

Celebrating Clark College's 89th Graduating Class



It was an evening to remember at the Cascades Amphitheater as hundreds of students from Clark College crossed the stage to celebrate a milestone that, for some, had been years in the making. Pomp and Circumstance played throughout the loudspeakers as students made last-minute adjustments to gowns and straightened their caps before stepping through the double doors to the Amphitheater and into the next chapter of their lives.

To say students were excited would be an understatement; they didn't file into the Amphitheater – they floated in, with pride and hope for the future carrying them to their seats. Families waved and hollered enthusiastically from the audience when they spotted their grad entering, their cheers echoing across the arena.

Each of this year's 2,131 graduates savored the moment their name was called. Some waved their scrolls at the audience as they crossed the stage, and one even jumped and whooped after President Dr. Karin Edwards handed him the document. Each of these inspiring graduates represents the next generation of leaders, workers, scholars, and dreamers in Southwest Washington and beyond.

As Dr. Edwards said to the graduates in her closing remarks: "Your impact will send ripples far into the world and will touch lives in ways you may never know." And we are Penguin Proud of them!



President Dr. Karin Edwards, *center* meets with graduates before the ceremony.

2025 Commencement Highlights

This year, Clark College conferred a total of 1,915 degrees and certificates and recognized 2,131 graduates. This is a 32% increase in graduates from last year.

By the Numbers

This year's graduation numbers have grown significantly since last year:

- **2,131** graduates – up 32%
- **1,614** associate degrees awarded – up 35%
 - **1,291** of those were direct transfer degrees for students continuing to four-year universities – up 26%
- **903** career-technical graduates earned workforce-ready degrees or certifications – up 66%
- **604** Running Start students received both a high school diploma and a college credential – up 35%
- **580** professional certificates earned in a wide range of career-ready disciplines – up 66%
- **133** bachelor's degrees awarded in applied fields like management, cybersecurity, dental hygiene, and human services – up 39%
- **100** adult high school diplomas – up nearly 59%

Coming Fall 2025: Degree Programs on the Rise

Dr. Edwards highlighted Clark's new offerings, which are expanding to meet the needs of the region's growing industries. Some graduates have elected to continue their education in the following areas this fall:

- Bachelor of Science in Computer Science – the college's first BS degree
- AAT in Surgical Technology – the first of its kind in Southwest Washington
- Advanced Manufacturing Program – includes two new certificates and an integrated technology degree

Words of Wisdom from the Stage

Commencement speakers offered heartfelt reflections and encouragement to the graduating class.

President Dr. Edwards' sentiments came full circle as she reminded students of her message on unity at the beginning of the year:

"As future leaders, thinkers, and change-makers, everyone is responsible for carrying this spirit of unity into the world. Strive to bridge gaps, foster collaboration, and create environments where everyone feels valued and included, whether in workplaces, communities, or schools. Use your collective knowledge, talents, and passions to create a brighter, more unified future."



Clark College Board of Trustee Chair Denise Gideon *above*, shared the story of her own educational journey to show that we too often only see the finished product and not the

perseverance it took to get there. She left graduates with this message:

“Stop measuring your worth against someone else’s journey. Your path is your own. And it is enough. While this chapter may be closing, I encourage you: don’t close the book. Stay open to the possibility of continuing your education – on your own timeline, in your own way. You have what it takes to go as far as your dreams will carry you.”

CCAHE Faculty Union President and Professor of Communications Studies Suzanne Southerland affirmed to the graduates that, in a time of disinformation and extreme divide, the world needs THEM.

“It needs your ability to work with passion and tenacity, it needs you to stay informed and to stay involved, it needs your problem solving and your sense of humor, it needs your capacity to care, your sense of right and wrong and your love for your fellow human. We need your ability to think deeply and act ethically and with compassion. So go out there and question authority and challenge those systems that just aren’t working.”



Student speaker Malina Siharath, *above*, who earned a direct transfer associate in arts degree, urged the Class of 2025:

“Your box may feel safe, but the steps you take outside of it will set you free. Trust in yourself, and the rest will follow. And as you walk across the stage tonight, diploma in hand – we’ll take that first step together. It’s time to step out of the box.”

Special Student Recognitions



Gurraj Singh Dhami, center, with his parents, Vice President of Instruction Dr. Terry Brown, and Professor Suzanne Sutherland.

The 2025 Community College Presidents' Award, in honor of Val Ogden, was presented to Gurraj Singh Dhami, who impressed the Presidential Scholarship Task Force with his academic excellence, leadership, work ethic, and drive to help others and give back to his community. This annual scholarship is awarded to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to Washington State University – Vancouver.

In his application, Gurraj shared, "Higher education is the door to my dream. It helps me grow, learn, and one day, give back. I want to make my family and community proud. This is because I want to honor everyone important in my life – my grandparents, parents, and sisters."

With the help of the Clark College Foundation, two additional students were recognized with \$1,500 scholarships:

- Josh Bergstrom graduated with an associate in arts degree and plans to continue his studies in political science and eventually attend law school with the goal of becoming a congressman.
- Dorji Damdul graduated with an associate in arts degree in Business Administration with plans to study finance and become a financial advisor.

