Good afternoon, everyone. On behalf of my fellow graduates, I want to sincerely thank you, the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences and our families and friends, for being here today.

This day is even more special with you sharing in it, and I'm honored to have the opportunity to speak before you.

When I was first selected to give this speech, I must have looked like a deer in headlights. I wondered how I could possibly capture the emotions running through all of us after these past years in grad school. But with graduation finally here, I can’t help but look back and reflect upon where I was when I started this journey.

I remember the first week of my interior design graduate classes. While I had taken a few studio art classes before, I realized about five minutes in that I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. I finally understood the meaning of blind-sided -- and when art and design are involved, blind is an adjective you want to stay away from...unless you're Monet. I imagine that everyone here in a cap and gown felt similar apprehension.
While I didn’t know exactly how much work grad school would take, I did know that I had a passion to become someone: a designer, and I was determined to do whatever it took to acquire the knowledge and tools to pursue that goal. Reflecting three years later, this journey has been one of the hardest but the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.

Graduates -- we have all proven that we can achieve what we set our minds to, despite challenges, setbacks and fluctuating confidence that nearly knocked down many of us – myself included.

Among our varying academic interests, from design to psychology to criminal justice, we share a passion for problem-solving within our fields, and the courage and steadfastness to pursue our passion through education.

Making the choice to invest in ourselves and push ourselves is no small feat, and after so much hard work and effort, we have finally emerged on the other side full of possibility.

In addition to this momentous feeling of accomplishment, I am thankful today for the connections that I’ve made through this experience. For the first time, I've found myself immersed in a community of like-minded peers who are truly passionate and devoted to the same things as I am: fellow designers who cringe at poor space planning in a restaurant ... have a love-hate relationship with HGTV ... and can take an obstacle -- like
an obtrusive column in the middle of a space -- and turn it into a solution.

I never thought that through grad school, a community of people would emerge to be even more valuable than a diploma, and I could not have made it to this point without you.

It's impossible not to feel such a strong connection when everyone is so tirelessly dedicated that we hid from the security guards to try to stay at school after hours. I hope that like me, you feel that you have found your place and made similar connections here at Suffolk--whether you're an economist, a political scientist, or a communications professional.

These relationships are special and enduring, and our classmates will continue to be a part of our lives long after we leave school. This community is our network, the colleagues we can count on in the future...whether it's for advice...to help each other find jobs...or to celebrate when those among us make it big.

And personally, my classmates have been tremendous support... Only you could politely tell me something needed to be "reworked" when it was, in fact, hideous. The desire to earn your personal and professional respect has motivated me in a way that I never could have done alone. As we leave Suffolk behind, I consider any achievement of a classmate to be an achievement for all of us.
I'm pleased that after today, I'll retire "classmate" from my vocabulary to call everyone sitting before me my friends, colleagues, and fellow alumni. Without each other, we wouldn't have the tools we need to proactively address the problems and embrace the opportunities that we will face within our fields. We live in a world of enormous challenge, and the brilliance before me gives me incredible optimism.

Thank you again to the faculty ... and to our family and friends -- especially my own -- for being here today and supporting us through this journey.

And fellow Graduates, thank you for inspiring me ... compelling me to stay curious ... and making me challenge myself over the course of graduate school and into the future.

Congratulations on this great achievement!

May we continue to inspire each other as we turn the blank canvas before us into a masterpiece!

Thank you!