Welcome President Liebowitz, Trustees, faculty, staff, parents and the extraordinary Class of 2019. I am honored to be your commencement speaker and want to extend congratulations to all of the graduates here with us today.

I learnt four important lessons at Brandeis: I love hummus, always leave two and a half hours for laundry, take a cosi class pass fail if you aren’t a computer science major and, most importantly, we have the power to change people’s perspectives.

I am not going to lie you: Brandeis was not my first choice of colleges. The first time I saw Brandeis was on Accepted Students Day and I didn’t even get my free backpack. Even after I paid my deposit, I told my mom, “We have to go back to Brandeis in July or else I cannot go there!” Who cared that I no longer had any other options? I had to see the campus again. So we came on a hot day in July and as soon as we reached Loop Road, I burst into tears. I went on a tour full of juniors who were wondering why an admitted high school senior was touring with them when she was about to start Brandeis a month later. Our enthusiastic student tour guide took us around to see the buildings, noting how the different architecture mirrored the unique qualities of the student body. Throughout the tour, I kept thinking, “This is not how I pictured college. I will not fit in here. I am not going to like it. Why does Chums not look like Central Perk?” To make matters worse, I had a triple room assignment. As the tour was coming to an end, our guide brought us to a triple in Massell and I burst into tears again. (Not a good look for the juniors who heard I was coming in August.) Here was my future, trying to put on my socks without my top bunk roommate accidentally kicking me in the face as she got out of bed. I won’t even mention what I was thinking about the closet space for three people.

I tell you this story now standing as your commencement speaker, about to explain how Brandeis has been one of the best experiences of my life. You are
probably wondering how I went from crying that I didn’t want to come to Brandeis a month before school was starting to crying that I don’t want to leave Brandeis today. It’s because Brandeis proved me wrong.

In my time at Brandeis, I have gotten to see the spark that makes Brandeis so special, a spark that I could not see on that hot July day. I saw it in our professors who take the time to meet us after class to discuss current events while simultaneously writing their future award winning books. I saw it in the staff putting on late night events so that we could get those free mozzarella sticks we so desperately need. I saw it in our administration in their tireless work.

What I saw and still see today is a driven passion and dedication to making this community the best it can be. But I especially see this in each of you. There is a word for students like us and it’s called Brandeisians and they are what changed my perception.

Brandeisians are said to have three majors, to be the president of multiple clubs and to probably speak three languages. But even if you only have one major, speak one language and did not join a single club, you are still a Brandeisian. Brandeisians are not people who do everything, but they are the people who put everything they have into what they do. This quality of giving it all you’ve got can be seen in student research, in club events, in the sports teams, in the small businesses people are creating, but most importantly, it can be seen in the friendships and relationships we create here.

Over these last four years, we have gotten to know each other as classmates, roommates, lunch-mates and as people. The dedication we have put toward our academics got us to this point, but the dedication to our relationships shown in the late nights of laughter, early morning meals, midday madness, afternoon activities and cramming for finals will last beyond these gym walls.
If I could talk to myself four years ago, I would have said, “Why are you crying about your future roommate possibly kicking you in your face? First of all, you can try to get your room changed, but maybe that kick in the face will be the start of a new friendship.”

Now, as we sit here today, some of us going off to jobs, others to graduate school, and others to that unknown void known as “our future”, also known as unemployment, we know that we will encounter people who will make assumptions about us. Whether it is because of our age, our gender, our sexuality or our race, we can’t stop people from making assumptions but we can change their perceptions. I assumed Brandeis was not what I was looking for in a college, but the Brandeisians proved me wrong. The spark that each of you hold is bright enough to enlighten even the most closed mind. It may be cliché, but it is true: by changing even one mind, you have the power to change the world.

Today we are leaving the physical location that is Brandeis University, but we are not actually leaving Brandeis because we are Brandeis. Being a Brandeisian doesn’t stop today.

In closing, I ask you to never forget the spark that is in each of you. We live in a world that can sometimes feel hopeless, but then there are all of you. We are the future, we are the hope, we are the spark. Just keep your mind open, and remember the power you have to open the minds of others.

Thank you and good luck always.