Utah State University Uintah Basin Celebrates Class of 2021 | Statewide Campuses

04/26/2021

Industry Donations Support USU's Environmental Research

Utah State University Uintah Basin is proud to celebrate its class of 2021, comprised of 124 Uintah Basin community members. The Class of 2021 consists of individuals earning 66 associate, 45 bachelor’s, 12 master’s degrees, and one graduate certificate.

“Each one of you represent unique journeys and stories but collective you are what makes the Uintah Basin strong, educated and ready for the future,” said James Y. Taylor, Associate Vice President of USU Uintah Basin. “You have my respect and my appreciation for all that you have done and everything you will do to make our world and our region a better place.”

USU Uintah Basin celebrated graduates with a socially distanced gathering outside at the Roosevelt campus that was limited to graduates and two guests but included virtual elements. The White Peaks Centennial Pipe Band led the processional march of graduates. Taylor welcomed the graduates and introduced the keynote and student speaker.

Melissa Taveapont, who received her degree in Human Development and Family Studies, shared her journey as a first-generation college graduate. “The beginning of my education was extremely difficult,” she said. “In grade school I was made to feel inadequate, uneducated and even stupid by teachers and administration. I was placed in special education because I spoke two languages. The system failed me! I was a bright little girl who was overlooked, forgotten by teachers, and looked down on by peers. Elementary school completely defeated me.”

Taveapont’s distaste for school continued through high school, yet she graduated early and near the top of her class. Although she was satisfied with being a high school graduate, she made the decision to return to school after working at a job with no growth opportunities.

The importance of education my parents instilled in me many years ago finally made sense. I finally realized how powerful education is,” she said. “I determined that returning to school might help me to reclaim everything my elementary school robbed me of. My experience as a USU student has allowed me to take back my voice, cheer, and happiness. I am priceless. I am a first-generation Mexican American college graduate. I am powerful, independent, and an educated woman paving the way for future generations. I am here to make a difference for others. I want to be the voice of future generations.”

Darren Parry, former Chairman of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, shared his perspectives as the keynote speaker. His goal is to make sure that those who have gone before him are not forgotten and that the Native American perspective is heard and respected. He shared a story about his grandmother and gathering choke cherries something her people have done for centuries. She taught him about the signs to look for to know what berries were ripe and the importance of sharing those berries.

“I hope you take those berries of knowledge and experience and place them in your basket and I hope you cherish them,” Parry shared. “Then one day when someone in your life that you care for is in need, facing challenges and someone who may need a little nourishment, and a little guidance. What will you do? What choices will you make? How will you choose to use your berries of knowledge? I hope you will pull out those berries and give them to someone in need. Cherish those berries, cherish your education. The lessons that life has taught you, show gratitude for all the beauty in your life.”
The Red Spirit Singers celebrate the graduates with the Honor Song

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 an Honor Song to the graduates by the Red Spirit Singers.

During the ceremony, awards were also given to the following:

- Outstanding Faculty Award: Inella Bastian
- Faculty Researcher of the Year: Mike Christiansen
- Outstanding Graduate Student: Oaklee Riley
- Outstanding Undergraduate Student: Jaden Libberton
- Student Researcher of the Year: Cal DeBerard
- Outstanding Staff Member: Trish Kingsford
- Facilitator of the Year: Pua Rasmussen

USU Uintah Basin is home to over 125 program options and 27 full-time faculty members with locations in Vernal and Roosevelt. Scholarships applications for Fall 2021 are still open. Learn more at uintahbasin.usu.edu.