

# Mercy College Holds First Virtual Commencement Ceremony to Celebrate 2020 Graduates



“You come here; you feel loved.

NO MATTER HOW HARD THINGS GET, YOU HAVE SOMEONE NEXT TO YOU.”

“Mercy is somewhere where you belong.

AND WHERE YOU FEEL LIKE WHAT YOU’RE DOING IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE.”

“I don’t see graduation as the end, I see it as the beginning

OF SOMETHING GOOD. AND I’LL ALWAYS HAVE MERCY TO BACK ME UP. IT’S MORE THAN JUST A SCHOOL TO ME.”

These heartfelt sentiments shared by members of Mercy College’s 2020 graduating class, who faced an extraordinary situation due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, held extra weight at this year’s commencement on May 20.

Mercy graduates adjusted to a new normal in the middle of the spring 2020 term as they experienced an abrupt transition from an in-person to

online learning format in the matter of a few days. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent social distancing mandates imposed by New York State, graduates were required to meet their degree requirements remotely.

With support from the entire Mercy College community, including PACT, the registrar’s office, the president’s office, student affairs and many other departments, the graduating class

traversed a challenging last term in stride.

The unprecedented wrap-up of the semester was made even more commemorative with the graduation of the first former College of New Rochelle (CNR) student cohort, who continued their degrees at Mercy College after Mercy entered into an agreement with CNR to provide a pathway for its students to continue their education after the institution’s

closing in August 2019.

While the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique set of challenges for Mercy College in organizing the virtual commencement ceremony, the administration worked swiftly over the course of two months to organize an online commencement, with plans to organize an in-person event, when that is safe to do so.

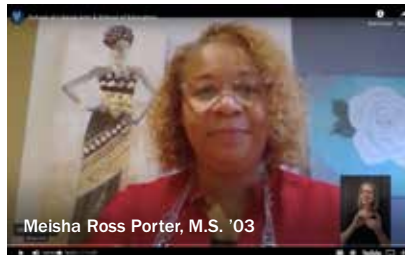
The virtual commencement included all the pomp and circumstance of an in-person ceremony and involved an integrated media strategy with engaging content from College leaders and students across multiple online platforms. On the day of the commencement, virtual videos were streamed on a dedicated microsite, [www.mercy.edu/commencement](http://www.mercy.edu/commencement). Videos were pre-recorded and watched in unison to mimic the feel of a live event. Graduates were mailed a cap and tassel and encouraged to share their “Tassel Moment,” (the movement of tassels on graduation caps from right to left to signify graduation) via social media channels.

The ceremony enjoyed by Mercy College students and their proud families, faculty, staff and alumni involved a college-wide video intended for the entire Mercy community, as well as individual, school-specific videos for the School of Business, School of Education, School of Health and Natural Sciences, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and School of Liberal Arts. In the school-specific ceremonies, students saw their names and photos announced across the screen in correlation with their degree programs.

In the college-wide ceremony, Mercy College Provost José Herrera, Ph.D. acknowledged the students’ victories: “I want to say how very proud I am of all of you. This has not been a typical spring term for anyone, and you have persevered to this very special graduation event. Despite the calamities, you have endured to get to this point in your career.”

At the conclusion of the main ceremony, after praising the graduating students for their persistence, President Hall

expressed his thoughts on the unprecedented event. “One of the things I enjoy most about our annual commencement ceremony is getting to celebrate with you all as you cross the stage, getting to call you by name and congratulate you, so it was a difficult decision to postpone our in-person ceremony,” said Hall. “I look forward to celebrating again when we are able to safely gather together in the future.”



The school ceremonies featured remarks from Mercy College’s 2020 Honorary Degree Recipients – four individuals who have demonstrated leadership in the humanitarian, medical, philanthropic and civic fields. They included Stephanie J. Hull, Ph.D., president and CEO of Girls Inc.; Valerie Mason Cunningham, former senior executive leader at Xerox Corporation and a

Mercy College Trustee; Rajiv Ratan, M.D., Ph.D., executive director at Burke Neurological Institute and Burke professor of neurology and neuroscience at Weill Cornell Medicine; and Meisha Ross-Porter, M.S. '03, Bronx executive superintendent for the New York City Department of Education.

Hull informed the graduates, “you’ll face challenges that you’re not quite sure what to do with. But you’ll find out soon enough that ordinary success doesn’t feel nearly as good as the success that you have after a major curveball. After you’ve made your own way through the hard part.” Mason Cunningham reminded them, “You will reap the benefits of [your] determination and grit as you leave Mercy to pursue your goals and dreams. Your education is a key plank to your next opportunity, success and milestone.”

Ratan encouraged graduates to push forward, even in the face of failure. “How you respond to the inevitable failures that occur in ordinary life can determine how successful you really become,” said. Ross-Porter emphasized the importance of the spirit of gratitude: “Be grateful for the time and space that has been created to be a learner in this moment, for that is what will truly prepare you for what is next.”

In terms of what is next, no matter the uncertainty of what our world may look like in the future, one constant for these graduates will be their place in an accomplished network of alumni. As said by Hall, Mercy graduates will always be welcomed back, and as they grow personally and professionally, their collective experiences will enrich a deep-rooted alumni network already making a difference.

Congratulations to the Mercy College Class of 2020, who will be remembered for their extraordinary commencement ceremony, and their tenacity to overcome what seemed at times an insurmountable obstacle, with unfettered determination and sensitivity to the health and safety needs of our communities. As said by Mercy PACT Counselor Nicole Asamoah: “The world is excited and ready for you, so do your thing.”