

Thank you Mr. Registrar.

Good afternoon Chancellor Bubber; President and Vice-Chancellor Davis; members of the board and administration; faculty and alumni; honoured guests; and of course, fellow-graduates.

I have the great opportunity to share with you my story of my journey as a Kwantlen student, and what had led me here.

It's difficult to sum up such a big experience in a few minutes. The closest I can get is by sharing with you my mantra. This mantra has led me through my personal and academic life, through primary school and high school in Kenya, to university in South Africa, and to university here, at KPU.

My mantra is: That nothing is *that* serious. It's a motto of encouragement, that when things don't go as planned, to get back up and keep trying. Through good situations and bad situations, silly ones and serious ones, this mantra has kept me going.

For example, when I was 14 had a crush on this very pretty girl that, despite all my efforts, ended in heartbreak. I felt like my world was collapsing around me at the time – but my friend told me that everything would be okay, that "hey, it's not that serious." In high school, after I trained for weeks only to not make the team for a soccer tournament, we told each other: "It's okay, it's not serious. Next tournament."

After high school, I headed out to Johannesburg for university and I took this mantra with me. Unfortunately, while it may have helped me deal with high school and my earlier life, it didn't work as well in this new environment. I started failing exams because I didn't study. My friends and I would tell ourselves: "It's just the first exam. It's not that serious. We'll make up for it in the next assignment." We never did make up for it, because we repeated this slogan for subsequent assessments. I decided to quit university because I never took anything seriously. Except, perhaps, this mantra.

It was my mom who helped me realize that when we face obstacles and challenges these things shouldn't discourage us. She reminded me that it's important to value opportunities, and to apply yourself equally when things are going well, and when things are going poorly.

When I came to Canada, I remembered a very important condition of the mantra that I had forgotten in my time in SA (thanks to my mom): If you've done everything you can personally do to try to achieve something, and you're unsuccessful because of elements outside of your control, you shouldn't take it as failure.

That's why failure should never be that serious: you've done your part; the rest is beyond you, so you shouldn't stress about it. That was the condition my mom put forth, she said: "You put in effort, Alex, and leave the rest to me."

And so I came to Kwantlen to do the Associates degree in Political Science. I was finally finding something that I loved, that I actually took seriously, and had a keen interest in: I was an international student in a completely foreign country, who's now eager to take on and learn more about the world.

This eagerness led me into conversations with Heather Harrison who's the program coordinator of the new Policy Studies program, once I finished the Associates degree.

I saw Policy Studies as an opportunity to be part of something new, something different from what I'd been doing, different from what is being previously offered, and a challenge because it was somewhat out of my comfort zone.

Prior to my first course, I had no clue about policy, environmentalism or sustainability.

I joined the Policy Studies program, which was brand new and still being developed even when I was enrolled in it. The newness and thus experimental nature of the program gave us students the momentum to take what we were learning beyond the classroom.

Through the "philosophy" that comes with being part of Policy Studies I've volunteered with NGOs; we've tackled sustainability on campus with the Policy Studies group; I've been involved in committees with the student association, and found myself speaking up for student interests on campus and outside. None of which I had previously done, because I had never had the motivation to apply myself.

Back to this mantra that raised me in Kenya – the one that led to learning some tough lessons in SA – has changed with my time here at Kwantlen. I know that, positivity is important, but so is finding something important to you, applying yourself, committing to doing your best, and seizing new opportunities when they arise.

While many things in life may never be as serious as we sometimes make them out to be, Kwantlen taught me that one of the keys to life is finding those things that you want to be serious about. Thanks to my classmates, instructors and advisors, and with the support of my family, friends and my girlfriend, I learned to take myself seriously and to take charge of my own fortune, and to embrace the challenges beyond your control.

Thank you for listening to my story and congratulations graduates!