

Global dreams converge at Clark



Ruixuan Bai and Meghan Jackson are Clark College's nominees to the 2017 All-Washington Academic Team.

One student plans to spend her career overseas; the other traveled across an ocean to study here. But on March 23, the stories of Meghan Jackson and Ruixuan Bai will converge when they represent Clark College at the 22nd annual All-Washington Academic Team ceremony honoring 63 students from Washington state for their academic excellence and community service.

The All-Washington Academic Team is a program of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges. Top students from each of Washington state's 34 community and technical colleges will be honored at the annual ceremony, which will be held at South Puget Sound Community College in

Olympia; each will receive a medal and scholarship, and will become eligible for additional transfer scholarships from in-state colleges and universities.

About Ruixuan Bai



Ruixuan Bai

When Ruixuan Bai first traveled from China to Clark College to study as an international student, it was her first time riding in an airplane. Bai, now 21, began her educational journey at Clark in the college's Intensive English Language Program three years ago. She has since become an active member of the Clark community. She has served as both a Transitional Studies Peer Mentor and an International Peer Mentor at the college, as well as vice president of the Associated Students of Clark College, president of the Chinese Culture Club, and president of the college's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa. Additionally, she volunteers at Peace Health Center and at Share House.

A first-generation college student, Bai chose to study in America on the advice of her parents, who urged her to broaden her horizons and learn from other cultures. She chose Clark in part for reasons of affordability and in part because of its prestigious nursing program.

“At first it was hard,” she said. “I didn’t know that much language. I wasn’t used to the food—I wound up in the emergency room because my stomach hurt so much. But I really like the people here. They are very kind and very patient with my English. And I can eat the food now!”

Bai developed her goal of working in medicine after the death of her beloved aunt from uterine cancer. Currently, Bai is double-majoring in biology and business. She holds a 3.85 grade point average and plans to graduate from Clark in fall 2017, after which she hopes to continue her education in the United States.

“I want to have a better future, but I’m still deciding what that will look like,” she said. “I like the life here, but I miss my country and my family. I haven’t celebrated Chinese New Year since I came here.”

About Meghan Jackson



Meghan Jackson

Meghan Jackson came to Clark College through Running Start, a Washington state program that allows high school students to earn college credit. The Washougal High School student said she was looking for an advanced learning environment, as well

as the opportunity to explore interests before entering a four-year institution.

“College was always a given for me, but I never really knew what I wanted to study,” said Jackson, 17. “Part of why I wanted to do Running Start was so I could try different classes and find out what interested me most.”

The strategy worked: Inspired by her women’s studies and political science courses at Clark, Jackson decided to pursue a career in international diplomacy. She has maintained a 4.0 grade point average at Clark and expects to graduate in spring 2017. In addition to her studies, Jackson plays high school soccer and serves as president of Washougal High’s American Sign Language Club.

Thanks to Running Start, Jackson may be able to enter university with sophomore or junior standing, thereby helping relieve the financial burden of college tuition for her parents. She says earning scholarships like the one provided to All-Washington Academic Team members not only helps further ease that financial burden, but also helps confirm her decision to begin college at an early age.

“I work really hard, I study a lot,” Jackson said. “To be able to say I’m a part of this, it’s special to me.”

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

Penguins Fly



Graduates from Clark College's welding program wait to enter the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater before the college's 2016 commencement ceremony.

"Mommy did it!" read the message on Ashley Ellis's mortarboard cap, the glittery writing sparkling in the sun as she waited outside the Sunlight Supply Amphitheater before Clark College's 80th Commencement ceremony on June 16.



Ashley Ellis

Ellis wrote the message for her 2-year-old son, Paul, who would be in the stands watching his mother receive her Associate in Applied Technology degree in pharmacy technician—making her the first generation of her family to earn a college degree.

“I just wanted to show my family that I could do more,” Ellis explained. “I dropped out of high school at 16, and now here I am graduating with honors.”

As was the case for many of the approximately 720 Clark graduates waiting to process, Ellis’s achievement did not come without sacrifice. “I didn’t sleep a lot,” she said with a laugh. “I got up at 3:30 a.m. to study sometimes.”

While many graduates, like Ellis, came to Clark after time away from school, others had attended Clark before they’d even graduated from high school. This year’s graduating class included 346 members of Running Start, the Washington State program that allows high school students to attend college tuition-free. This was a record number of Running Start graduates for the college; 170 of them graduated with honors.

“I really felt like the experience I had at Clark prepared me so much—not just for college, but for life,” said Running

Start graduate Anita Bejan; the three fellow Running Start graduates standing with her nodded in agreement.



Bachelor of Applied Science
in Dental Hygiene graduates

Another large group of graduates stood together, chatting and playing with the oversized paper teeth necklaces hung around their necks. These women were some of the 23 graduates from the college's new Bachelor of Applied Science in Dental Hygiene program. This is the first cohort of students to earn their BAS since the program launched in fall 2014, making it the college's first baccalaureate degree. The college is in the process of getting a second BAS program, in Applied Management, accredited and able to enroll students in the 2017 winter quarter.



Bruce Becker

Graduate Bruce Becker, who was waiting to receive his Associate of Arts in Business Administration, said he hoped to enroll in the new BAS. Becker came to Clark after a traffic accident left him unable to do his old job. "It had been 47 years for me since I'd last been in school, so it was a little challenging at first," Becker said. "But it's been really fun. I've had a blast."

