Good morning, everyone! Thanks for the kind introduction.

It’s an honor and privilege for me to join you, the graduating class and families, to celebrate this important milestone of yours. Thanks to the EE Department to bring me back to Princeton, this lovely land of Tigers outside a zoo. I noticed how tight the parking has become and how packed the traffic is now :-) . I wish there were a wonderful event in my time to bring together graduate students, family and faculty. This celebration brought my memory back to 13 years ago, when I was like many of you, about to put on the gown and receive a graduate diploma with the Princeton seal.

I am sure you all feel the excitement and have high expectations about your future. Some of you may feel somewhat uncertain. Perhaps you may be interested in hearing my experience since leaving the warmth of Princeton.

[My own career choice]
When I started out at Princeton after finishing college in China, I did not see myself to teach at a university after my PhD. Over the course of my graduate study at Princeton, I developed a genuine appreciation of the impact our professors have made on us graduate students: through courses, guiding us through research, and later, in our professional development. They taught us both big picture issues and details: how to give good talks, how to write a paper, how to go about job search, introducing us to their colleagues at conferences, and more -- I could see firsthand they helped us grow so much within just a few years at Princeton.

They also instill in us the value of freedom to explore new ideas, new challenges, to think outside the box. I saw from my professors the attraction and challenges of an academic career. But "freedom is never free". We hear much about the difficulty and uncertainty to establish oneself within a few short years, the uncertainty of promotion, etc. For me, I realize that it’s not easy for men, and few women was on EE faculty in U.S.. I had no idea whether this would be a career I would enjoy, and whether I can have a balanced life beyond work, but I thought it worth a good try. So after pondering with job offers from leading industrial research labs, I decided to
take the opportunity at University of Maryland, College Park as an assistant professor in ECE.

[The transition]
I soon found myself working hard, perhaps harder than ever, to learn the ropes of how to do the new job better. This is a period of transition. Graduate students have their professors as a last line of defense. A faculty member has to take the ultimate responsibilities, whether in teaching or in research, making decisions, handling sensitive or unexpected situations. This is awesome responsibility, because your decision may affect your colleagues and students. Whether or not each of us have a specific position labeled as "post-doc" on our resume, and whether or not our job is in academia or industry, we all go through a transition period after PhD during which we learn to go beyond the thinking as a graduate student. During the transition, we gain more technical and professional experience, build and expand professional network, learn to deal with unexpected and complex situations, and overall, learn to work more efficiently and effectively.

[Practical tips and thoughts to share]
Here I want to share with you two very helpful things I learned during this transition: no.1 -- not all days are rosy, be always prepared for the rainy day, and never never give up. What makes us excited may not always be well received, whether it's a paper, a proposal, or a cool idea just presented to your boss. This is especially so in dealing with a reviewer or a boss or colleague who tends to be very critical, or skeptical toward new ideas. It's not just you and me. It happens to many -- including many intellectual giants :-) It's ok to feel sad and depressed for a moment. Then take a deep breath and calm down. Look at the bright side: hey, we just got free consulting service from the reviewers or colleagues without spending a single penny :-) What do we do with the free goodies we get? Take those good ones and forget about those not useful. So take the same approach here: take as much constructive ideas as we can, look at the critiques with a positive lens -- perhaps there is something we could learn or do differently. And try again at the next opportunity. The willingness to try and try again, and learn from the past experience to do better the next time, is a dividing line between the ultimate success and failure.

The 2nd helpful thing is to develop a group of mentors who care about helping their junior colleague, particularly those who are interested in your professional growth and success, and who can offer frank and constructive advices. For the years after Princeton, I benefited tremendously from having an incredible mentor of the same technical area in my department, a mentor outside my area who was the first female engineering faculty at University of Maryland, and of course, my advisor at Princeton
Prof. Bede Liu. Their generous time, thoughtful opinions, encouragement, and sometimes just as a patient sounding board have helped me through different stages of my career. I feel very lucky in that sense, and I am confident many of you can also develop a strong mentor and support base around you.

Mentors in a new job location are familiar with the dynamics there; they can be instrumental to help you navigate in the new environment, pointing out important things to be aware of, and serving as cheerleaders and offering that positive lens when we face obstacles. It may also be helpful, when possible, to develop a mentoring relation with more than one mentor -- for example, to have one outside our specific tech area or organization. Although these additional mentors may not be keenly aware of the location specific issues, they may offer an enlightening perspective to complement the opinions and advice we get close to our work environment. Most importantly, do not let our advisors off the hook. They have signed up as our mentors for "life" :-). Do not forget your fellow colleagues in Princeton, for they are a great source of inspiration, encouragement and mentoring.

A successful mentoring relationship also requires the active participation of the person to be mentored. So take the initiative to seek advice and help. Be honest to yourself and swallow your pride to seek advice (especially when things may not go as well/smooth as we wished). Keep an open mind to follow through and give the advices you receive a chance to work.

[Give back to help others -- through mentoring, service broadly defined …]
As today is a day for celebration, the word "Thanks" is perhaps over used. However, it indeed takes the generosity of many people in order for us to arrive at where we are today. (I believe) A true appreciation should go beyond words.

Once settling down and passing the initial transition and no longer the rookie in the team, it is time to think of how we give back. Please participate in the annual fund drive that you will soon receive in mail from the University and Engineering School :-) Although each donation may be moderate, it can add up to something substantial, and can make a dent (e.g. to support new initiatives and activities).

Also, if we are the beneficiary of mentoring, then we should serve as a mentor to help those coming later to succeed. There is no better way to express our thanks than using our own action and effort to extend the legacy of generosity and scholarship of our faculty and mentors.

Mentoring is especially critical for some special groups. Some of the graduating class
are from abroad or from underrepresented groups. You have reached a milestone, and you will reach more. Perhaps your achievement is history making: for example, being the first female, the first African American (Latin American, ...), the first from your home country, the first from certain schools, to be in your elite organization, receive prestigious recognition, or appointed certain high positions. While we celebrate such achievements with pride, take a moment to think what we could do more. I know a few who made some of the 'firsts'. Although they are happy for their own achievements, I know they all would be happier if they are no longer the only ones with those honors. Through role models and mentoring, we can pave ways for more to come after us, so that there will soon be 2nd, 3rd, and more to achieve these success.

A broader picture of giving back is the Princeton spirit of service. The Princeton’s unofficial motto of "In the Nation’s Service and in the Service of All Nations" encourages students to engage in service in many forms. As a fresh graduate, there are quite a few ways you can get involved -- in both our new organizations, as well as in the technical community, My personal experience with services at IEEE, at my own university, and more recently with local K-12 schools, have been most rewarding. It helps to develop all-around skills and leadership experience that may bring new dimensions of impact we can make.

[Closing]
It is a true pleasure for me today to be invited to speak to this EE graduating class. I am honored and humbled by the invitation from Prof. Malik and the Department faculty -- there have been so many outstanding graduate alumni from our department (including here our Engineering School Dean Prof. Vincent Poor). And I believe we'll have many more in the future from today's graduating students. Once again, my wholehearted congratulations to all of you who are graduating. And congratulations to the advisors on your hard work of nurturing the students over the past years, and to the student families for having supported them along the way. Thank you!