

I am so excited to be here with you today to celebrate your amazing achievement. Our program has come a long way in three years. Many of you here started out among our early cohorts of students.

Thank you so much for taking a chance on a new program. Through your participation and feedback, our program has become stronger, and our classes have become better, benefiting future generations of students.

I just came back from a trip to Singapore, where I met many Singaporean MCIT Online students for the first time. There are more than 40 MCIT Online students based in Singapore alone. I held my first kickoff teaching staff meeting yesterday for CIT 595. For the first time, we have TAs and teaching fellows from the US including Hawaii, China, and Europe, all on the same Zoom call. Through that Singapore meetup, the CIT 595 meeting, and our reception today, I am reminded of the global impact this program has, the scale in which we are transforming lives, and our ability to bring the world closer together through education.

Right from the onset, your application profiles told us this program will be truly unique. You come from banking, healthcare, education, public service, and agriculture. Among you are stay home moms and dads, individuals 10 years into their current jobs, individuals starting out their careers and others getting close to retirement. Some of you put your careers on hold when your kids were young, and wanted to resume entering the workforce as they were older. For many of you, you wanted a chance to hit the reset button—to transition out of an existing career and begin something new and exciting.

After you graduate, I am positive that you will go on to successful careers in the tech industry and beyond, whether by joining a big tech company or starting your own tech ventures. I had the privilege of teaching some of you in CIS 553 in your final semester. Based on the quality of your final group projects where you had to build complex distributed systems over thousands of lines of code, I can confidently say that all of you are ready to have outstanding careers in the tech industry. I am sure my colleagues and fellow instructors feel the same as you are finishing up your final projects in other classes.

But that's just part of the story....

You have achieved all of this while balancing full-time jobs and family obligations. You juggled demanding work schedules, young children, new born babies, home purchases, kids baseball games, kitchen renovations, historic floods, and a lot more. And you did all that even as a global pandemic shut down the world and ravaged lives and economies around the globe

As an instructor, I have enjoyed our many conversations during my Open Office Hours that were always filled with great technical questions that tested my own knowledge at times. I will never forget my final CIS 553 open office hours with some of you. I came fully prepared to answer questions on the final exam, but in our last office hours in the final class you are taking before graduating, you came to talk about your hopes and dreams after graduation. You asked me if there were two more weeks in the semester, what else would I have taught you. I put away my document camera and we just chatted. At that moment, I realized MCIT Online wasn't just a final destination for you, but rather an integral part of your life-long professional development.

I had the privilege of working with many outstanding TAs, several of whom are here today. Your dedication to your fellow students is second to none. I like to provide some highlights. You volunteered to hold extra office hours close to deadlines without me asking. When a certain topic proved challenging to students, you volunteered to hold extra recitations without me asking. When OHQ is long, one slack message by a fellow TA is enough to get multiple TAs to come on board to help. I have seen this happen multiple times.

Once I called an emergency TA meeting via Slack at night to handle an extraordinary data loss issue. If you were my TA that semester, you know what I am talking about. Within 10 minutes, almost the entire TA team was on the Zoom call. We recovered all our data over the next few days.

Finally, what you have done in the CIT 595 autograder over several semesters is nothing short of an engineering marvel. The autograder can handle thousands of variations in student submissions and provide meaningful feedback to students. In addition to comprehensive black box testing, our autograders now can analyze the actual software written by students using LLVM, thanks to you applying knowledge they learnt in the software analysis elective course taught by Prof. Mayur.

I would like to thank the MCIT Online faculty for their dedication in providing a high-quality online learning experience for MCIT students. Many of them are here today. We owe our faculty a big thank you for stepping forward above and beyond all their other commitments on-campus. As early adopters of online learning way before the rest of the world did during the pandemic, they are the real pioneers in online learning. When we had to pivot the entire school quickly to remote learning on-campus in Spring 2020, I was thankful our school was able to count on your collective wisdom and knowledge gained from MCIT Online.

The MCIT staff team led by Rebecca Hayward has also been stellar, among the best academic staff team I have worked with at Penn. They are the unsung heroes – the ones who make sure the courses are developed on time, courses are run smoothly, and students' needs are met. Wherever difficult challenges I have asked for them to tackle, they always deliver.

Finally, I especially like to thank the CIS department chair Prof. Zack Ives for his support, without which we would not be able to roster so many of our MCIT Online classes on a consistent basis.

I would like to conclude by saying how gratifying I am to see all of you graduating today. We become faculty members because we want to change lives through our teaching and research. Being a part of MCIT Online has been one of the highlights of my career.

Once again, congratulations to all of you for your incredible achievement.