Name: Justin Pierre-Louis

Honors, Prizes & Awards:
Posse Scholarship Recipient
Member of the Brandeis Student Union Judiciary

Cocurricular and extra curricular activities:
Public Relations Representative for Vocal Poetry Club
Social Recreations Supervisor at Waltham Boys and Girls Club
Interning with Chief Probation Officer David Arinella at the East Boston Municipal Court

Why do you want to be the Senior Speaker:
For me this speech represents an opportunity to remain connected to the members of my class. I want to be the speaker because I'll do my part to assure that Graduation Day is as unforgettable as possible. As long as we can fondly remember our Graduation Day, our time at Brandeis, and the friends and fellow classmates that made it all worthwhile then we will leave here carrying a little of Brandeis with us, and saying goodbye will no longer seem as longstanding or as terrible.

Commencement Speech 2010

How to Inspire for Dummies

Hello all, I would like to first welcome the esteemed members of faculty, the proud members of my graduating class and especially the family members and friends with whom I am able to share this moment right now. To the families and friends, thank you all for making it here. For some of you the trek to Brandeis meant planning in advance, making sacrifices, prioritizing your time and having to deal with that one annoying uncle for an entire three hour car ride. Yet still, you endured. Because you knew what this day meant to your loved ones, because you were aware of the importance of being in this room, at this time, alongside these, the members of the graduating class of 2010, you did whatever it took to get here. Your conviction is one I can not only appreciate, but relate to. As scholars in Brandeis University it goes without saying that everyone in this room has overcome their share of trials and tribulations in order to be here with you now. But today is a day of celebration and reflection. Not one in which we dwell on our obstacles but one in which we realize they were never enough to stop us.

As I began writing this speech I honestly struggled with myself for quite some time. How could I characterize four of the most important years in my life in less than ten minutes? How could I do justice to the members of my graduating class? The young men and women that stand before you today are individuals who undoubtedly still have growing up to do but who shall embark in their endeavors with a dedication to excellence, a commitment to social activism, and a belief in the acceptance of all communities as is stated within the pillars of Brandeis University. The answer to my question came as a bit of serendipity. As I scrambled to collect my thoughts I
repeatedly, and I must assume quite exasperatingly consulted Dean Jamele Adams. I thought that with his affinities for oration and poetry he would be able to give me a million tips on how to put this together. I wanted him to be my living, breathing edition of "How to write awe-inspiring speeches for Dummies". This was of course, not the case, nor has it ever been at Brandeis. Answers have never been given to one on a silver platter here. Everyone from the professors to the faculty operate with the frame of mind that doing for oneself is the only true way to attain the type of knowledge that matters. The quest for knowledge and truth unto their innermost parts is not a carousel ride but a strenuous hike in which the trek itself is just as, if not more important than, the destination.

While this impetus was at work all around me throughout my freshmen year I did not realize it, nor did I acknowledge its relevance in my time at Brandeis until I was a sophomore. Frankly I do not believe that any of us realized very much freshmen year. After I discovered that I would be accepted to Brandeis as a Posse Scholar in the December of my junior year in high school, everything became a blur. There was Posse training through which I began to solidify my bonds with what would become an extended family of 9 individuals upon whom I know I can rely many years from now. I got to my first dorm, met my first roommate, learned what it meant to have a sock on the door, and learned how it felt to be the guy in Shapiro lounge while there was a sock on the door. Freshmen year, for everyone, was a time of assimilation. We began to decide the routes we would take and stumbled along all while starting to find our niches on campus, assessing the pros and cons of Sherman versus Usdan, and testing our limitations in all sorts of academic and extracurricular activities. As I said, in this whirlwind of activity things were a blur, yet we all continued forward despite the confusions and frustration that came with being new to campus.

