Good afternoon, everyone! I’m thrilled to be here representing the class of 2014!

If you detect a bit of an accent, it’s because I’m from Trinidad and Tobago – a small island in the southern Caribbean. Where I’m from everyone is very laid back and friendly. We’re the type to say “Good Day” to random strangers on the street. When it comes to the word “stress” – PSSHH! What is that? So imagine my culture shock upon arriving at Suffolk, smack in the middle of a big, fast-paced city. Everyone looked like they were late for something. I took one look around and said, “Uh uh, no… mm mm.” I remember my first ride on a Boston city bus. I said a pleasant “Good morning!” to the bus driver – to which he responded with a grunt. Welcome to Boston … I guess?

Fortunately, Suffolk was ready for me. In retrospect, I can tell you that Suffolk University has changed my life. With the support and guidance of the faculty, staff, and all of you, I stand here a better person. I’m an Admission ambassador, and last month, I told a big group of prospective students that I feel like I have undergone a change from a caterpillar into a butterfly – a “metamorphosis” as scientists would call it.

And that is what my experience at Suffolk has been – a transformation in which I have learned three key lessons. I have learned to truly appreciate differences; I have learned how to step outside of my comfort zone; and most importantly, I have learned how to accept and grow from failure. I know each of you could tell your own personal tale of metamorphosis. And today, I share mine with the hope that you will find a piece of yourself in it.

My first few months at Suffolk weren’t easy. I was an international student yet I felt like an alien from Pluto! I felt small. I felt different. It took me a while to make friends. I even wondered if I’d made the right college choice.

But I soon realized that I was not alone in my “difference.” Whether you are an international student, a Boston native, or even a Plutonian; you were trying to find your way at Suffolk, too. A community service trip during my first spring break really changed my outlook. I worked side-by-side with some of you building houses for needy families in rural Georgia. We soon found that we all had a common goal: to make the world a better place. Our shared passion acted as a bridge to minimize our differences. I learned that no matter how we differ—culturally, geographically, politically—there is beauty and strength in difference.
I also had to overcome fear of the unfamiliar. How many of you here can say that you wake up every morning, look in the mirror and say: “Hey, good-looking. How about we try skydiving or run for governor today?” Well, if that’s you, you definitely deserve an award for being fearless. Comfort zones are called comfort zones for a reason. Heck, when I arrived at Suffolk I was terrified of public speaking. And now I’m up here! (and hopefully not embarrassing myself.)

In countless ways, Suffolk has helped all of us step outside our comfort zones and embrace new experiences. We joined clubs, performed on stage, competed in sports, and took on leadership roles. We studied abroad, did internships, and volunteered. Or joined the Suffolk Step Team like I did.

[DANCE 5-10 seconds]
One of my professors dared me to do that … how’s that for stepping outside of my comfort zone?

These experiences helped us to understand ourselves, make lifelong friends, and develop leadership skills that will serve us well for years to come. And in my case, helped me solidify my professional goals to help others as a clinical psychologist.

My butterfly journey wasn’t all sunshine and rainbows, though. The most difficult lesson for me to learn was how to handle failure with grace. I would be lying to you if I said I wasn’t stressed out from taking five classes, working two part-time jobs, while still trying to have some semblance of a social life. Or that I wasn’t heartbroken when I didn’t get into a competitive program for aspiring psychologists (after writing EIGHT well-thought-out essays for the application). There were many times in my Suffolk career that I felt like throwing in the towel. But with the guidance of my Suffolk mentors, I discovered that in every failure is a unique opportunity to learn a valuable lesson: be it to truly accept myself as I am (flaws and all) or to discover what is most important to me.

That was my journey to becoming a butterfly. And I know I’m not alone. We’ve all had different experiences at Suffolk that have transformed us.

And as we embark on what we college students like to call “real life,” let’s remember who helped us get here. To our parents, family, and friends: thank you for being our advocates and motivators even when we doubted ourselves. Thank you for putting up with our whining and venting even when you had better things to do. But most of all, thank you for always believing in and never giving up on us.

To the faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, and everyone else at Suffolk who has shaped the student experience, a heartfelt THANK YOU. For without you, without your unwavering commitment to our growth and development, we would not have made it this far.

Suffolk University has been a place for us to grow and spread our wings. And now, as butterflies, we are ready to fly out into the world and pursue fulfilling careers and lives.

Congratulations class of 2014! And all the best!