

Valedictory Addresses – MFAcc Class 2019



MFAcc ASO Class 2019 – Rebecca Seidler - November 4, 2019:

Thank you Professor Brooks. It is an honour to stand here on behalf of my fellow graduates of the Master in Forensic Accounting (Advanced Standing Option) program, Class of 2019.

In preparing for this address, I reflected on what brought us here in the first place. As you may know, this Masters program is unique – each one of its students already holds a Diploma in Investigative and Forensic Accounting from the University of Toronto, which was no small feat (especially that 50 page research paper, of which many of us still have nightmares). Looking at the class list, each one of us is already very accomplished in our own rights: partners in accounting firms, enforcement agents at securities regulators, employees of the World Bank, just to name a few. So, why do this program? Why do we need it? What more could we learn?

I think it was last question that brought us all here. Forensic accountants are curious by nature. We have an innate investigative mindset, and a desire to get to the facts. We are intrigued by puzzles, and get great satisfaction when they are solved. We like to figure things out, to pull problems apart and put them back together in a way that makes sense, to draw on that thread until we find the “smoking gun”, the answer. We analyze information and people, and can present complicated issues in a simplified way in high stakes situations. We have also realized that the problems we are faced with are getting more complex, layered with technology and the fast pace we move at today. The solution is not just better technology; we must respond with new skills and enhanced critical thinking.

(With the guarantee of not having to do another 50 page paper), we were all eager to accept the challenge of this Masters program as we do in our everyday lives as forensic accountants – curious, and excited for a challenge. We embarked on this journey of the unknown and figured out what was needed to proudly hold a Masters degree, in turn sharpening our skills, credentialing our resumes, and further empowering us as ambassadors to the profession.

While some of the course content was intended to remind and ground us in the core principles of the practice of forensic accounting, the Master’s program elevated our learning and introduced new topics that are relevant in 2019 and into the future:

In our first course, we reviewed some of the core principles related to fraud prevention and response, and explored modern tools using data analytics and visualization that are available to help execute this type of analysis.

In our second course, we learned about the real-life issues behind Netflix successes such as *Dirty Money*, *Ozark* and *the Laundromat*: the intricacies involved in money laundering and international aspects of white collar crime.

The third course, my personal favourite, brought us inside the mind of the white collar criminal. We spent a full day discussing the psychology behind the types of people we investigate. Did you know that 5-15% of the general population are considered to be complex psychopaths?

Finally, our last course walked us through the topics of advanced business valuation, bankruptcy and insolvency, new material enabling us to expand the scope of our knowledge to some of the unique situations encountered by forensic accountants. The program culminated in an intense six consecutive days at U of T Mississauga, where we gathered in person from across the country to learn even more new material, hear from industry experts about new tools and technologies, practice what we learned in hands-on workshops and case studies, and finally, to be tested on what we had learned to date. I think I speak for my fellow graduates that we all gave a big sigh of relief at the end of that week.

But soon after this big sigh came a deep breath in preparation for what was to come as we returned back to our “regular lives”. In a world where people will always do bad things or fight about money, we have an important role to play. Now equipped with a Master’s level education, our role as ambassadors to the profession has been elevated, and we must represent it with skill and integrity. I am confident that each of my fellow graduates will continue be successful in their careers as forensic accountants.

It is now time to thank those who have supported us through this journey: First, thank you to Professor Brooks, whose tireless efforts to upgrade a diploma program to the highly respected Masters degree enabled us to be here today. Thank you to our instructors, who met with us every Thursday night to deliver challenging course material. Thank you to the MFacc support staff, whose dedication to the program is unmatched. Debby in particular deserves a special mention for always “making things work” – from fixing technical glitches to making special arrangements for individuals when life presented its challenges. Thank you also to our family and friends. You helped us to make the time to attend classes, complete assignments, and study for exams. For this, we are grateful and couldn’t have done it without your support.

I would like to give a special thank you to my husband who supported me along the way, not only through this program, but also through all of the years I have spent collecting the various other letters on my business card. You have always supported and stood by me, when life is simple, and when it is hard, this past year falling into the latter. I couldn't have done it without you. You are a role model to our girls, now 5 and 7, showing them how a family works together to support each other, and what it means to set and achieve goals and to help them create opportunities for their future.

Thank you also to my parents, who may never understand exactly what I do, but regardless always support me along the way.

Finally, thank you our classmates – for sharing your personal and professional stories and being a support just by knowing that we were in this together.

Best of luck in your future endeavours, and congratulations to the Master of Forensic Accounting Class of 2019!