Friends, family, Suffolk community, honored guests, class of 2013:

I’m going to start by saying that Suffolk isn’t your typical school. I truly believe that at any university, or anywhere in life for that matter, you need to find your niche: a little place inside a bigger place that you call home. But I believe the demand for this niche is much higher at Suffolk in comparison to other places. All universities contain doors of opportunity that open over the course of a student's four years, but at Suffolk we don’t just open doors, we build them too.

I’ve learned quite a bit here at Suffolk. I've learned how to tell you who I am and where I grew up - in Arabic. I've learned that the Math Support Center has serious life-saving abilities. I've learned how to navigate my way to the 11th floor of Sawyer in time for a lecture. I've learned that I'm a feminist.

But these lessons have not come easily. All ventures begin because someone decides to stand up and make their own opportunities. That is what we students do here at Suffolk. Our professors have taught us how to build doors and open these doors for ourselves.

I’m pretty sure Gleason Archer, the founder of Suffolk University, invented the door, at least the door to educational equality. Archer had dreams of starting a school that provided education regardless of economic class, race, or religion. Today, Suffolk is also one of the most accepting schools in the country of the LGBT community. I never met Gleason L. Archer but I think he would be proud to see his Suffolk, 107 years later, providing education equally to everyone.

Archer didn’t believe educational opportunities should be reserved for the wealthy few. A few years after starting a night school out of his living room, he wrote a book with the provocative title, “The Educational Octopus.” The book was about the difficulties Archer faced in founding this school—the octopus was his metaphor for all the Boston institutions and power brokers of that time who came very close to preventing the existence of this great university.

Over a hundred years later, I would like to reframe the octopus metaphor in a new and positive light. I like to think of this octopus as a symbol for the way Suffolk reaches into different parts of the world to find diverse peoples from all walks of life and brings them to a campus in the heart of Boston. I hope these tentacles will continue to bind us to an institution built on tolerance, opportunity, and diversity. And don’t get me wrong—I love Rammy. But I think the octopus could be a great mascot, too.

So to all my graduating octopuses, congratulations. There is a challenging world that awaits us, one with drone warfare and a Mother Earth that is far too warm. A world where the fight for
freedom has cost the lives of over 70,000 Syrians; where women have been oppressed for millennia; where racism, poverty, sexism, and injustice are far too common. But I believe Suffolk has prepared us well to start changing this world. Suffolk has taught us how to make our own opportunities when they are not given to us. Suffolk has taught us that if we don’t like something, we have the power and the responsibility to change it. So, in the spirit of Archer and a re-imagined modern octopus, let us venture into this demanding world with the confidence to construct our post-graduate doors and the courage to walk through them on all eight legs our Suffolk education has given us.

Thank you and good luck to the graduating octopuses of 2013.