was the first Chinese American

to practice law in Massachusetts. He walked these halls long before we did, fighting for civil rights, which was neither easy nor popular.

Suffolk has always been a place where voices rise up. Debate is expected here. The Ford Hall Forum brought us legends, like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X, to speak on its stage. And it wasn't just to talk. It was to push, to challenge boundaries and to challenge the views of society that we were willing to confront at the time. And those voices echoed through the city, reverberating and sending ripples of change across this entire country.

And now, it's our turn. While our names may not yet be etched into history, what we do from here on out will decide if they ever will be. It's time for us to step into the legacy of those who came before us. Use our voices to rise up, push back when things we know aren't right, and in the words of the late John Lewis, "Speak up, speak out, get in the way, get in good trouble, necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America."

And graduates, as we walk off this stage today, diploma in hand, may we carry with us every lesson, every stumble, and every caffeine-fueled epiphany that got us here. Let's tip our caps to the people who stood by us and to the city that taught us how to fight, how to endure, and how to win when the odds were stacked against us. Let's challenge what's broken, build what's better, and get in the way of anything that tries to stop us.

Semper fi, my friends, and congratulations. [APPLAUSE]