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STETSON UNIVERSITY

Stetson University Celebrates 132nd Commencement

828 students graduate in two ceremonies

DELAND, Florida, May 12, 2018 – Stetson University faculty, staff, students, families and friends celebrated the graduation of 828 seniors and graduate students at two 2018 Commencement Ceremonies this week. Stetson conferred degrees on 180 graduate students in Edmunds Center on Thursday, May 10. Another 648 undergraduates received degrees at a ceremony this morning, Saturday, May 12, in Spec Martin Memorial Stadium.

“To the Class of 2018, congratulations,” President Wendy B. Libby, Ph.D., said in her charge to the graduating class. “All your hard work, sacrifices and sheer persistence, and the support of the people that love you, have gotten you to this milestone day, to new beginnings. I am so proud of you.”

The speakers at each ceremony were students from the graduating class who are nominated by faculty or their peers, and selected from nominations by a faculty committee. This year’s speakers for the graduate class were Lucianna Chixaro Ramos, Master of Fine Arts in creative writing, poetry in the expanded field; and Rachael Faircloth, Executive Master of Business Administration. For the undergraduate commencement the speakers were Lucas Ludwig Coura, Bachelor of Music in voice and music theory; and Kaitlyn Orien Silva Forsythe, Bachelor of Arts in digital arts.

During her presentation, Ramos talked about unexpected surprises that “bring with them the gift of experience.”

“For me, one of those surprises was coming here to Stetson as a confused undergraduate and having to take the only English 101 course that I could fit into my schedule: Introduction to Lyric Poetry. That’s where I met Dr. Terri Witek,” said Ramos. “As a commuting student, the last thing I wanted to do was to take a three-hour class about lyric poetry until nine o’clock at night. But I didn’t know then that meeting her, and being a part of the supportive English Department at Stetson, would forever change my life. It was there in that classroom and at the writing workshops I took thereafter, that a mentor took the time to see the value in my work, and that I began to see that value in myself.”

“We all have struggled with the bullies in our lives, whether it was kids in school or our own inner voice of self-doubt,” Faircloth told her graduating class. “[R]emember that you own the power to define yourself, you own the power to persevere in the face of adversity and you own the power to truly dream big with the confidence that, with hard work and dedication, anything is possible.”

In his address to the undergraduate Class of 2018, Coura compared the ups and downs of life to a game of Pokemon.

“Strength is found in diversity,” Coura said. “As a Pokemon trainer, you form a team of creatures who fight on your behalf, each with a unique skillset. ‘Types’ play a crucial role in battle...You can’t get by with one type, with one point of view, with one manner of thought, with one set of experiences....Who is in your team of creatures?...[A]re they of diverse backgrounds, capable of exposing your weaknesses, but also of covering your blind spots? Can you work together, though you are different as fire and water, towards a common goal?”

Forsythe spoke about the Stetson community saying she “watched leaders in this community work like gardeners to prime organizations, programs and campus spaces to blossom.”

“The point of being blessed with wealth or privilege or knowledge or opportunity is that it’s our responsibility to share it, to re-distribute it,” Forsythe said. “The point of our success is to put us in the best possible position to show up, turn off our egos and be of help to others. And we’re better able to do that because we came here.

“Because we invested in ourselves and in this community, because we trained in economics and environmental science, Spanish and molecular biology, creative writing and computer science, and in compassion and civil dialogue, in healthy skepticism and humility, in integrity and intellectual honesty.

“We’re better able to roll up our sleeves and serve because we spent four years working on ourselves, to become citizens who are well equipped to solve the world’s biggest challenges. And as citizens of the world, it’s not our duty but our privilege to serve others.”

During Saturday’s undergraduate commencement ceremony, Provost and Executive Vice President Noel Painter, Ph.D., presented awards to a student and members of the faculty.

- [The Etter McTeer Turner Award](#) honors Stetson’s first woman dean of students, and was established by the family of former Stetson President J. Ollie Edmunds through their Gualala Foundation. It is awarded for outstanding academic performance, leadership and community service. Painter presented this year’s award to Alexandra Overdijking, Bachelor of Business Administration with double majors in accounting, and business systems and analytics.
- The [Hand Awards for Distinguished Faculty Achievements](#) are made possible through the generosity of longtime trustee and alumna Dolly Hand, LL.B.’49, Hon ’08, and her husband, Homer Hand. The recipient of this year’s Hand Award for Community Impact is [Pamela Cappas-Toro, Ph.D.](#), assistant professor of world languages and cultures (Spanish). The recipient of this year’s Hand Award for Research, Creative and Professional Activity is [Terence Farrell, Ph.D.](#), professor of biology.
- The [William Hugh McEniry Award for Excellence in Teaching](#) is considered Stetson’s most prestigious faculty award, and the winner is chosen by students and faculty. Excellence in classroom teaching is the primary criterion, although other factors, such as intellectual growth, academic activities outside the classroom, and service to students and the university may be considered. Last year’s recipient, Dan Plante, Ph.D., presented the 2018 McEniry Award to [Megan O’Neill, Ph.D.](#), associate professor of English.

Stetson awarded an Honorary Doctorate on Saturday to Gordon H. “Nick” Mueller, Ph.D., president and CEO emeritus of The National World War II Museum in New Orleans. Mueller earned a Bachelor of Arts in history at Stetson University in 1961, an M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina and has done postgraduate work at Yale, Harvard and several European universities.

On Saturday, May 19, at 8:30 a.m., Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, expects to graduate 266 J.D. students including four J.D./M.B.A. students, two J.D./LL.M. Advocacy students and 16 part-time J.D. students. Seventeen students are candidates for the LL.M. in international law, 10 students are candidates for the LL.M. in elder law and five students are candidates for the LL.M. in advocacy degree.

About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](#) is the oldest private university in Florida, providing a transforming education in the liberal arts tradition. Stetson stresses academic excellence and community-engaged learning, and consistently earns high marks in national rankings. Stetson encourages its students to go beyond success to significance in their lives, the lives of others and their communities. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.