

# **Clark College's 88th Commencement**

Clark College honored its 88th graduating class at the 2024 Clark College Commencement ceremony on Thursday evening, June 20, at the RV Inn Style Resorts Amphitheater.

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## **Applauding Class of 2023**

The college conferred 1,833 degrees and certificates on 1,601 graduates, the next generation of our community's workers, leaders, and scholars.

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## **Celebrating the Class of 2022**

Clark College honored its 86th graduating class at the 2022 Clark College Commencement ceremony held Thursday evening, June 16, at the RV Inn Style Resorts Amphitheater. The college conferred over 1,900 degrees and certificates for the next generation of our community's workers, leaders, and scholars.

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# Exceptional Faculty Awards



Professor Michelle Mallory is all smiles before Clark College's 2021 Commencement ceremony. *Photo: Clark College/Tarek Kanso*

Six outstanding members of Clark College's faculty have been recognized for their contributions to the college with a 2021 Clark College Exceptional Faculty Award.

These awards are presented annually to full-time and part-time faculty members. Nominations can be submitted by Clark College students, faculty, classified employees, administrators, alumni, Board members, and Foundation directors. Traditionally, they are announced during Commencement. This year, Commencement was held on June 17 on Christensen Soccer Field.

The awards are made possible through an endowed trust fund established by the Washington State Legislature and the Clark College Exceptional Faculty Endowment Fund, which was established in 1993. That fund provides recognition of exemplary work performance, positive impact on students,

professional commitment, and other contributions to the college.

Below are this year's Exceptional Faculty members, along with quotes from their nominators:

## **Kayoko Barnhill, mathematics**

"I have been taking Math for Elementary Education courses, and her course is very tailored not just to learning the materials, but learning how to teach each others in class. I have struggled with math my whole life, and her course gave me confidence that not only could I learn it, but I could gain deeper understanding and effectively teach it."

## **Tony Chennault, biology**

"He believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. He encouraged me to keep going, he told me I could do it when I didn't think I could do it myself. He teaches in a way that you understand, even if it's not your strongest subject. He is so inspiring, motivating, and encouraging."

## **Nami Inoue, Japanese**

"When I first began at Clark College, I had a very negative outlook on school based on my previous high school experiences. I decided to take some classes for fun and try out a college environment. Inoue Sensei's passion for teaching and love for her students was so warm compared to any teacher I've had before. She helped me rediscover the love I have for learning and school."

## **Michelle Mallory, early childhood**

## **education**

“To know Michelle is to love Michelle! She is a fierce defender of the learner and believes strongly in meeting the learner where they are at and with respect, dignity and recognition of the learner’s culture and style of learning.”

### **Joshua Patrick, English**

“Professor Patrick has taught me that I should never be ashamed to voice my opinion. He made me feel smart, validated, and taught me how to communicate my thoughts and opinions to others in an effective way to make them listen. He also engraved some very useful critical-thinking skills into my brain that I think will be very helpful throughout the rest of my college experience—but most importantly, I’ll be able to apply these skills to my daily life.”

### **Kristi Taylor, dental hygiene**

“Kristi has been incredibly supportive in a time of great financial uncertainty and worked on behalf of all her students to help us figure out a plan, or make contact with those who could offer us answers and help. She worked to provide all of us with an avenue for covid vaccination if we desired it. She works tirelessly on our behalf and still manages to answer emails in less than an hour. She’s basically Wonder Woman!”



Professor Kristi Taylor, *top row second from left*, stands with faculty, staff and graduates from the Dental Hygiene program at Clark College's 2021 Commencement. *Photo: Clark College/Tarek Kanso*

## Clark College holds in-person Commencement

# 2021

This will be the first time that the ceremony is held on the soccer field. Traditionally, the college's Commencement

ceremonies have been held at Sunlight Supply Amphitheatre. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the college's 2020 Commencement ceremony was held completely virtually. This year, as restrictions on public gatherings began to lift, the college surveyed graduates to learn which format of ceremony students preferred: virtual, drive-through, or in-person. The in-person format was the top choice of survey respondents.

"Our students have navigated through so much this academic year—pandemic, economic downturn, social unrest, struggling with issues like job loss and food insecurity," said Clark College President Karin Edwards. "It was important to us that we honor their achievement with a ceremony that met their hopes, while still conforming with public health guidelines."

Other noteworthy highlights of this year's ceremony:

- About 525 graduates are expected to participate in this year's ceremony, out of approximately 1,650 graduates from the entire academic year.
- Graduates include those receiving Bachelor of Applied Science and associate degrees, as well as certificates and high school diplomas or equivalents.
- The Class of 2021 will include the first graduates from the college's new Bachelor of Applied Science in Human Services degree program.
- Some of the participants are members of the Class of 2020. When that year's Commencement was moved online, the college invited graduates to participate in the next in-person ceremony.
- The ceremony will be led by Dr. Edwards, and will be her first Clark College Commencement as president of the college.
- The student speaker is Jaelyn Sotelo, a Running Start student who is transferring to University of Washington to pursue a career in political advocacy. Introducing her is student government president Josiah Joner, also a Running Start student, who is in the third generation of

his family to attend Clark College and is transferring to Stanford University in the fall.

