

Tradition, celebration and surprise: Commencement 2015

May 26, 2015

An unexpected surprise

Charlye Iversen lifted her eyes as she stepped to the top of the stage, as applause echoed through the Floyd L. Maines Veterans Memorial Arena during SUNY Broome's 67th annual commencement. Smiling, she reached out to shake President Kevin E. Drumm's hand.

The 1,237 SUNY Broome graduates – the college's largest class yet again for three years running, according to Dr. Drumm – had a good deal to celebrate: the end of an academic journey, the start of new careers and new endeavors. For Charlye, the future lies in Washington State, where she will study nutrition at Bastyr University.

Graduation day brought an unexpected surprise, however, to the Individual Studies major as she turned to receive her diploma cover from Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer Francis Battisti.

It wasn't the venerable academic who stood there, in his long robe and mortarboard cap. Instead, there stood her brother Jake Iversen – ramrod-straight in his crisp U.S. Marine uniform, with a bouquet of flowers in his hand. An active service member, he wasn't expected to make it home in time for the ceremony.

With brimming eyes, she flung her arms wide for a long hug, as the audience roared in applause.





'This is your chance to be great'

For students everywhere, graduation is a rite of passage – but not truly an ending. Commencement actually means the act or process of beginning, noted Margaret Coffey, vice chairwoman of SUNY Broome's Board of Trustees, in her address to students. The word graduation derives from the Latin *gradi*, which means to step or walk.

For many graduates, the occasion is both celebratory and bittersweet, as they step from the college that nurtured them into an unknown future.

"It's been a long time coming. To finally be here right now and the tail end, it's worth it," said [Nathan Dean](#), a Communications and Media Arts major who and toted a Captain America-styled shield during the ceremony.

Dean graduated with a job in his field – at News Radio WEBO. When he thinks of SUNY Broome, he remembers

the top-notch academics, as well as the simple joy of meeting new people and sharing experiences.

An internship through SUNY Broome also landed fellow Communications major Mary Bell a job in radio post-graduation. And she also appreciated the opportunity to meet new friends; she knew no one other than her boyfriend when she moved to the area two years ago.

Mary Bell

“I’m very grateful for everything. It is a SUNY school, it really is,” she said. “I couldn’t ask for a better place to get my first degree.”

For Mexican international students Juan Sebastian Martinez Jaramillo and

, SUNY Broome offered a chance to earn degrees in Quality Assurance, hone their English skills – and travel. Active in a wide range of clubs, the two traveled to New York City, Washington, D.C., Boston, Virginia and North Carolina. They also attended the [Clinton Global Initiative University](#) in Miami, where they showcased projects to aid their home countries. Without a college degree, they would have faced lackluster career prospects back home, they noted. The future is now looking brighter, and includes prospects of earning a bachelor’s degree back home.

Juan Sebastian Martinez Jaramillo

Juan Felipe Romero Quintanilla

Quintanilla didn't know English prior to college, and English classes have allowed him to become fluent in the language. Jaramillo has become so accustomed to speaking English that he even dreams in the language at night.

"Studying abroad is like the best experience you'll ever have in your life," Jaramillo said. "I had the time of my life. I met amazing people."

Graduates ultimately take from the experience what they put into it, noted Isaiah Brown, a Liberal Arts major who is transferring to SUNY Oswego and pondering a future in broadcast or radio.

Isaiah Brown

He offered a bit of advice to his fellow graduates: "This is your chance to be great; take it."

It's a message that [Aisha Mortenson](#), SUNY Broome's Student Trustee and a nursing major, could likely get behind. During her address to fellow graduates, Mortenson quoted 19th century activist, writer and statesman Frederick Douglass: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress."

Struggle teaches the student and shapes the career, allowing individuals to become more skilled and more intelligent versions of themselves, she mused.

"It's time to take that diploma and put it to good use," she said. "Embrace the opportunities before you."

Aisha Mortenson

President Drumm

A year to remember

The 2014-2015 school year was one to remember, noted President Drumm.

This year saw the opening of the [Student Village](#), the campus' very first student housing complex, the extensive renovation of the [Darwin R. Wales Center](#), and a nearly \$11 million gift from the [late Emil Calice](#), which will fund scholarships on campus. SUNY Broome also received funding to create the [SUNY Bridge to Entrepreneurial Excellence](#), opened the [Veterans Resource Center](#) and [Digital Lounge & Commons](#), launched its new [Associate in Arts in One Year](#) degree and celebrated an inspiring [Convocation Day](#).

SUNY Broome's [Health for Haiti program](#) brought solar power, clean water and computers to the island nation – and students also helped deliver a baby. A new [Honors Program](#) is scheduled to kick off this fall. All in all, it's been a remarkable year, Drumm said.

“You are the leaders of tomorrow. It may sound cliché, but it's true,” he told students.

And while many SUNY Broome students have compelling stories, President Drumm highlighted five for their perseverance and achievements:

- Vera Shindyakova, a Health Information Technology major and mother of seven who came to this country as a religious refugee with her husband from the former Soviet Union. Her husband was first to graduate from SUNY Broome in HIT and is currently working in the field. Her son and daughter are also SUNY Broome students. Vera returned to college when her youngest turned eight years old.
- [Spencer Nagle](#), a Liberal Arts in Science major, president of Phi Theta Kappa and a member of the Hornets soccer team. He originally wanted to be a Navy Seal, but that dream was thwarted after several leg surgeries in high school. He came interested in neuroscience after his grandfather was diagnosed with

Alzheimer's. He'll continue his studies in the field at Cornell University.

Spencer Nagle

- **Marie Finelli**, majoring in Human Services. A single mother, she focused for years on supporting her daughter and school went on the back burner. One of SUNY Broome's first campus Peace Officers, she finished her degree in 18 years — proving that no matter how long it takes, you can do it.
- **Kevin Johnston**, majoring Hotel and Restaurant Management. After losing his wife in 2005, he entered the proverbial wilderness, moving all over the country. He ultimately ended up moving into the local YMCA, where he began to rebuild his life. Despite struggling with depression and anxiety attacks, he trained to work in a field where the pressure is always on, including as kitchen manager for SUNY Broome's Mock Wedding. According to Johnston, SUNY Broome "has been the second chance most people never get."

- [Joseph Seidel](#), an Early Education major and Army veteran who served in Afghanistan. He found a passion both for educating and the process of deliberative democracy, which he teaches to youngsters in local schools. He received the Vanguard Award for students who excel in fields that are nontraditional for their gender.

Retirement of David Maslar

Leading up to graduation day, a good deal of work goes on behind the scenes. Orchestrating the intensive effort is Student Activities Director David Maslar, who has spent a 33-year career at SUNY Broome.

Maslar retired this year, but stayed on to help coordinate one final graduation. During rehearsal, he walked students through the process one more time, with humorous stories of pitfalls and all the things that can and do happen.

And he also gave students some advice on making the most out of their special day. Before you commence on the next chapter of your life, pause a moment – and enjoy it.

“Tonight, graduate,” he said. “Celebrate what you did. What you’ve done is not easy.”

The man behind the scenes: Dave Maslar

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