By sophomore year things began to clear up. People were either on their way towards fulfilling a major or ready to begin one. And while some of us would come to change our major two, three, or more times in the years to come, as sophomores we had a general sense of what path we were on. It was during sophomore year that I realized the importance of experiential learning and its place in Brandeis philosophy. At the time I was taking a general chemistry course. The teacher’s assistant at the time was, now Professor of General Chemistry, Ms. Claudia Novack. During her review sessions she would never let us get off easily. Every answer and the reasoning behind it was extrapolated from a student. It was not until we’d exhausted our efforts, most likely tired from having lab on the same day, that she would divulge information and help us to eventually solve practice problems. Professor Novack’s teaching method is indicative of that used by many professors on campus in all fields. The faculty of Brandeis University is expert at making one realize his or her own potential and aiding one to build upon it. To the professors I would like to extend a solemn thank you as you have made this journey all the easier and all the more meaningful.

Our last two years of school are a blur much like our first. By junior year we either took our MCATS, LSATS, GREs, or we started looking at jobs and making definitive decisions about what we would do once our journey at Brandeis was over. While none
of us wanted to admit it as juniors, we were very aware that our time at Brandeis was nearing its end. As seniors this year we went through the motions sending out applications to grad schools and programs, applying for jobs, and going to classes. While some of us cracked jokes and seemed happy at the thought of leaving we all, secretly or not so secretly, shirked at the thought of saying goodbye to a place that we have called home for so long; a place that I, personally, will never stop calling home. We kept ourselves busy and kept our conversations upbeat to avoid the inevitability of having to say our goodbyes. This year was especially bittersweet because of the benefits that come with four years of building friendships and accruing knowledge about the university. Our time as the big guys and girls on campus only made us realize how hard it will be to leave this place. Yet as we serve as mentors to lower classmen and witness the entrance of what will become the graduating class of 2013 we are given a sense of purpose and reminded that it is our time to maintain Louis Brandeis' legacy beyond the walls, stairs and hills of 415 South Street.

As you all sit here, almost ready to ascend and descend the hills of Waltham for what may be the last time, here I stand having gone on an incredibly long tangent without ever telling you how Jamele Adams finally helped me to write this speech. The one bit of advice that Jamele Adams gave me was this: "(name omitted), you are one amongst a class of champions. Address them as such". Now as he said this I first double-checked his email to make sure that there was not an attachment with all kinds of tips. There was not. As is the Brandeis way, Jamele gave me no more than what I needed to complete this task. I then contemplated the meaning of his words. Why was he calling us champions? Was it some cliché? Was he trying to say that everyone's a winner? No, I concluded. Jamele is way too classy, let alone cool, to say something so droll. I then thought If Champions are winners, what have we won? This is obviously a poignant question for today. What have we all won, and what have we all conquered as graduates? The answer is that we've accomplished more than we even realize. The fact that we were selected to be Brandeis students to begin with designated us as champions. We fought in the arena of academia where the perils of all nighters and missed parties might befall us but wherein the spoils of battle were progression, growth, and the fulfillment of potential. We fought hard and we won. Today is our victory celebration.

I say to you Faculty members, thank you for being such good trainers. Your efforts on and off the scene kept us fixed on our paths, kept us fighting the fight that Brandeis calls us to on a daily basis. To parents, family and friends I say thank you for raising champions. They say it takes a village to raise a child, I say it takes the warmth that comes from the caring, concern, and implicitly affectionate while overtly frightening scolding to forge hearts of steel; to cultivate the spirit of a champion. And I say to you champions, you future doctors, lawyers, engineers, social activists, politicians, social workers, interpreters and all other types of occupations I've missed, I say to you remain steadfast in your efforts. Keep your hearts, minds and spirits embedded with the pillars of excellence, of tolerance, and commitment to positive change. I've gone this entire time without quoting anyone so I might as well take the opportunity to do so now. A great Roman Emperor, the champion Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, once said that a
human being is not to be measured merely by his merits but that one’s "worth can be found in the objects he or she pursues". As long as we live fighting for what we believe in, we live lives worth fighting for and we remain Champions. To all my fellow graduates, fighters, champions, thank you for letting me speak and congratulations.