- Also speaking are: Clark College Board of Trustees Chair Rekah Strong; faculty union president Suzanne Southerland; and Interim Vice President of Instruction Dr. Genevieve Howard.
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## A remarkable journey



Evans Kaame

This year's recipient of the Community College President's Award in Honor of Val Ogden is Evans Kaame, a student who has been through much and traveled far to pursue his educational dreams.

### About Evans Kaame

Evans Kaame was born and raised in a small community in northwestern Kenya. After his father died, the family was thrown into hardship and poverty. "I watched my younger siblings crying as my mom left early in the morning and came

home at 9 p.m.," he recalled. "We didn't know if we were going to eat at night or not."

When Kaame was in his early teens, he decided to leave home and live on the streets to ease the burden on his mother and siblings. "The street was a new life with so many barriers ... but because tragedies happen in life, I had to do this," he said. "I had no other option. I fought cold nights in the street ... being on drugs and breaking into people's homes. I had to survive. I had no choice."

In 2009, the course of Kaame's life changed once again, when a charity called New Hope Children entered him into its program providing housing and education to street children. At New Hope, Kaame's academic potential became realized. He graduated from high school in 2016 at the top of his class. However, his challenges were not yet over: He could not afford to enroll in college in Kenya.

New Hope's founder, Rachael Swanson, lives in Vancouver and graduated from Clark College. She encouraged Kaame to apply to Clark, and in 2018, after securing a student visa and scholarship funding from Clark College Foundation, Kaame enrolled at Clark as an international student.

Kaame has thrived at Clark College. This past academic year, he has served as student government president. He has run on the college's track-and-field and cross-country teams. He has volunteered with multiple local organizations, as well as at Clark College's Penguin Pantry and as a Peer Mentor for international students. And he has earned a Grade Point Average of more than 3.9 while doing so.

After graduating from Clark College with his transfer Associate in Arts degree, Kaame intends to continue his studies, focusing on business administration, political science, and comparative religious studies. He hopes to one



day create a global initiative focused on leadership and management.

## **About the Community College President's Award**

The Community College President's Award in honor of Val Ogden is given each year to a student who has completed their studies at Clark College and is transferring to Washington State University Vancouver. They receive full tuition and fees for two years while they finish their bachelor's degree at WSU Vancouver. The award is traditionally announced during that year's Commencement ceremony.

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## **A Commencement like no other**



Oswald was on hand to pass out yard signs to Clark College graduates.

Like all Clark College students, the Class of 2020 experienced plenty of challenges—academic, economic, and personal—along their educational journeys. But on top of the typical hurdles, they also faced something unprecedented in the college’s history: In March, they learned that their classes would be held completely online, as the COVID-19 outbreak forced the college to move into remote operations.

This Thursday, Clark College’s 84th graduating class will experience another “first,” as it is honored in the college’s first-ever virtual ceremony.

At 6:30 p.m. on June 18, guests and graduates can visit [www.clark.edu/grad2020](http://www.clark.edu/grad2020) to view a video of ceremonial remarks, a congratulatory message from staff and faculty, and customized slides of each participating graduate. These slides feature each graduate’s name as well as an optional photo and

personal message.

The virtual ceremony will remain on the college's website through the end of June, for those who want to watch it at a different time.

Last week, graduates also had the option to pick up free yard signs from the Bookstore through a socially distanced drive-through.

"We are all so proud of our students who have persevered," wrote Clark College Interim President Sandra Fowler-Hill in an email to college employees. "Join me in congratulating the Class of 2020."

*Photo: Clark College/Tarek Kanso*

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## **A night of triumphs**



A record 835 students participated in Clark College's 83rd Commencement Ceremony. *Clark College/Nick Bremer*

*"Hola, soy Denisse, hoy sere su enfermera,"* read the elaborate script on the top of Denisse

Zuniga-Ibarra's graduation cap, below a cluster of silk flowers. Or, in

English: *"Hello, I'm Denisse, today I'll be your nurse."*

Zuniga-Ibarra was one of 835 graduates waiting in line to enter Sleep Country Amphitheater for Clark College's 2019 commencement ceremony—and each one, it seemed, had their own story to tell of perseverance and triumph.



Dennise Zuniga-Ibarra, *far left*, with Estefania Tran and Osmara Robles, all nursing graduates. *Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

"Graduation, to me, means a new job, a new beginning, making my parents proud and giving back to my community," said Zuniga-Ibarra, who was receiving her Associate in Arts degree in Nursing.

