Some of us met for the first time 2 years ago at Opening Convocation. I quoted the great poet Dr. Seuss and we talked about all the places you could go. And, boy, did you go! You have explored the canopies of Ecuador, worked the land on an eco-farm in Nicaragua, participated in ciphers on the streets of Berlin, studied youth culture in the beauty of Alaska and represented Guttman as scholars all over the country.

You have marched the streets of Manhattan demanding that the world pay attention to climate change and black lives. You have written letters to the governor and chancellor in support of funding for CUNY.

I have heard you debate the merits of constructivist learning and the role of ethnography in personal and professional development with the same passion as we deconstructed the feminist and black nationalist themes of Beyonce’s Lemonade.

On behalf of all of us sitting here on the stage, I want to say “Thank you.” Thank you for taking a chance on Guttman. For entrusting us with your future. For coming to class at 8am and staying until 6. For hustling up and down 6th Ave to and from SPS. Thank you for being patient while the laptops loaded and for filling out all those survey forms. You showed up and you went all in. And as hard as you worked toward the goal of graduation, we tried to stay one step ahead of you - making sure your needs were met and that you had the tools for success. Please know that we work very hard to provide a top-notch college experience. Your professors were educated at the nation’s top institutions. We came to Guttman from prestigious four-year universities. Did we dilute our scholarship to fit our community college students? No! We didn’t! And we didn’t have to. We set our expectations just as high as they would be for any student at four year colleges. And you met every challenge. You passed every milestone. I know it wasn’t always easy, but you did it with grace.

And look at you now, each one of you followed your own path to 50 W 40th Street. We had this moment together and now you move on to your different destinies. You leave here to become homicide detectives, sociologists, psychologists, mathematicians, veterinarians, nurses and educators. And that’s just for your Bachelor’s degrees! Many of you will continue your education and complete your MBA, MSW, JD, PhD or MD.

So, naturally I have to give you some advice, because that’s what commencement speakers do. My first piece of advice for you - set goals. When I was in 3rd or 4th grade, I sat down and made a list of things I wanted to accomplish. Then I stashed it somewhere safe and revised it as needed. 7th grade - learn clarinet. Check. 8th grade - make the varsity basketball team - check. 12th grade – graduate valedictorian. Get a full scholarship to college. Check. Check. College - graduate with honors. Check. Get Ph.D. Check. The Ph.D. was the last thing on that list. My mom and I burned it together and watched the ashes float away. It was a one of the best celebrations of my life! I crushed every goal on that list (and there were about 20 of them). Each time I did, I crossed it off and that in itself was a time to pause and celebrate my accomplishment. So, my second piece of advice to you is to make time to celebrate the ALL the things. The little ones (making an A on a paper) and the big ones (like today’s celebration). Each time we achieve a goal, we are one step closer to our dreams. And that is worth celebrating.
And lastly, be diligent. Be the early bird that gets the worm; don’t make excuses, make plans; take risks; and whatever you do, don’t let haters derail you. Don’t even entertain it. What you’ve accomplished here may set you apart from others and that’s okay. You may now find yourself in the position to be a role model. Do it! Be someone that other people can look up to.

I am so proud of you all! I am excited about your potential! I cannot wait to hear back from you in the semesters and years to come about all of the amazing things that you are doing.