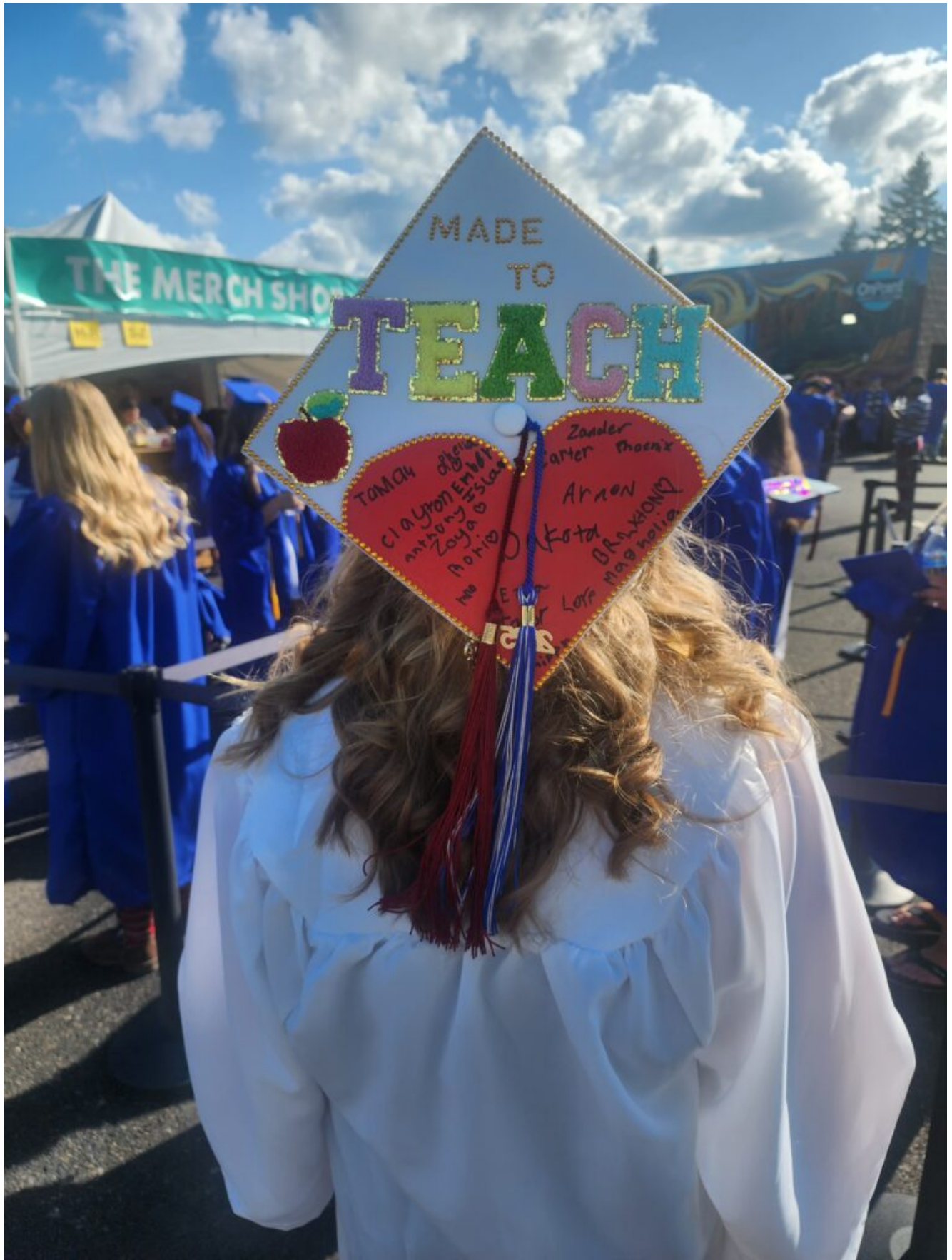
In Their Own Words

Before the ceremony began, students mingled with faculty members outside the Amphitheater, sharing the stories that brought them to where they are today.





Lucinda Nieves, who earned her AA in Health Information Management, proudly represented the Quinault Tribe by wearing a cedar-woven cap, continuing a longstanding tradition in her tribe.





As her cap stated, Lorelei Steuben was truly “Made to Teach.” She asked all of the students in her student teaching class to sign her cap – a reminder of the lives she touched that she could carry with her across the stage.



After coming to the United States as a homeless 10-year-old, Veronica Bustillos didn't know what college was, so she didn't even consider higher education an option. She went through setbacks but also had four beautiful children – they are what kept her on track when she was struggling. Because of them, she proudly stood on that stage as a first-generation graduate with a bachelor's degree in human services. She even received a full-ride scholarship to PSU to pursue a master's degree in social work.

“When I got the honors cord, I about died,” Veronica shared as she straightened the many pieces of regalia on her shoulders. “I'd been working my butt off to get good grades. I've never been a good student, so that meant a lot to me.”



Fortunato Hernandez Espinoza earned his diploma from Clark alongside his daughter, Miriam Espinoza. Miriam and the rest of his family are the ones who motivated him to continue his studies, as he wanted to achieve a better life for them. He hopes this education will help him reach the next level in his career.





With pride (and a bit of humor), Kat Skvartsova showcased her post-graduation on her cap. She's known she's wanted to be a pharmacy tech since sitting in her high school chemistry class

– after falling in love with the subject, she became determined to find a career in the pharmaceutical field.



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Relive the Excitement

Browse photos from the 2025 Commencement on Flickr or watch the ceremony on YouTube!

Photos: Clark College