

# Thousands walk at Purdue commencement

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**On a day meant to symbolize a turning point some students were just happy they made it**



(Photo: Wei-Huan Chen/Journal & Courier)

## Story Highlights

- More than 1500 graduated at Purdue's Winter Commencement.

If you sat in the second balcony of the Elliott Hall of Music during Sunday's Winter Commencement ceremonies, you could hear quiet taps on iPhones, coos of infants in the hallway and the rustle of roses on parents' jittering laps.

Below the balcony was a sea of hats and robes, and from that mass of graduates families could barely pick out the people they were there to celebrate.

On a day meant to symbolize a turning point — a diving into all the hopes and challenges the world will bring — some were just happy they made it. Shuai Fang's aunt spent months applying for a Visa so she and the rest of his family could come to the U.S.

Fang, who graduated with a Bachelor's degree in applied statistics, should have been walking with his classmates on the sunny, chilly Sunday afternoon, minutes before the ceremony was to begin. Instead, he stood with his family and took pictures. He reveled in the fact that six people flew all the way from China just to see him, and that they were about to embark on a U.S. tour that included Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle.

Back inside the holiday-themed Elliot Hall, Subrata Dutta strained his neck from the first balcony and pointed at one of the 1500-plus robed figures below. There she was. His daughter, Aparajita, graduated Sunday from the College of Electrical and Computer Engineering. She did it in three and a half years, with distinction, and all she could think about today, Dutta said, was not tripping over herself on her way up the stage.

Everyone in the room had something a little different to worry about, but they still cheered and clapped together, as one student body. Here were moments that would not be lost in time.

The crowd laughed as one PhD candidate, towering over his advisor, had to bend all the way down to be hooded. On that same stage, Monica Cox, the first tenured African-American female faculty member of the College of Engineering, hooded Jeremi London, an African-American female engineering PhD graduate.

In a field where both women and people of color are vastly underrepresented — less than one out of five engineering graduates in the U.S. are female, and less than one out of twenty are black, according to the American Society for Engineering Education — the moment signified the boundaries being broken at Purdue.

"This represents an expansion of what it means to be an engineer," Cox said in an interview after the ceremony. "We are demonstrating that engineering is accessible to diverse groups and diverse people at all levels."

Take a look at the program for Purdue's 224th commencement and you'll see that the school is in many ways a microcosm of a rapidly globalized society. Students' hometowns span the world. Ibadan, Nigeria. Islamabad, Pakistan. Seoul. Kokomo. Lafayette. Monrovia (the town in Indiana). Peru (the country).

As Colombia native Diana Moreno sat and waited for her turn on the stage, her sister, Cinthya Brown, juggled a baby on her knee in the lobby. Today was as much a moment to remember for Moreno as it was for Brown.

"When your first language isn't English, it's very hard to get good grades," Brown said. "Diana graduated with scholarships and honors. Tonight, we are all getting together and we're going to have cake. She really made it."