

Rosanna Lara's Commencement Speech 2020
Liberal Arts Ceremony: 1 pm.

Thanks President Glenn for the introduction. Good afternoon and congratulations graduating Class of 2020 and 2021. My name is Rosanna Lara, and it is such an honor to represent the Liberal Arts class. Congratulations to all the graduates and their families who are celebrating this day with you today. I hope we all can look back on where we are proud of our own personal achievements. We should view this day not only as the day we graduate from college, but also a time where we have graduated from life itself.

In my remarks, I want to share how Northern Essex has helped shape the direction of my life, and I hope that, in my story, you will find parallels with your own.

My journey hasn't always been easy. But the experiences I've had, bad as well as good, have helped me get where I want to be on my way to a career in Public Health.

Born and raised in the Dominican Republic, I came to the United States in 2005 to live with my Dad. I was a 17-year-old with both dreams and doubts. I remember my first years here: starting high school as a senior was extremely difficult because I was struggling with the language. My personal digital translator, a gift from my Dad, quickly became my best friend. I would use it to translate assignments from English to Spanish and then, after I wrote my assignments in Spanish, I would translate them back to English. It took a lot of time, but let me tell you, that translator is still -- to this day -- my best friend!

Just as it has been for so many of you, getting here to graduation hasn't been easy. In fact, it has been a long 14 years for me, with many more life challenges that I could not have anticipated when I began college courses in 2006 to improve my

English. Then, in 2009, I began a family, delayed further education, and by 2015 was a mother of three. This joy was overshadowed when my oldest son had to endure two major surgeries. Those years were most difficult. But we persevered.

Just when I thought everything was going well, my world was again turned upside down when I got laid off from my job just ten months after we bought our first house. At first, I felt frustrated and wondered why this was happening to us. Then, I took hold of myself and decided we would somehow get through it. I told myself that everything happens for a reason. Sometimes good things fall apart so better things can come together. That was the moment I decided to enroll at NECC, get my Associates degree, and keep going after my dream.

Nothing was going to stop me. I was so energized that I found myself taking five courses, doing work-study, and involved in leadership roles outside the classroom.

At what seemed like the perfect time, my mother made the decision to come visit and stay with my family to provide some relief and help with the kids. Unfortunately, soon after she arrived, she developed health issues that led to hospitalization and a leg amputation. Now, my mom needed me more than ever. I was her primary caregiver and in addition to going to school, I was now traveling to Boston every day to sit by her side. I would take exams and write essays in the hospital hallway.

I considered quitting college. But my husband, Newton, stepped in, took over responsibility for our three children and home and encouraged me to focus on just two things -- my mom's health and my schoolwork. He became my life-support. That semester, I earned 5 A's.

My time at NECC taught me, much more than coursework, and I hope that, your lessons learned have gone far beyond the classroom as well. Like me, I am sure that many of you have also learned that there will always be obstacles that we must face. And my hope is that, you will continue to stand up and face those challenges. In order for you to achieve your goals and aspirations, you must fight, persist, work hard, be firm in your goals, and believe in yourself and your possibilities. Above all, surround yourself with those who will support you in your dreams.

Every member of the class of 2020 and 2021 should take pride in having completed our degrees under such difficult circumstances. These are trying time, but we have proven to be resilient, and I know we will go forth and do amazing things in our community and the world.

I am proud to be graduating from NECC, a place that has opened many opportunities for me and so many before me. Even Though, my story has been full of challenges, it has also been full of rewarding experiences.

I want to thank my family, my professors, and everyone who has supported me throughout my college journey. I could not have accomplished this without your support.

My last thought for the graduating NECC class is that the last two years we have had to face many challenges, so being here today reaffirms that we are stronger than we thought and the way we have persevered shows that we can overcome everything that life throws at us. Now, this is our time to celebrate our remarkable achievement. Congratulations class of 2020 and 2021 once again ... We did it!!!! Let celebrate!