

Class of 2020, welcome. For one last time, let me take you for a walk on Brandeis's campus.

First stop, the campus center. Let's go back to your first-year. You're thinking, alright, I got this. You bubble with that energetic high as you grab your bagel and coffee from Einstein's. You still don't understand exactly what SCC and SSC stand for, and you aren't sure if it's Usdan or ooh-sdan. But you and I, we were ready. We were invincible as we started our step towards the unknown. For me, that was assuming taking five and a half classes my first semester was good (side note: *maybe* not).

As you wait in line, your hopes for that coffee align with the hopes of the year. New friends, new classes, new people to beg for recommendation letters...the sky was limitless, there was nothing we could not do. Okay, and maybe the coffee wasn't as hot as we wanted, much like that first paper grade handed back. But the energy and excitement was there!

Next up: sophomore year. By now, your journey up the hill has begun. Maybe you've reached the library, or maybe you've just hit the Louis statue. You've still got the high of the caffeine, but exhaustion is creeping in. Did you pick the right major? Can you afford to study abroad? How many hours of sleep is enough to function? And yet, like myself, our class picked themselves up and continued to trudge onward. We became Waltham Group coordinators, political campaigners, satire masters...we became what we needed to be to thrive. So up the hill we went.

And then came junior or senior year, or as I like to call it, the Rabb steps. Yes, those wonderful steps. My tour guide told me I would get great muscles from walking up and down those steps all the time...yeah, I'm still waiting for that.

The Rabb Steps are not only a pain to physically walk, but they represent the struggles of being in your last years of college. They represent the push you need to make to finish your degree, get a job, apply to graduate school. The steps are the obstacles from the world around us and Brandeis. Was your class you needed for your major canceled at the last minute? Did a new policy on immigration place your future here on hold? Were you questioning what social justice meant? Did a virus cancel the last two months of your senior year? Any and all of these were thrown at you as you tried to process your experience at Brandeis with what you still had to do.

Yet...you kept climbing. Why? Because Brandeis makes you realize you are not alone. There are people to the left and right of you that are helping you put one foot in front of the other to make it up those steps. For me, it was the Department of Community Service and my roommates. For others, it's their sports teams, their professors, their co-coordinators, the smile from Yen as she greets you in the dining halls. It's the people you have met at Brandeis who make you stick to the Rabb Steps and keep climbing.

It's also the passion that you have nurtured at Brandeis. My classes here have led to a desire to pursue a career educating the next generation about the Holocaust. I ask you now, Class of 2020, what happens if you stopped climbing these past two years? Who was going to protect the homeless, fight for equal rights for all *regardless* of gender identity and sexual orientation, or change gun laws? And so you kept climbing to that last step.

And suddenly...you made it. You are finally done. You got to this moment, to sit here today and say, "I did it." But don't waste that time at the top to immediately run back down. Take a breather: stand on top of those steps and look at the campus below and remember what Brandeis has taught you. Maybe it is the knowledge of all the acronyms, from BEMCo to NEJS. If I had to guess though, it is something much deeper. My journey has taught me that there will

always be Rabb Steps: some smaller, some bigger. It's when I remember my core being, my "why" and that I am not alone that I know I can conquer them.

Class of 2020, it is time to conquer those new steps. Take the memories of your years here, that excitement of your coffee from Einstein's, and go forth and change the world. Thank you.