

May 2012 Commencement: Nearly 1,500 UWO graduates recognized

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/18981/may-2012-commencement-nearly-1500-uwo-graduates-recognized/>

Feelings of excitement and relief filled the Kolf Sports Center Saturday as nearly 1,500 graduate, undergraduate and -- for the first time ever -- doctoral students became graduates of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh May 12.

The institution's 138th spring Commencement ceremonies brought out the usual – hugs, balloons, flowers, cap-and-gown adjusting, high-fives, cheers and even a few tears.

“The first is always special,” said Anna Christian, one of the four Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) graduates who made history as she crossed the stage Saturday.

A day of firsts for many

Like Christian, others felt a special sense of being first at Commencement on Saturday, too. Each for their own reasons, of course.

Brad Richards, of Oconomowoc, is a first-generation college graduate who knows just how special his graduation day was to his family.

“For everyone, this really means a lot,” he said.

Samantha Kirst, of Markesan, was one of the first three students majoring in environmental health to graduate from UW Oshkosh. Her mortar board was even bedazzled with Titan-colored jewels that read: “1st EH Class!”

And, Tyler Meyer, of Fond du Lac, was the first of his siblings to graduate from a four-year college.

"It feels great. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity," Meyer said.

VIDEO: Spring 2012 UWO grads share reflections, backstage moments...

<http://youtu.be/6N35q0-kqeQ>

Excitement palpable during ceremonies

Others at the two Commencement ceremonies held in a packed Kolf simply beamed with excitement; some overjoyed that they are forever done with finals and writing papers, others about earning the final proof that they succeeded.

Before the morning ceremony began, soon-to-be graduate Ken Redmer, of Waukesha, yelled across the gym, “We’re graduating” to a friend. High-fives were had; smiles were exchanged.

Excitement like Redmer’s was palpable throughout the 9 a.m. ceremony, which awarded degrees to students from the College of Letters and Science and the Center for New Learning and Graduate Studies.

“I’m very excited to be done after almost five years,” said Kelly Reyer, of Oshkosh, who graduated with a degree in environmental studies.

Reyer said she plans to take a little time for herself this summer before moving onto the next chapter in her life. Even as she moves forward, she said she’ll never forget the community of UW Oshkosh.

“I will definitely always remember my professors and the students in my program,” she said.

As it turns out, the students leave lasting marks on professor's hearts, too.

"I take with me the thought that every student I've ever taught takes a little piece of me with them," said Joann Noe Cross, accounting professor, who gave the afternoon Commencement address.

Wisconsin State Senator and UW Oshkosh alumna Jessica King also shared a few inspirational words with the Class of 2012.

“I believe the extraordinary start you’ve received at this institution...will do you well,” King said during the morning Commencement ceremony.

German renewable energy pioneer earns honorary doctorate

Renewable energy pioneer Dr. Martin Viessmann, who leads The Viessmann Group of Allendorf, Germany, received an honorary doctorate during the morning UW Oshkosh Commencement ceremony.

Viessmann’s family-owned, nearly \$2.5 billion Viessmann Group’s dedication to renewable energy initiatives and training within the industry have helped dramatically advance Germany’s goal of carbon neutrality. Meanwhile, his company and its subsidiary BIOFerm Energy Systems of Madison have worked just as diligently with educational partners such as UW Oshkosh, sharing expertise and state-of-the-art technology to develop pacesetting biogas energy production and research facilities on campus and in the Oshkosh area.

As touted in the morning’s Commencement program: “In concert, these innovative facilities and partnerships – each building upon Viessmann’s source ingenuity and stewardship – are enhancing UW Oshkosh’s and the New North’s distinction as a high-impact epicenter of educational collaboration and excellence for faculty, students, entrepreneurs, executives and industry leaders advancing the renewable energy revolution.”

Concern and confidence as grads prepare to apply degrees

Even with all the celebration and smiles Commencement brings, some graduates are still slightly

apprehensive about what's next citing the challenging economy.

"I'm pretty nervous," said Mark Offenbecher, of Appleton, who graduated with a degree in English.

Offenbecher does not yet have a job lined up, but he said he's optimistic about what the future – and being a degree holder – will bring despite it being "a tough job market out there."

But Offenbecher said he does feel prepared for his future and believes his UW Oshkosh degree will be helpful in getting a job. He gives much credit to on-campus services like Career Services for helping him through the process of finding perspective jobs and obtaining interviews.

Kayla DeBruin, of Little Chute, who graduated with a degree in Kinesiology, also believes in the connections she made during her time at UW Oshkosh.

"UW Oshkosh has really set me up for my future, especially in terms of helping me find internships," DeBruin said.

The 2 p.m. ceremony included students from the College of Business, College of Education and Human Services, College of Nursing and Graduate Studies. The Golden Titans – the graduating class of 1962 – lead the processional during the afternoon ceremony.

"... I am forever grateful for my four years at Oshkosh. They are the anchor-stone of my life," said Pat (Long) Marohn, a Golden Titan from Glenview, Ill. " "We loved being college students..."

Many of the graduates of 2012 felt similarly grateful for their experiences at UW Oshkosh. Kelly Luedeke, who graduated with a master's degree in education, was thrilled to be a part of the afternoon ceremony festivities and believes in her UW Oshkosh education, she said.

"I think this degree really puts me in more of a leadership role at my school and benefits my students," said Luedeke, who also earned her undergraduate degree from UW Oshkosh and is a current teacher in the Oshkosh Area School District. "I felt like I got an excellent undergrad education here and there was no doubt I'd come back to UW Oshkosh for my master's."

Read more about spring 2012 commencement:

- [First-ever doctoral grads make UWO history May 12](#)
- [Eighteen honored with Chancellor's Awards for Excellence](#)
- [Class speaker to class of 2012: "Feel proud of your accomplishments"](#)
- [Faculty Commencement speaker: "Find passion, embrace civility, enhance community"](#)

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