

2025 COMMENCEMENT



University of
Pittsburgh®

School of Public and
International Affairs

Friday, May 2
COMMENCEMENT 2025

School of Public and International Affairs
University of Pittsburgh

Opening

Dr. Erica Owen

Processional

Welcome

Dr. Carissa Slotterback, Dean

Endowed Awards with Special Focus

Dr. Luke Condra, Associate Dean

Graduation Awards

Dr. Carissa Slotterback, Dean

Student Address

Amanda Zaner, MID '25

Commencement Address

Itha Cao, MID '15

Presentation of the Graduates

Dr. Lisa Alfredson, MID Program Director

Dr. Gary Hollibaugh, MPA Program Director

Dr. Erica Owen, MPIA Faculty

Dr. George Dougherty, MPPM Program Director

Dr. Gary Hollibaugh, Interim PhD Program Director

Closing

Dr. Erica Owen

Recessional

Master of International Development

Sobia Ayub

Isabel Cristina Milagros Brum Cancio

Mersades R.A. Cook

Megan Isabella Debski

Chloe I. Esquivel

Laura Hagy

Shelbi Elizabeth Henkle

Rebeca Nara Nogueira

Ehryn Ortega

Jonah Ronald Philipp

Shima Rasapour

Maria L. Salazar

Ariana Scott

Madison Marie Young

Amanda Marie Zaner

Master of Public Administration

Christianne Accurso

Howard Saul Alvarez Ulloa

Chih Hsuan Chang

Madeline Dix

Branden Edward Dutchess

Thea I. Gamboa

Ellyana Marie Gomez

Zongjie Hu

Simon Joseph

Serafina Marseglia Lanna

Jiahui Liu
Umamah B. Masum
Raychel Michel
Evan Moran
Kelly Pare
Christopher Anthony Perez
Anna Marie Richard
DaChanel Rutherford
Catherine Weis
Shelby Lyn Woodard

Master of Public and International Affairs

Ethan Michael Alfery
Jean-Phillip Banane
Tyler Battestin
Kevin Bertha
Colin Michael Bistarkey
Sofiya Bobrovnikova
Emily Crawford
Temuujin Davaadagva
Michael DeAngelo
Delaney Maureen Deitrick
Jeffrey Deng
Jake Thomas Dougherty
Ryan Druffner
Jubaida Auhana Faruque
Eleanor Forshaw
Zarah Glaze-Williams
Melinda Theresia Go

Bailee Elizabeth Hassen
Junyi He
Joshua Chad Hubbard
Matthew Santiago Hytten
Dastan Imanaliev
Aleeshyah N. Lightfoot
Janae O'Connell
Samuel C. Rendon
Ferdaouss Sabar
Thomas W. Schmidt
Deborah Nwachinemere Sike
Dakota Stein
Frances Marie Troiano
Lydia E. Troutman
Esteban Vazquez-Freire
Marco Wertheimer

Master of Public Policy and Management

Eugene Amor
Brent D. Barbe
Lora Ann Bray
Sara Brown
Karen S. Clarke
Alison M. Cooley
Kyle DeShong
Sara Dickey
Catherine George
Sarah Glenn
Chatiqua Lashawn Good

Melita Hatley Terry
Byeongjun Kim
Melissa Knox
Megan Christine Lange
Laura Latini
Seungjae Lee
Allison O. Levin
Shahid Madni
Christopher John Matek
Kevin Patrick McKenzie
Sarah Minnaert
David Shane O'Donnell
Alexandra Rigby
Patrick Spizarny
Vanessa Nichole Thompson
Katie Weidenboerner
Jacob Robert Williamson

Doctor of Philosophy

Fahad Albylwi, BA, MA
King Saud University, Saudi Arabia, 2012; Pennsylvania
State University, 2019. Dissertation: Understanding Saudi
Arabia as an Emerging Donor.

Robert P. Kozloski, BS, MA
Old Dominion University, 1997; Johns Hopkins University,
2011. Dissertation: Assessing the Logic of Images:
A Theoretical and Empirical Examination of the American
Image of China from 1900 to 2022.