Almost 2,500 degrees and certificates were conferred on graduates in the 2018-2019 academic year—a record number for the college. It included the first graduates of the Clark's new Cuisine Management program, as well as of the college's Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Management (BASAM) degree program.



Bachelor of Applied Science in Applied Management graduates holding a photo collage of their classmate Debbie Terry. *Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

For the BASAM graduates, the event was bittersweet—one member of their cohort, Debbie Terry, died before she could receive her degree. Her classmates held a poster with pictures of her as they waited in the white robes reserved for bachelor's-degree graduates. During the ceremony, Terry's daughter, Melanie Carter, would be the first person to cross the stage, receiving her mother's degree post-humously.



Amanda Rath was one of 126 students earning their high school diploma or GED this year. *Clark College/Hannah Erickson*

Family featured strongly in many graduates' stories. For Amanda Rath, this night wasn't about making her parents proud, but rather, her own four children, aged 3 to 13. All of them would be watching their mother walk across the stage to receive her high school diploma, which she earned through the college's Transitional Studies department.

"I want to provide something more for my children to see in the future—something more than just working at a call center," said the single mother, who works full-time and is already enrolled to begin the pre-nursing program at Clark. "I knew that started with pursuing an education."



Brian Ford Jr. graduated with an Applied Technology degree in Diesel Technology. *Clark College/Nick Bremer*

Like Rath, Brian Ford Jr. had balanced work, life, and school responsibilities. He was graduating with an Associate in Applied Technology degree in Diesel Technology. "It's been a long journey—three years," he said. "I had two kids while I was in school. I worked full-time. But I made it. It's the biggest accomplishment of my life and I'm so happy to get to this day."





Board of Trustees Chair Jane Jacobsen addresses the class of 2019. *Clark College/Nick Bremer*

Once the bagpipes started and the lines of robed figures filed into the amphitheater, the moments of triumph continued.

“Keep going,” Trustee

Chair Jane Jacobsen told the graduates in her remarks during the ceremony. “This world needs you.”

Jacobsen also pointed out that this ceremony would be the last one to be presided over by Clark College President Bob Knight, who

announced in January announce that he would be retiring after 13 years as the college’s president. She thanked him for his service.



Student speaker Soukaina Ouahhabi. *Clark College/Nick Bremer*

Student speaker Soukaina Ouahhabi spoke of the challenges she had faced as a non-native English speaker studying computer science who also worked full-time. “Sometimes, I would have to choose which I needed to do most: eat, sleep or do homework,” she said. “Because I only had time to do one of them. I’m sure many of you can relate.”

Still, Ouahhabi said, she kept her focus on achieving her goals. “My desire to reach my goals was stronger than the struggles I faced and has pushed me to be the strong, smart woman I am today,” she said, to a roar of applause from her classmates.



Vita Blanco learns she is the 2019 recipient of the Community College Presidents' Scholarship. *Clark College/Nick Bremer*  
There was also applause for the award recipients announced during the ceremony. This included the 2018-2019 Exceptional Faculty Award winners, as well as the 2019-2020 Community College Presidents' Scholarship, which was given to Esmeralda "Vita" Blanco. Another finalist for the scholarship, Anastasiya Kozlovska, received a \$1,000 scholarship as well.



Keynote speaker Julianna Marler with President Bob Knight.  
*Clark College/Jenny Shadley*

Keynote speaker Julianna Marler, who is a Clark College alumna, spoke of her journey from being the daughter of Hungarian immigrants to the first female CEO of the Port of Vancouver USA. “Clark College was a foundation of my business knowledge,” she said, adding that even some of her electives, like psychology, wound up being unexpectedly useful in management. “I wouldn’t have guessed it at the time, but those lessons would turn out to serve me well.”

As Knight concluded the ceremony, he told the graduates, “We are excited to think of the ways in which you will change the world. And we are glad to know that Clark College will always hold a special place in your

hearts.”

More photos can be viewed on our Flickr page.

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## Commencement ceremony to be held on June 20



*Graduates lining up at the 2018 Commencement Ceremony*

On Thursday, June 20, Clark College will honor its 83rd graduating class at the 2019 Clark College Commencement ceremony. The ceremony will take place at 6:30 p.m. at the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater. The keynote speaker is Julianna Marler, CEO of the Port of Vancouver USA (see full bio below).

More than 700 students are expected to participate in the ceremony, celebrating the completion of their bachelor's degree, associate degree, certificate, and/or high school diploma or equivalency.

The ceremony also will include the announcement of 2018-2019 Community College President's Award.

This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who is transferring to a degree program at Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) and who demonstrated leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.

The Sunlight Supply Amphitheater is located at 17200 NE Delfel Road in Ridgefield, Wash.

