

**Anna Smith**  
**SESP Convocation Remarks**  
**2024**

*Anna Smith, a 2024 graduate of the School of Education and Social Policy, studied social policy and business institutions. While at Northwestern, she worked with the Institute of Policy Research and served as a campus ambassador for the Women's Network, the largest collegiate networking organization meant to cultivate women's ambition.*

*She also participated in The Garage's Propel cohort, a grant program for women entrepreneurs, and oversaw teaching undergrads for her business fraternity. Outside of school, she is an advocate and spokesperson for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. After graduation, she will be assuming a role in business fundraising and hopes to pursue other interests in creative writing, female mentorship, and promoting equity in the professional world.*

Friends, family, and my fellow graduates, it is an honor to be with you today. I want to thank the School of Education and Social Policy, lovingly deemed SESP, for being one of the smallest schools. We'll be out of here in no time.

Unlike my quick remarks, I did think this time in our lives would last longer. To my peer undergrads, it's crazy to think that it was four years ago we stepped onto campus, into our dorm rooms, and onto Zoom. Still, I remember the excitement buzzing all around us, growing with every new experience, despite the uncertainty. My first ever class was SESP 200, and the faces I'm looking out at now are the same that I met virtually on day one. Freshman year during COVID was an odd time, to say the

least. I remember going on walks to make friends. On the lake fill, in Chicago January.

Class of 2024, it wasn't easy to get here today. Our resilience was tested again and again. We've had times of great momentum accompanied by setbacks. We were challenged in every aspect of the word: in our studies, our social life, and by the world climate we live in. But throughout it all, we've had each other. SESP has been my home all four years, and I am so thankful for the community found right here.

So what does the SESP community mean to me? Is it Annenberg 3rd-floor discussions? Is it the different colored cursors on my Google doc as I study for a midterm? Is it the professors who can do both: bring cookies for the class and publish groundbreaking research? Is it my class loading up on a bus and exploring south side Chicago and the history that is too often overlooked? Is it every teacher knowing my name? I mean it *is* Anna Smith.

Is it the announcements signed with the moniker SESPLove? Is it the student worker smiling at me as I take Jolly Ranchers out of the candy bowl? Is it sitting down to dine with the dean, telling him our life stories, experiences, and what we could all do better. Or was it my advisor sending an email with the simple subject line "checking in" after I lost a parent sophomore year?

Whenever I look back at my time in SESP, I don't remember the nights in the library, or that paper that I probably should've edited more. I remember the people surrounding me, pushing me not just to be a better version of myself, but to find myself. And pulling me up with them.

As a community, we made sure that together we all succeed, even if it looks differently for each individual. As a community, we made sure that every voice gets heard, and stand up for those being silenced. In SESP we learn what cannot be taught; to challenge our assumptions, to think critically and for ourselves, to see something and immediately think what could be better. And never accepting the status quo.

Now, it's scary to graduate and leave this supportive community. Soon, we will leave this place and SESP will be scattered to different cities, countries, and activities. I will not stand up here and pretend it will all be easy.

Transitions and changes are difficult, we entered university during a challenging time and leave during one. But when I am sitting in my empty shoebox apartment in New York, where my boss will probably not bring cookies to work, I will hold on to the memories made here. The lessons learned through trial.

I'm going to try this thing out and give myself new homework after graduation. My assignment? To find community in unlikely places, to cultivate and grow little examples of SESP everywhere. Places of open dialogue, of sparking change, of inclusivity, and lots and lots of laughter.

I will not be graded with finals, or GPAs but on if when I look at my little corner of the world, it reflects something similar to all of you. I have truly been inspired by the passion of my peers. I'm not worried one bit about any of you, but I will be so excited to hear all about it when we meet again.

I could've chosen some other theme to leave you with, but I am a believer that SESP has never been defined by what we do but what we do for others. This world desperately needs more communities like this.

So class of 2024, congratulations. You should be proud of yourself just as I am proud to be one of you. Showing up every day, being willing to work, and eager to participate for these past four years has led us to show up here today. Please take this moment in and enjoy it. Just remember your homework begins tomorrow. Thank you.