

Name: Daniel Liebman

Honors, Prizes, & Awards:

Presidential Scholarship

Dean's List

Americorps Student Leader in Service

Advisory Committee to the Dean of Arts & Sciences – Chairman

Activities:

Undergraduate Theater Collective

Brandeis Film Collective

Waltham Group

Liquid Latex

Admissions Tour Guide

Pre-Health Society

Why do you want to be the Senior Speaker?

My years at Brandeis have been the most transformative of my life. The people I've met, the experiences I've had, and the things I've learned here will last a lifetime, and for that I am truly grateful. I would like to be the Senior Speaker to have the chance to publicly thank the university and my classmates for these last four amazing years, and because I believe my message is a worthwhile one for the occasion.

To President Lawrence, Provost Goldstein, members of the board of trustees, distinguished faculty and staff, kvelling parents and grandparents, squirming siblings, and friends of the university : welcome!

To anyone who came hoping to see a Brandeis Judges basketball game: you're a few months too late, but welcome all the same!

And to my fellow COLLEGE GRADUATES of the Brandeis Class of 2012: congratulations!

In my experience, in student addresses it is customary to reflect on the various gifts we have received from our school over the past four years, to give thanks for the superb instruction we have received, and to predict how the skills we've developed here will lead us to success and happiness as we prepare for the next phase of our lives. It is also a custom that at some point I say something funny that only my classmates will understand, so I will get that out of the way first: "Sherman pizza".

I would, however, like to break with the first custom to a certain extent, because all of you already know what Brandeis has done for you. You already know that the critical thinking skills and capacities for scholarly inquiry that you've developed here will continue to serve you well for years to come. You already know that the bonds you've developed with your professors, with each other, and with this place will endure long after you throw your cap in the air and return your recyclable gown. You already know that you have heard the words "social justice" more often in the past four years than you ever thought you would hear in a life time.

And so, if I may, I am going to turn the question on its head, and ask you to consider not just what Brandeis has done for you, but also what you have done for Brandeis.

I would like to bring everyone back to our first week at Brandeis, our orientation week, when we first arrived here with nothing but a nervous smile and an "I got in" class of 2012 t-shirt.

Specifically, I'm going to ask you to think back to that first class-wide address we received in Spingold Theater. Do you remember "I Am Brandeis"? For those who do not, and for those who

were not there, let me briefly explain. “I Am Brandeis” was a rallying cry used by the orientation leaders that day. During the assembly, each orientation leader stood up one by one to loudly proclaim “I am Brandeis”, followed by a unique facet of their Brandeis experience. Sound familiar? The phrase was used to describe something quintessentially Brandeisian about yourself – an example usage might be “I-have-three-majors-and-two-minors-and-sing-in-two-acapella-groups-and-run-a-charity-devoted-to-promoting-free-healthcare-clinics-in-Haiti-and-have-a-15-page-research-paper-and-350-pages-of-reading-due-on-Tuesday-and-I-know-all-of-the-lyrics-to-Dispatch’s- ‘The General’ —I am Brandeis”.

The phrase was popular amongst us first-years for a little while after that, and we proceeded to beat the joke to death over the next month or so. But truth be told, at that point in time, it wasn’t really accurate. We weren’t truly Brandeis then, not yet. We were Brandeis material. And over the next four years, we proceeded to become Brandeis. We learned how to use acronyms and building nicknames to avoid the awkwardness of saying to someone, “Let’s meet in ‘Shapiro’ at 5”. We learned that there is a holiday called Shemini Atzeret. We discovered that it is a Brandeis law that any class held in Spingold or the IBS must be immediately followed by a class at the very top of campus, and that class must be taught by a professor who will chide you if you walk in late.

*We became Brandeis.*

Newton’s Third Law tells us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; when a force is exerted on an object, that object exerts an equal force in the reverse direction. Over the past four years, Brandeis has exerted forces on you as you have progressed towards this day. I submit to you that this has not been a one way force—as Brandeis has acted upon you and changed you, you have acted upon and changed Brandeis. You are not the same person you were four years ago; and as a result, this university is not the same place that it was four years ago.

Think about what you have done for Brandeis. Indulge me for a moment. I guarantee that you have left your mark in some way or another.

It may not be difficult for you to think of the ways in which you've changed this place. Maybe you founded a new club, or revitalized an old one. Maybe you served in the Student Union or on a supervisory committee and contributed to policy changes or new initiatives. Maybe you scored a game-winning shot that changed the course of your team's season.

Yet not all of the impacts you've had on this place are as easily noticeable—you have likely had an impact that you didn't even realize you had at the time, or may now even know now. Maybe you were a TA or a BUGS tutor who was there to provide support for a struggling classmate at a time of need. Maybe you made a comment in a class that led to a creative spark in the mind of one of your colleagues. Maybe you turned someone on to a major or minor they had never considered before, and in doing so radically altered that person's life path and THEIR impact on this place. It's called the "butterfly effect", where a small event in the present can have dramatic ramifications for the system in the future.

Brandeis would not be the same without you. The laws of physics demand it.

And so, as we prepare to leave this place and move forward to the next steps of our lives, whatever they may be, I encourage you to keep Newton's Third Law in mind. If you're like me, there are times when the existential questions slide in the back door from your subconscious, and you begin to wonder what the purpose of your life is, and whether or not you'll make a difference in the world one way. (If you're really like me, these questions will tend to come to the forefront right when you're in the middle of trying to study for the upcoming organic chem exam that is threatening to eat you alive).

Standing here before you this afternoon, I won't pretend to know how you will leave your mark. I can't say where you will find your niche. I don't know how you will change the world. But I can say, with certainty and without hyperbole, that simply by entering the world, you will change it in some way, just as you have changed Brandeis. I don't mean this in some esoteric, metaphysical way. I mean it realistically. You will leave your mark. You will always leave a mark on your surroundings. And since 'You Are Brandeis', chances are good that mark will be sizeable.

William James once said, "Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does". I am sad that we will be going our separate ways after today, leaving this place that we all have called home, but I am incredibly excited to see where you all go and the differences that you all make. It has been such a privilege to be your classmate, and while I hope your facebook privacy settings are secure enough to keep those pictures away from your future employers, I hope you leave those settings *just* lax enough that I can check in every once and a while to see where you all end up.

Congratulations class of 2012! Go leave your mark!