Tickets are not required to attend. Anyone needing accommodation due to a disability in order to fully participate in this event should contact Clark College's Disability Support Services Office at (360) 992-2314 or (360) 991-0901 (VP), prior to the event. For more information visit [www.clark.edu/cc/commencement](http://www.clark.edu/cc/commencement).

## **About Julianna Marler**



*Julianna Marler*

Julianna Marler is the CEO of the Port of Vancouver USA. Prior to her appointment, she served as the port's Chief Financial and Administrative Officer. Marler is the first female CEO in the port's 105-year history and one of just a handful of female port CEOs in the U.S.

Prior to joining the port in 2008, Marler worked at the City of Vancouver for nine years, where she served as the procurement services manager. Recipient of a 2018 Iris Award – an award honoring women of achievement in Southwest Washington – Marler engages in ongoing activities to encourage and support women in leadership positions.

Marler is a Vancouver Rotary Club member and serves on the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, Greater Portland Inc Board of Directors, American Association of Port Authorities Board of Directors, and the Washington State University Vancouver Advisory Council. She was recently appointed to the

Association of Washington  
Business Board of Directors.

A native of Vancouver, Marler  
attended Clark College and received her bachelor's degree in  
Business

Administration from Washington State University Vancouver.

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## Penguins shine



The skies above Sleep Country Amphitheater filled with heavy gray clouds on June 21, but nothing could dampen the bright spirits of the more than 700 students participating in Clark College's 2018 Commencement ceremony.



Members of the college's 82nd graduating class encompassed every imaginable background, age bracket, and life goal. Approximately 75 of them wore the light blue robes that indicated they were celebrating their high school diploma or GED completion; another two dozen or so wore the white robes reserved for those receiving their Bachelor of Applied Science degree. The class included a record 476 Running Start graduates who were graduating from high school and college simultaneously; meanwhile, other graduates were old enough to have children of their own—and, in at least a couple cases, dressed them in matching royal-blue robes so that they could cross the stage as a family.

All told, more than 2,300 degrees and certificates were conferred upon the Class of 2018.

As the ceremony began, however, it became clear that certain themes held these graduates together. When President Bob Knight asked all graduates who had worked while attending Clark to stand, almost the entire class rose to their feet. When he next asked the first-generation college graduates to rise, the result was only slightly less unanimous.



Valeria Flores

Student speaker Valeria Flores spoke about her experiences as the first in her family to attend college. "Being a first-generation student in college is like learning a foreign language," she said. "You don't become fluent overnight. I had

no idea where to begin. I did not know that I could apply for FAFSA. I didn't know how to register for classes, or even how to *find* my classes."

Flores went on to say that she did eventually find her path through college, and that working at the college's child care facility had led her to decide on a career as a speech pathologist, a path that would require her to continue her education to a master's degree.

The ceremony's keynote speaker, retired Evergreen Public Schools superintendent John D. Deeder, spoke of his own experiences as a first-generation college student. "I recall that 51 years ago tonight, I finished my junior college career in Couer d'Alene, Idaho," he said. "It was a big deal, because I was the first in my family to ever graduate beyond high school. It opened so many doors—I can't tell you how important this night is for you."



John Deeder

Deeder also spoke about the importance of education in broadening people's perspectives. "I really believe we need to be more tolerant, we need to be more inclusive, we need to be better listeners, we need to be accepting of differences in every way—cultural, religious, political, social, etcetera," he said. "If we do that, this society and the world that you're going to lead in the next few years will be a better place, and that is critical."

As is traditional, the ceremony was occasion to announce two major awards. Early in ceremony, President Knight announced the names of the recipients of the 2018 Exceptional Faculty Awards: computer technology instructor Bruce Elgort; English as a Second Language professor Sara Gallow; music professor Richard Inouye; mathematics professor Dr. Kanchan Mathur; and addiction counselor education instructor Don Wissusik. Later during the ceremony, he announced that graduate Grace Moe was the recipient of the 2018-2019 Community College Presidents' Award in Honor of Val Ogden. This annual scholarship is given to a Clark College graduate who demonstrates leadership potential, a commitment to community service, and academic achievement. The scholarship award provides full-time tuition at WSUV and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree.



Grace Moe

Thanks to the Clark College Foundation, scholarship finalists Chad Lipka and Mckenna Pozsgai also received \$1,000 each to attend WSUV.

The ceremony ended with the traditional sounding of bagpipes. And as for those looming storm clouds? By the time the last graduate had crossed the stage, they'd broken up to reveal

patches of golden sunshine. And when the graduates left the amphitheater and headed toward what their new futures held, they walked into the last golden rays of a gentle sunset, with the cheers of family and faculty greeting them on every side.

*Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley. To see more photos, visit our Flickr album.*