

June 16, 2017
2017 SESP Convocation
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Thank you so much for that introduction. You are not the only person that told me they did not first like me. Good evening, everyone! I miss hot summer days as a child. I miss running around without a care in the world. I miss filling water balloons up and having water balloon fights with the kids.

I overfilled my balloons. So many times they exploded, leaving colorful rings around the faucet head, and I, soaked and angry, already losing the fight. Leaving me hating the balloons for being so weak and not reaching the capacity I wanted. I didn't want to be complacent and settle for barely filled water balloons.

I wanted the balloons to expand, but I didn't realize for this expansion to occur, I had to be in tune with them and be aware of their bursting points. I know you're all wondering 'why is this guy talking about water balloons?' but hang in there with me.

Class of 2017, you must never be complacent. However, learn from my childhood mistakes. To accomplish this expansion, you must be in tune with your own personal vessels and be aware of your own personal bursting points. This is possible if you take care of yourself, and if you never forget who you are and appreciate your growth.

There's my first point. If I were cognizant of the water balloon's bursting point, I could expand the balloon without it bursting. Water balloons are meant to explode, but only when you're ready for them to, at the right time and right place.

To come back to complacency, you must be aware of your own personal bursting point. You can do this by being aware of your mental health and taking care of yourself. We have world-class academics here, and we also have world-class students.

Students that consistently seek to expand their vessels in every endeavor, no matter the pressure. Students who are hard-working, critical thinkers and leaders. Students who have tough course loads in conjunction with extracurricular activities while navigating under the pressure of the quarter system, a system of midterms and papers due almost every other week so unfortunately, we're also known for putting academics over self-care and mental health.

As a low-income student, I was tasked with navigating masculinity and responsibility with very little support. There were times in which reminders of my previous experiences, of poverty and instability, lurked all around me. This compiled with the

memories that I received as a youth created a perfect formula for low self-esteem, depression and a debilitating psyche.

The tragic death of George said, 'it's okay to not be okay.' That you can trust and open up to people that care about you and that there is power in being vulnerable.

On to my next point. When you're in tune with something, you gain a greater appreciation of it. With that comes a greater understanding of it, and with that greater understanding, comes the opportunity to master whatever you're in tune with.

If I was in tune with the balloon, I would have known exactly what I need today to achieve the expansion I thought. So to further our expansion we must be in tune with our vessels and master them. The greatest way to accomplish this is by never forgetting who you are and appreciating your growth.

We have met with strife and disaster. Some of you may not even recognize yourself from your freshman year counterpart. I know sometimes, I see old pictures of myself, and I wonder if I even knew who that person is.

Think about the identities, relationships, and goals that you held near and dear to your heart. What did they look like now? I did some reflection on this myself as I was preparing to write this speech.

Like many students, I came to know Northwestern wanting to pursue premed and like many students, after a couple of premed classes, I realized I had to get out. This left me lost with no goals or passions. I had no clue what I wanted to do with my life, and then I transferred to the School of Education and Social Policy.

I became aware of the laws, policies and issues that play in the lives of the black and brown people that call America home. I spent my practicum on the west side of Chicago. This experience was a groundbreaking.

I had the ability to work with lawyers doing a wide array of criminal and justice work. I got a close view of it and saw how broken the system is. This experience was a turning point of my life. I made a promise to myself, I would dedicate my life so that equality and diversity can be more than just objectives on board room walls, so that mass incarceration can be a thing of the past.

I guess you can say I found my passion while in SESP. We have all grown tremendously, but circumstances change and we must be able to recognize that and

not take it for granted. It is imperative to reflect on these changes and truly appreciate our growth.

Take a second. I imagine some of you can't even fathom seeing this day. Some of you have fought hard to be where you are now. At times, you felt that your best wasn't good enough. You may have been on the verge of giving up, but you never did.

You have experienced highs and lows, but the highs put the lows in perspective and give you a better appreciation of this. Be proud and cherish this and never forget this.

I want you to never forget what you bring to the table is priceless. Yes, we may have our flaws, but they make us unique and add flavor to the world. Embrace your flaws wholeheartedly and own them. These beautiful imperfections make you perfect in your own respect. I see before you, a room full of people who have withstood the pressures that we call Northwestern University.

People eager to expand. People standing under the faucet of life ready to be filled and not just take everything that the world throws at you. Demand to be given what you deserve and never settle for less. Finally, never be complacent. Understand the importance of time. Time is one of the most precious substances in the world. It's also one of the world's greatest paradoxes. It's infinite and limited. Do not let complacency rob you of your time.

One thing I have learned at my time here at Northwestern, is that complacency is toxic. It's the very antithesis of process. It will make you wish your time is spent in a place that doesn't challenge you or meet the goals you set for yourself.

Learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. To not be afraid to have difficult conversations with those you feel uncomfortable with. You may feel like you're at your bursting point. Explore new things. Do not be afraid to take risks. Sometimes the safe choice isn't always the best choice.

Getting out of your comfort zone puts pressure on you until you reach your bursting point, and you then must decide which is worse, the pain of staying the same or the pain of change. And from there, real growth occurs. At times, we have overshot our comfort zones, uncertain of what lies ahead, uncertain of our capacity to succeed. I dare you to fill yourself to your bursting point. Stretch out your limits, but check yourself at heights higher than you can ever imagine.

Go places that you have only seen in your dreams. Do not let those falling grains of sand become martyrs to your complacency. In closing, I am so thankful for this

community within the School of Education and Social Policy. I believe I found my passion because of SESP's amazing community, a community like no other.

It's open, encouraging and insightful. At SESP, we're known for being the little school that could and for being world savers. We're known for fostering new ideas and changing perspective. For possessing an intense feeling about community and for encouraging exponential learning in conjunction with academic endeavors.

With this community, I can engage in dialogue that help to further insight my passion that lives inside of me. A couple of years ago, I never imagined I would have the courage to give a speech to my graduating class, but SESP and becoming more involved in the black community taught me valuable lessons about complacency. This allows me to expand my vessel and became the man you see before you today. A confident man with drive and purpose.

I have come a long way from being a lost and hopeless poor immigrant from Nigeria. Class of 2017, I want nothing more than to see your constant expansion. But this can only happen if you consistently defy complacency.

You must learn from my childhood mistakes. You must be aware of your own personal bursting points and take care of yourself. You must be in tune with your own personal vessels and never forget who you are and appreciate your growth. Class of 2017, 'impossible' is only impossible until someone makes it possible. Go defy complacency. Thank you, congratulations and God bless!