Jessica Sanchez was also ready for more school. Sanchez was one of about 20 Transitional Studies graduates waiting to receive their High School Diploma or GED recognition. This is the second year that Transitional Studies graduates have been recognized at Commencement.

For Sanchez, this moment had been four years in the making—two spent learning English through Clark's English as a Second Language program, followed by two of basic education. "I already had a high school diploma," said the 26-year-old native of Mexico, who plans to continue in Clark's for-credit classes. "And then I had to do it all over again, but in another language. I really liked doing it at Clark College, because you can get one-on-one tutoring and there's great support."



Jessica Sanchez, *third from left*, stands with some of her fellow 2016 Transitional

Studies graduates.

Another high school diploma recipient, Esmeralda “Vita” Blanco, addressed the audience inside the amphitheater as one of two student speakers included in the ceremony. Blanco, a single mother of two who dropped out of high school after becoming pregnant, spoke movingly about the ways pursuing her education has changed her and her family’s life. “I strongly believe I’m taking away more than a diploma,” she said. “What I’m really getting is a world of new opportunities, one I can share with the two most important people in my life: my daughters.”

Associate of Arts degree recipient Megan Cook, who attended Clark through Running Start, spoke about the wide range of students she’s encountered at the college. “There are graduates here who are the first in their family to go to college, and those who are learning right alongside their parents,” she said. “I’ve met people of all ethnicities, ages, and genders, and that isn’t necessarily something you find at every college or university.”



Left to right: Washington All-Academic Team member Tammy Senior, ASCC president Sarah Swift, student speaker Megan Cook, Washington All-Academic Team member Qi Wu, Clark College President Bob

Knight, keynote speaker Jessica Lynch, and student speaker Vita Blanco smile with Oswald before going onstage for the 2016 Commencement ceremony.

This year's keynote speaker was former prisoner of war Jessica Lynch. "Each one of us has some type of obstacle, some type of struggle that wants to hold us down," she said. "Do not let it."

The ceremony was occasion for Clark College President Robert K. Knight to announce the names of the recipients of the 2016 Exceptional Faculty Awards. The 2016 awardees are history instructor Joseph Cavalli; business technology instructor Dr. Kathleen Chatfield; geography professor Heather McAfee; and French professor Doug Mrazek, who is retiring after 38 years at the college.

President Knight also announced the recipient of the 2016-2017 Community College Presidents' Scholarship in Honor of Val Ogden, which 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 Washington State University Vancouver (WSUV) and is renewable for one additional year, essentially providing full tuition to complete a bachelor's degree. This year's recipient was Holly Varner. Two other nominees, Abigail Bambilla and Adeena Rose Wade, received \$1,000 each.

President Knight concluded the evening by saying, "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. Remember: Once a member of the Penguin Nation, always a member of the Penguin Nation!"

Approximately 2,000 degrees and certificates were conferred in total on the Class of 2016.

Photos: Clark College/Jenny Shadley

See more photos from Commencement in our Flickr album.

See full video coverage of the ceremony online from CVTV.

A springboard to opportunity



Three Clark College Transitional Studies students celebrate earning their high school diplomas during Clark's 2015 Commencement ceremony. Beginning in the 2015 summer quarter, students like them have a new option for earning their diploma called High School 21+.

Starting this summer quarter, adults in Southwest Washington who lack a high school diploma have a new, streamlined way to earn this valuable educational achievement. Clark College has adopted High School 21+, a new program in Washington State that is designed to help adults gain the education they need to participate in today's workforce.

"There are so many adults who are afraid of returning to school or who are worried about the GED exam and that stands in their way of defining and reaching their goals," said Monica Wilson, Transitional Studies Program Manager. "High School 21+ gives adults a new pathway to meet their goals with additional supports from the Transitional Studies team to help make the process as easy as possible."

High School 21+, which was launched in 2014 in 12 community and technical colleges by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, is open to all Washington residents aged 21 or older who do not have a high school degree. While students have always been able to earn high school diplomas or prepare for the GED through two-year colleges, this new program helps remove some obstacles to the process. Students can earn credit for skills gained through work or military history, helping to reduce the amount of time spent in classes that are unnecessary. Also, the program infuses basic skills classes—things like computer skills or writing that students often need to take, but that previously did not apply toward their high school credential—with rigorous academic coursework, allowing them to apply toward a diploma.

According to the U.S. Census, 10 percent of Washington State adults (defined as 25 years or older) do not have a high school degree. Meanwhile, according to recent studies, more than two-thirds of all jobs in Washington State will require postsecondary education by 2018—the sixth-highest rate in the nation.

High School 21+ is designed to make earning a high school diploma more accessible. Classes cost \$25 a quarter and books are provided for no additional charge; classes are offered at two locations, during times that fit working adults' schedules. And, because federal regulations now require a high school diploma or equivalency to receive financial aid, High School 21+ makes college more accessible as well for thousands of Washington State residents.

Clark College's Department of Transitional Studies launched High School 21+ in the 2015 summer quarter with 41 students enrolled. Already, five of them are expected to earn their high school degrees in fall quarter.

To learn more about Clark College's High School 21+ program, visit www.clark.edu/cc/hs21.

Photo: Clark College/Jenny Shadley