

## **Mahima Devanahalli - Commencement Speech**

Good afternoon faculty, families, friends, alumni and of course the graduating class of 2021, we made it!

You know when people ask, “so, what have you been up to?”, in the first week of freshman year, I probably said I just moved across the world, I just moved into my forced triple in North quad and I just went to a party in the museum of science. When people have asked me that, this past year, well, let’s be honest, usually, the answer has just been nothing much. But as graduation approached, it got me thinking, what have I really been upto? What have I been up to these past 4 years? And what have all of us as a student body been upto?

When we first moved into Brandeis, we adjusted to a completely new place, living with people we’ve never met before from different cultures and backgrounds. We adapted and gained new relationships, some of which are still going strong today.

When we tried out for different clubs and teams, there are many times we got rejected, I remember praying I would get into an acapella group, going to the audition and then facing the embarrassing reality that maybe I’m not that good of a singer. But we embraced that rejection, tried out for other things instead and grew passions in areas we never even thought we would and that’s how I found my passion for dance.

When we pulled all nighters in the dungeon, studying for that all or nothing exam and then ended up failing, (and when I say failing I mean I think I got close to a 0 on one exam), it made us rethink our whole entire career path but we adapted and kept trying, we rode that struggle bus together and here we all are at the finish line.

Some of us had to deal with social anxiety and mental health struggles.

Some of us experienced college heartbreaks, homesickness, imposter syndrome, and a lot of internship and job rejections. These were all challenges we had to deal with on top of our academics. but we adapted, we learnt, we overcame and we reached this amazing milestone.

And then of course the dreadful 2020, when our whole world flipped upside down, **that's** when we adapted the most. loss of loved ones, financial instability and isolation from friends and family were and still are some of the many adversities we face. Yet we dealt with that situation and we persevered, and although we all miss our late night fries at the stein and “studying” at upper farber but really just socializing, we had to adapt to protect our populations most vulnerable.

As the year progressed, racial injustices and inequalities that we've been witnessing for centuries were brought into the spotlight. We came together to stand up for these communities, and despite the barriers that the pandemic brought upon us, we found ways to voice our opinions and uplift the voices that deserve to be heard. We're leaving Brandeis now with the knowledge that more can be done and more has to be done about in justices including systemic racism and marginalized communities.

So what has the class of 2021 been up to? We've been adapting to change, we've been fighting for change and we've been making change. As they say, change is the only thing that's constant and the fact that we have been embracing and dealing with what life throws at us is something to really be proud of. As we leave here today, none of us can know whether the next stage of our lives will be smooth sailing, in fact, I can tell you right now, it probably won't be. But what I can say for certain is, if we all show the same

kind of grit that we have been showing these past 4 years, then we're going to be just fine.

So whether you're planning to continue studying, work at a full time job, take a gap year, or even have no idea what you're doing, I hope we all take the experiences we got from our four years at Brandeis to brace the unpredictability, spread positivity, stand against injustices and continue adapting to, fighting for and making change. So class of 2021, it has been an amazing 4 years with you all and from the bottom of my heart I wish you all the best and congratulations!

I believe that being able to adapt to whatever life throws your way is a really important skill to have and I think that the class of 2021 has adapted to a lot of changes in the past 4 years especially during the pandemic. I want to be the senior speaker to emphasize the amazing ways our class has handled those situations and congratulate them on