Good morning, President Aoun, Provost Director, esteemed Alumni, Trustees, Faculty and Staff, and of course, my fellow graduates of 2015 - Welcome!

A few years ago, or half a decade ago, yes a lot of us have been here that long, we had a choice as to which college we wanted to attend. Each of us, for our own reasons, ended up here at Northeastern. For me, it was the promise of a unique experience that drew me in, one that involved travel, public service and the ability to effect social change. As you know, Northeastern delivers on its promises, and the breadth of opportunities offered here is truly extraordinary.

Before I expand on this, I would like to take a minute to share one of my experiences with you. Three and a half years ago, when I embarked on my first co-op to Cape Town, South Africa, I was overcome with fear. Fear of being under qualified for the work I set out to do, fear of not being accepted into the local community, and worst of all, the fear that I had made a mistake in choosing something so different for my first co-op. In fact, I called my Mom in tears during my first week, telling her that I felt too far away from everything I called home. I had jumped 7,803 miles outside of my comfort zone. My mother reassured me, reminding me of how lucky I was to have been presented with this opportunity through Northeastern, and that this was only the beginning.

As usual, she was right. As my weeks in Cape Town went on, my comfort zone quickly expanded, and I realized that I hadn't made a mistake; I had only begun what was an incredible start to three years of taking chances. It became clear that it was my choice to see this adventure, and the others I would eventually embark on, as empowering or discouraging ... and it was during those 6 months, that I began to grow into the person standing before you.

Like many of you, I found myself changed after my first co-op. Over the next several years, I traveled to over ten separate countries, learned two new languages, and made some of my best friends overseas. In collaboration with Northeastern, I worked on rape crisis counseling in South Africa, suicide prevention in China, and drug rehabilitation in Zambia. I even had the opportunity to run a marathon on the Great Wall of China, in order to fundraise for the victims of the Boston bombings. When I wasn't traveling, or limping towards a finish line, I was here at Northeastern, engaged with the Greater Boston community through academic work, service projects or athletics, such as powerlifting. These experiences are a part of my own unique Northeastern story, just as each of you has a narrative that is equally as personal, and equally as meaningful to who you've become. I believe the core of a Northeastern education lies in
pushing all of us to challenge ourselves through risk and experience, ultimately providing each student with their unique story- and for this, I am eternally grateful.

Our experiences here, however individual, include some common ground, such as rubbing the husky’s nose for good luck, getting lost in the tunnels, having to explain the difference between an internship and co-op, having to explain what a middler is, experiencing the simultaneous dread and unity of Club Snell and spending way too much money at Chicken Lou’s and Conor’s. We have all had some phenomenal professors that fulfilled our wish to learn, and encouraged us to push ourselves to think harder, longer, and outside the box. All of these experiences, both shared and not, have made us into proud Northeastern Huskies.

From that very first experience in Cape Town, and through the guidance of all those I’ve met, Northeastern gave me the confidence to keeping pushing myself, to keep growing, regardless of my fears. I was encouraged to learn a new language, explore a new country, try a new sport, and to continuously take chances. Whatever it might have been for you, I urge you to keep moving forward, keep pushing yourself, and keep taking chances.

We have spent our years here carefully calculating our next moves: whether it was determining majors, minors, co-ops, study abroad locations, work schedules or extracurricular activities. Of course there were times when we were unsure of the future, but with the guidance of an advisor, or S, a plan always seemed to open up before us. Now we are entering the “post graduate life,” where we will rely more heavily on our own instincts, where our jobs will hopefully be longer than 6 month contracts, and where our education will be taken to the next level.

As for me, I chose to continue my pursuit of knowledge, heading to the University of Bristol in England for a Masters and eventual PhD. My future plans lie in tandem with the many lessons I have learned at Northeastern. If I had to pick out three of the most impactful,

- the first would be to always continue the pursuit of knowledge;
- the second would be to feed our curiosity of other cultures; and
- the third, which if you only get one thing from this speech, I hope it is this: lose your way, just let go and live.

We should not fear the unknown, for it is in these moments of uncertainty that we shine the brightest.

I can't tell you what lies ahead of me in England, and for that, I am grateful. At times, the greatest education in our lives will come from the adventures we choose to have with daring abandon. Just as Northeastern taught us, we need to build our skills and our experiences, not just our resumes. My fellow graduates, continue to face your fears, continue to change the world, and continue to have courage. Congratulations class of 2015!

For more about Christie, see these links: an article NU did on her, and a reflection from that first important co-op.