Mohammed Osama H. Sulaimani, BS, MA
King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia, 2013;
Pennsylvania State University, 2018. Dissertation:
In Between Sovereigns: The Political Economy
of International Oil Concessions.

Rachel E. Travis, BA
University of Delaware, 2016. Dissertation:
Welcoming Policy as Rust Remover: Welcoming America's
Impact on Policy Relationships in Rust Belt Cities.

Endowed Awards

Tarahnath Das Foundation Prize

Sobia Ayub
"Access to Proper Sanitation – Challenge of Sanitation
to the Slum Dwellers in Islamabad, Pakistan"
For outstanding paper on a subject relating to Asia.

Gloria Fitzgibbons Memorial Award

Christianne Accurso
For SPIA women graduating in the MPA or MPPM program
who are deemed to have the potential to become a
recognized public administrator.

Kevin Morrison Memorial Award

Samuel Rendon
For the most outstanding student in statistics and
quantitative methods during the academic year.

David E. Oeler Award

Ethan Alfery
For an outstanding student in
the field of information systems.

Simon Reich Human Security Writing Award

Deborah Sike

“Authoritarian Innovations and Democratic Backsliding: Exploring the Development of Modern Military Coups in the Sahel Region”

For the best research or policy paper on a human security topic.

Graduation Awards

Master of International Development Award

Rebeca Nogueira

For the most distinguished record among graduates of the International Development Program in terms of academic achievement and service to the School.

Master of Public Administration Award

Simon Joseph

For the most distinguished record among graduates of the Public Administration Program in terms of academic achievement and service to the School.

Master of Public and International Affairs Award

Dastan Imanaliev

For the most distinguished record among graduates of the Public and International Affairs Program in terms of academic achievement and service to the School.

Master of Public Policy and Management Award

David O'Donnell

For the most distinguished record among graduates of the Public Policy and Management Program in terms of academic achievement and service to the School.

2025 Commencement Speaker

Itha Cao, MID '15



Itha Cao, an experienced project manager and strategic partnerships leader, is this year's Commencement Speaker for the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) at the University of Pittsburgh.

Named in honor of her birth city Ithaca, New York, Itha spent her early years in State College, Pennsylvania before relocating to Pittsburgh in 2013 to attend the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. She graduated in 2015 with her Master of International Development (MID) with a concentration in development planning and environmental sustainability. While at Pitt, Itha served as the MID Representative on the Student Cabinet, was President of the International Student Initiative, a member of the Out in Policy Group, and served on the Programming Committee for the Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG).

In her current position at Buchanan, Ingersoll & Rooney, Itha enhances operational and budgetary effectiveness as part of the law firm's Department of Practice Administration. Her earlier work in the nonprofit sector involved leading a computer skills education and laptop distribution initiative in Pittsburgh's Homewood, Hill District, and East End neighborhoods. She also collaborated with community stakeholders under former Mayor Peduto to spearhead impactful local projects.

Itha demonstrates her dedication to community service and leadership development through a wide array of advisory and volunteer roles. She served as a Commissioner for the Pennsylvania Governor's Commission for Women, leading the creation of its inaugural strategic plan, and is a board member for both Vibrant Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. She combines her passion for cooking and community engagement through organizing cooking fundraisers and actively participates in neighborhood cleanups and outdoor activities with the Explorers Club of Pittsburgh.

A steadfast advocate of continuous learning, Itha is certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP) and holds a second-degree black belt in taekwondo. She holds two bachelor's degrees from Penn State University in addition to her master's from Pitt. Itha's leadership and dedication to community service have earned her multiple accolades: Pittsburgh Magazine's 40 Under 40, the RealList Connect Award by Technical.ly, the Community Service Award from Get Involved Pittsburgh, and the inaugural Alumni Impact Award from the University of Pittsburgh.



University of
Pittsburgh®

School of Public and
International Affairs