

# Utah State University Blanding Celebrates Class of 2021 | Statewide Campuses

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-A Utah State University Blanding graduate walks across the commencement stage after their name is called on Friday, April 23, 2021.

*Photo credit: Utah State University*

Utah State University Blanding is proud to have celebrated its class of 2021 on Friday, April 23. The class of 2021 consists of individuals earning 73 associate, 27 bachelor's, three master's degrees, and 39 certificates.

"You have had an experience like no other graduating class. University is difficult in normal years. In the middle of a pandemic all I can do is give you my utmost respect," said Kristian Olsen, Associate Vice President of USU Blanding. "You are here today, having accomplished your goal. You have not let anything stand in your way. Not even COVID."

USU Blanding celebrated graduates with a socially distanced gathering inside San Juan High School that was limited to graduates and two guests but included virtual elements. Olsen welcomed the graduates and introduced the guest speaker and student speaker.

The student speaker was Hunter Warren, of Red Mesa, Utah, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in Social Work. In his address, Warren spoke overcoming obstacles and the resiliency of the graduating class.

"We each have our own challenges that we had to deal with throughout our education. Despite all those odds, we all still manage to graduate! That shows how much resiliency is bestowed upon us, to be able to continue on

with our education after everything that tried to hold us back," said Warren.

"I know that each and every one of us have the capability of overcoming obstacles or else you wouldn't be sitting here today. That's what makes me proud to be a part of this Aggie Family."

Heather Hurst Young, an alum who is the former USU Blanding director of students and long-time employee of Utah State, was the guest speaker. Young was born and raised in San Juan County and worked at the campus for 27 years before retiring in July of 2020.

Young spoke about how important commencement is to the campus and the county she calls home. She also gave thanks to the graduates for all the hard work they put in during an unprecedented year.

"The unusual circumstances that have made your educational journey far from normal is one for the history books. We acknowledge the struggles that make this day even more glorious. You are a member of a very elite group. Few can say that they earned a degree in the midst of a pandemic. Some have been quarantined, have suffered confusion, isolation, fear, and have had to deal with less than reliable technical connectivity and, most painful of all, have lost loved ones; yet here you are," said Young.

USU President Noelle E. Cockett conferred the degrees virtually, and the graduates received their diplomas. The celebration closed with remarks from USU Alumni Association Board President Laurel Alder followed by closing remarks by Olsen.

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