Jade Cruz carried her 7-month-old son, Oliver Robinson, after crossing the stage to receive her bachelor's degree in biology at Suffolk University's commencement. Graduates of Brandeis, Tufts, and Boston University also were honored at commencements on Sunday. B1, B3.
She made history as the first African-American woman to win an Oscar for costume design after she created an "Afro-future" style for a superhero, and on Sunday, Ruth E. Carter called on Suffolk University graduates to create their own adventures in life.

Carter, a Springfield native who won the award for 2018’s "Black Panther," spoke during the commencement ceremony for Suffolk’s College of Arts & Sciences Sunday afternoon in the Seaport.

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Suffolk held three commencement ceremonies Sunday for 2,137 graduates from its Sawyer Business School, College of Arts & Sciences, and Suffolk Law School at the Seaport.
“Black Panther” features the fictional country of Wakanda, and Carter described the process of creating the look of a highly advanced society with deep roots in many of the real-life nations of Africa. Marvel wanted the film’s look and design to be authentically African, and encouraged her to create what she called “Afro-future,” she said. “Marvel may have created the first black superhero, but through costume design, we turned him into an African king,” Carter said, quoting from her own Oscar acceptance speech in February.

The film was also an opportunity for Carter to design for strong female characters. “Through the costumes, it was an honor to showcase the tradition and royalty, and to imagine beauty and the empowered woman who can look and feel on-screen,” she said.

Carter said she views “Black Panther” as a “career-defining full-circle experience” for herself and an opportunity to immerse herself in many African cultures. “I was showcasing a point of view, the African culture and diaspora, and using technology, intertwining it with imagination, and using technology, and the African diaspora,” she said.

In her remarks, Carter talked about the support she received from her mother and a professor at Hampton University, where she designed costumes for campus productions and earned her undergraduate degree.

At one point, she considered dropping out, but her professor inspired her to stay in school and showed her the discipline she would need as an artist. Carter completed her degree, returned to Springfield, and quickly realized that she would need to leave home if she was going to pursue a career in costume design, she said.

That decision, which ultimately drew her to Hollywood, also led to collaborations with directors like Spike Lee, with whom she worked on “Malcolm X.”

Her work in film reignited her passion for studying African and African-American history and literature, she said. She read the work of artists including Lorraine Hansberry, Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, and James Baldwin.

She became an expert in period design, and she got a job creating the costumes for “Amistad,” directed by Steven Spielberg, she said.

Among the graduates was Jade Cruz, 22, who earned a bachelor’s degree in biology Sunday.

“I am so excited for the next chapter of my life,” Cruz said, holding her 7-month-old son, Oliver Robinson, in her arms. Cruz is engaged to Patrick Robinson, 23, who recently graduated Northeastern University with a bachelor’s degree in business management.

“I’m so honored to be in her presence; she really spoke about the hard work it takes, especially as a woman, and a woman of color,” Cruz said.

Brenna Gomes, 22, who earned her bachelor’s degree in public relations, praised the work Carter has done.

“I really don’t know what the future holds for me, but I’m so proud to have graduated from a university like this,” Gomes said.

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