

Hello everyone, it is an honor to be standing here in front of my peers, friends, family, and Eastern's faculty. Like me, you should all feel a sense of relief to finally be able to celebrate this milestone. It took a lot of hard work and dedication to get here and we should be proud, right now, of our accomplishment.

Like some of my peers in front of me, I am a transfer student. I spent my freshman year at a different university and made the decision to transfer to Eastern. When I first came to school here I had low expectations for myself. I had ideas of the person I wanted to be but I didn't think I could become that person. I wanted to be someone who was a part of our community, someone who had a lot of skills, and someone who took advantage of the opportunities we have at this university. These characteristics embodied a version of myself I had no idea how to reach. In my mind, this was so unattainable that it almost wasn't worth pursuing. Despite my concerns, I felt compelled to try anyway.

On the day of my transfer orientation, I was given a tour of Lumpkin Hall and had the opportunity to ask questions about our college. I was curious if there were any student organizations for women like me who were business majors, hoping that if I could join I would start being involved in our community. Luckily enough I was introduced to Dr. Melody Wollan, who willingly answered my questions. Unfortunately, she told me that there wasn't an active organization like I the one was seeking, but she suggested that I start one myself and offered herself to be the advisor. Start a student organization? My immediate thought was to say no, of course. This is coming from a girl who was too scared to ask her first-grade teacher if she could go to the bathroom and ended up wetting her pants. I didn't know the first thing about starting or running a student organization. I thought about this for a few days and came to a realization. This was exactly what I had been looking for, an opportunity. Opportunity to lead, to develop my

skills, to be a part of the community. Here was this opportunity, on a silver platter, and my initial reaction was to run away from it. I knew then that if I wanted to start living up to my expectations, then it was time to take some risks.

So that was the beginning, I made the decision to work with Dr. Wollan and bring our student organization to life. I was extremely motivated from the start but I still felt a lot of uncertainty. I wasn't sure if other students would be interested and I didn't want to become overwhelmed by the responsibilities. Regardless of the reservations I had, I met other highly motivated students who were willing to put in the work. We planned events, held meetings, and made some real connections. All of that happened nearly three years ago and now, there's a whole new group of ladies continuing to run that club. It's an honor to think that after I leave here, the remnants of something I helped get started will continue.

My time as a student leader was a wonderful experience, although it was only the first of many other opportunities that were presented to me. The community that exists within this university made it very easy to be put on a path of success. I learned quickly that the faculty members care deeply about student involvement and development. Dr. Wollan, who became my mentor, recommended that I serve on our Dean's student advisory board. I had the chance to meet other student leaders and discuss important topics in the college of business and technology. I noticed that like much of Eastern's faculty, my fellow students would also make an effort to support and uphold the ambitions of those around them. During my time as the student president, I was asked to do an interview about my organization for the Daily Eastern News. The student who interviewed me asked if I'd be interested in writing columns for them. By then it had become very easy for me to say yes with little hesitation. I recognized that there was some risk in

not taking advantage of what comes my way. I didn't want to look back and wonder if I missed out on developing skills unknown to my future self.

Here I am now, a college graduate. I'm moving into the next stage of my life and I will do so equipped with the same determination I had when I came here. The accomplishments and knowledge I've acquired while at this university will stay with me as I move through the world. Eventually, I want to run a business of my own, I don't know when that will happen but I feel prepared to do so. While my professors were proving me with skills of accounting, analysis, and professionalism, my position as a student leader taught me collaboration, communication, and community. All of these skills embody the qualities of a successful business person.

I would imagine, that like me most of you want to work in a different place than where you grew up. Leaving the comfort of your hometown, and leaving your university is scary. I want to work in as many places as I can. Having the chance to interact with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures is important to me. Deciding to come to college at all means having to accept being around people who act, think and speak differently than you do. I've already learned how to navigate one environment unfamiliar to me, and I will do it again.

What I really want to do after I graduate is something I invite you all to do as well. And that is to continue testing the boundaries of what you believe you can accomplish. And to not allow fear of failure to dictate what you can and can not do in this life. There are so many people who may place doubts in your head about what you can be, but you should not be one of them. Know that you've done something so valuable that it will affect every decision you make for the rest of your life, in the best way. To the class of 2022 I leave you with this; progress through life as if you will accomplish everything goal you set for yourself, and don't be surprised when you do.