

# INDUSTRY LEADER LISA SU RETURNS TO MIT

At 2017 PhD hooding ceremony, the Advanced Micro Devices CEO says MIT “taught me how to think.”

By Peter Dizikes | MIT News

**T**hree-time EECS alumna Lisa Su, now the president and CEO of Advanced Micro Devices, urged MIT’s new doctoral graduates to “dream big” and “work hard every day to solve the world’s toughest problems” in her commencement address at the Institute’s 2017 Investiture of Doctoral Hoods.

MIT professors, clad in the multihued robes representing the universities from which they received their doctorates (including MIT), draped doctoral hoods over students from 26 departments, programs, and centers at the Institute. EECS awarded 95 doctoral degrees during the most recent academic year, and most of those recipients attended the ceremony.

“I encourage each of you to dream big and believe you can change the world, have the courage to take risks and enthusiastically learn from mistakes, and work hard every day to solve the world’s toughest problems,” said Su, who received an SB in 1990, an SM in 1991, and a PhD in 1994. “I think if you do that, I’m pretty sure you will make everybody very proud, and you will be incredibly lucky throughout your career.”

In outlining her own experiences in technology and business, which have taken her from the Institute’s laboratories to the executive suite, Su observed that MIT has been a central influence on her own life and career. “The MIT PhD degree truly shaped who I am in so many ways, both personally and professionally,” she said.

Su came to the U.S. from Taiwan at age 2 and grew up in New York City. As an undergraduate at MIT, she developed a deep interest in semiconductors; as a graduate student, she received a master’s degree in management and a doctorate focused on research in silicon-on-insulator technology. Su quipped that when she entered MIT’s doctoral program, at the urging of her parents, she was “too young at the time to know any better.”



Photo: Dominick Reuter

However, she wound up thriving in a challenging academic environment. “MIT is pure, and it’s really hard,” Su said. “MIT taught me how to think and solve really hard problems.”

Recalling the many ways that her technical education encouraged her to pursue a career in management, Su recounted, “I thought I could make better business decisions because I understood the technology.”

Su began her career at Texas Instruments. She spent 13 years working at IBM, rising to the level of vice president of the Semiconductor Research and Development Center. She then worked in multiple executive roles at Freescale Semiconductor, Inc. She joined Advanced Micro Devices in 2012 as a senior vice president and general manager for global business units, and served as chief operating officer before becoming the CEO.

Su was named one of the Top 50 World's Greatest Leaders by *Fortune* in 2017, and has been named a Top Semiconductor CEO by *Institutional Investor* in both 2016 and 2017. She was also cited as one of *MIT Technology Review's* Top 100 Young Innovators in 2002. She serves on the board of directors for Analog Devices, the Global Semiconductor Alliance, and the U.S. Semiconductor Industry Association.

MIT Chancellor and Ford Professor of Engineering Cynthia Barnhart SM '86 PhD '88, who annually presides over the hooding ceremony, introduced Su. While giving welcoming remarks, Barnhart said she was "thrilled" to have Su addressing the graduates, and offered her own congratulations to the newly minted doctoral graduates.

"Earning a doctoral degree from MIT is no small feat," Barnhart told the assembled graduates. "You have every reason to be proud, to be relieved, and to be filled with hope for what the future holds."

This marks the third year that MIT's doctoral hooding ceremony has featured a keynote speaker, who is chosen with input from MIT faculty and doctoral students.

Academic regalia dates to at least the 15th century, but American universities only adopted formal codes for graduation gowns and hoods in 1893. MIT doctoral degree robes have had their current design since 1995. MIT features a silver-gray robe with a cardinal red velvet front panel, as well cardinal red velvet bars on the sleeves. Additional color markings denote whether graduates have received a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) or a Doctor of Science (ScD) degree.

The actual doctoral hoods are part of the doctoral robe ensemble. After the remarks by Barnhart and Su, all doctoral graduates had their names announced as they walked across the stage, then individually had the hoods draped on their ensembles by their department or program head. 🎓

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—Lisa Su, CEO,  
Advanced Micro Devices

## JUST FOR POSTDOCS

EECS is MIT's largest department — so it should come as no surprise that it's home to a massive postdoc community as well.

Dozens of postdoctoral associates work in the four EECS labs: Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL), the Laboratory for Information and Decision Systems (LIDS), the Microsystems Technology Laboratories (MTL), and the Research Laboratory of Electronics (RLE). EECS's Postdoc6 initiative helps unite this widely dispersed community for peer networking and skills training.

"Postdocs come to MIT in what is perhaps the most stressful period in their careers," notes Nir Shavit, professor of electrical engineering and computer science and Postdoc6 faculty coordinator. "They have a relatively short period of time to show that they can engage in novel research, typically different from what they did in their PhDs, and at the same time apply for jobs."

One popular offering is the EECS Leadership Workshop for Postdocs, a two-day offsite event offered several times a year for groups of 16 postdocs. The workshops, held at MIT's Endicott House conference center in Dedham, Mass., offer presentations and interactive sessions tailored to postdocs interested in both academic and nonacademic careers.

Workshop attendees actively participate in sessions on leadership, collaboration, group dynamics, effective communication, and organizational skills such as setting goals and priorities. Facilitators use improvisational-theater techniques as part of that training, creating a microcosm of what happens in the lab. They also establish follow-up peer groups to provide postdocs with supportive networks that last long after each workshop ends.

"Key to these workshops is the ability to take the postdocs out of their busy everyday lives and allow them an interruption-free environment in which they can reflect on their needs going forward as future scientists and leaders," Shavit says.

Postdoc feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Typical was the comment from one recent attendee, who described the intensive workshop as a "very useful and productive experience," adding: "The material can be applied immediately."