

Commencement remarks

D. Rosowsky, May 2026

Tufts University School of Engineering



Congratulations Graduates! I am so happy – and so honored – to join you today, to celebrate your accomplishments, and share in the collective pride and excitement of this special day.

Wow! I can't believe I am standing on this side of a Tufts commencement ceremony on the green. On The Hill. At my alma mater.

I'm looking out at you and remembering my two commencement ceremonies, one for my BSCE and the other my MSCE.

Now, this was the 80s, so my memories aren't entirely clear.

I may not be able to remember who was sitting next to me, or what I was doing the night before. But I do remember our two commencement speakers.

The infamous Tip O'Neill, politician from Massachusetts who served as the 47th speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987; and the inimitable Gloria Steinham, renowned journalist and social-political activist who emerged as a nationally recognized leader of second-wave feminism in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Now, if I can remember that four decades later, you can understand how it's a little daunting to be standing in front of you today, hoping to say something – or make you think about something – that YOU will recall in 40 years.

I can recall my feelings, sitting where you are today. Excitement, some uncertainty, relief (that I passed ES-3, circuits, that I somehow deferred until my senior year spring semester), and a sense that – while anything was possible (as I was being told by the speakers) – I still needed to pick a path and go down it.

That was when I realized I was on my own, to make my own decisions, choose my own paths, make my own mistakes, and – hopefully – make more of own good choices. My parents wouldn't be there. My favorite faculty members wouldn't be there. Even some of my closest college friends wouldn't be there.

That was also something I came to realize... that I could still call on all of these people, seek them out for advice or guidance or just to listen to me noodle through a decision. But that, too, fell on my shoulders. I had to make the effort. And I can tell you from experience – good, bad, hard, and even hurtful – that I never regretted making the effort to reach out to these trusted people.

These are the people who love you, who want for you, and who can see you for your failings and still know you can come out on top.

You are not losing them. You are moving them into a new position, you are asking them to play a new role, and you are establishing a new (and equally precious) relationship with them.

In my case, my journey – my decisions – took me to Johns Hopkins for my PhD, and then onward into the world of higher education and a nearly four-decade long career in teaching, research, and leadership.

At each step, I reflected on my career trajectory and each time I did that, I came to one foundational conclusion: It was my Tufts education that prepared me for success.

I used to tell people I had the closest thing to a Liberal Arts degree in Engineering you could get. And that's a great thing.

And with each career step, pivot, and new set of challenges, that point became more evident – and more important. Tufts prepared me as a broad-thinking engineer.

It was my Tufts education that allowed me to cross disciplines, cross cultures, and cross barriers to develop and implement solutions, and to do so in a way that was effective, respectful, and responsible – whether to people, to our communities, to our planet, or to our precious and shared futures.

I was a better PhD student at Hopkins because of my Tufts education. I was a better professor because of my Tufts education. I was a better engineering researcher because of my Tufts education. And I was a better leader because of my Tufts education.

So lean into your Tufts pedigree. Take comfort and confidence in all that your degree will mean throughout your lives. Your light will shine brighter, and your stock will forever be rising.

Right now, all of your lights are right here – on The Hill. But starting tomorrow, your lights will disperse across the country and even around the world.

Know that you will always be connected to this special place, to the special people sitting next to you, and to the entire Tufts community.

The world has changed in the last 40 years. A lot. And the world will change a lot more in the next 40 years, and that change will come faster. And with that change will come uncertainty, fear, anxiety, and difficult times.

One thing is certain: CHANGE is part of the journey we are on. And one thing is known: the PACE of change will never be slower than it is today. Your Tufts engineering degree – as mine has – will serve you well.

Your generation of graduates must be nimble and agile, pivot-ready and risk-tolerant. You will each need to find your own North Star – something to guide you and something to fall back on when faced with decisions, conflicts, opportunities, challenges, and losses.

But I promise you, as that North Star comes into focus – and it will take time, perhaps even many years – what burns brightest and hottest at the center will be what you take with you from this time at Tufts.

Several years ago when I was a provost, I used to tell our graduates each spring that we were counting on them to solve the very serious problems we face as a people, population, and planet. That our very future depended on their wisdom, their ingenuity, their commitment, and their success.

All of that is still true. But we live today in a period that has been characterized as a meta-crisis. A period of political upheaval, economic insecurity, social unrest, global conflict, and attempts to foment hatred, create divisions, and unwind progress that has been made over decades. And this is not just in our country. This is happening around the world.

You are launching into that very messy world with the two greatest advantages I can imagine: a Tufts engineering degree and the boundless energy of someone in their 20s.

Democracy's fragility is on full display. The world order is being challenged. The gap between the wealthy and the poor is widening. And we still haven't figured out how to solve then greatest problems that would seem to be the simplest to fix: (1) feeding the world's population with the sufficiency we know exists in the world's food supply, and (2) stopping practices we know to be doing the most damage – the most permanent and lasting damage – to the only thing that sustains us, Earth. There is no Plan B.

So today I am adding this to my hopes for each of you – and for each of those you will work with, inspire, lead, and perhaps raise: Use your gifts wisely. Focus your energies on where they are most needed. And do the work that speaks to you.

Love what you do. Give generously. Show our nation and the world a new path forward. Lead us in better directions. Engineers, start your engines!

Guide us with brighter lights. Your lights.

Go with grace. Proceed with purpose.

Today marks the end of your chapter as students at Tufts. It's a capstone, and one the deserves to be celebrated, but it's called Commencement for a reason. Commencement also marks a beginning as you enter the next chapter in your professional careers. You are armed with one of the best tools you can have – an engineering degree from Tufts University.

So go forward, go onward, and go upward – with humility, with humanity, with grace and with purpose. Your successes will shine brightly on Tufts and on your faculty.

But it will also add needed points of light to our communities, our nation, and our world.

Tufts is known for its points of light. And today you become one of them.

Whether human health, infrastructure security and sustainability, advanced diagnostics and therapeutics, alternative energy sources and systems, autonomous vehicles, advanced manufacturing, cyber infrastructure and cybersecurity, robotics, or advanced materials – your knowledge and your commitment to leveraging your Tufts degree and your Tufts experience to do well (AND to do good) will help to create a better world – one that is safer, more resilient, and more just.

And that's a world I look forward to being part of.

I'd like to close my remarks today by sharing a piece I wrote for the commencement ceremony on my own campus when I was a provost, which I have modified ever so slightly for this occasion.

It's called, appropriately enough, "Light on the Hill."

Today is a day rich in tradition, steeped in ritual, marked by ornate pageantry.

Your gowns, your caps, your stoles are all timeless and universal symbols of your dedication to learning, and more specifically to advanced study. (I often say universities are the only places you get to dress up and parade around in medieval robes.)

As we take this moment to reflect on the significance of this day, let us consider a symbol unique to Tufts University – the steeple of Goddard Chapel.

The steeple is a beacon, an icon, a reminder of the importance of our university, and a familiar anchor that illuminates our way.

This light on the hill is as compelling as it is constant. It serves as a reminder of the powerful role that great universities play in our communities and our society, and of the tremendous opportunities afforded those of us who have had the privilege to study and learn there.

This light is also a symbol of your preparation, your promise, and the profound responsibility you now have to illuminate the paths of others.

Yes, let today be a day of celebration, but let it also be a day of commitment to the future, and commitment to the important role each of you will play in creating a safe, sustainable, and prosperous tomorrow – for those of us who have had the great privilege of standing under our beautiful steeple – and more importantly, for those who have not.

Congratulations Tufts School of Engineering Class of 2026. Congratulations Graduates!

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