

# School of Education Commencement 2021

## Invocation: Chaplain John Walsh

In the names of all that we call sacred and holy:

This week, we celebrated with all of creation, the earth that gives us life, and the science that enables us to understand our responsibility to live sustainably upon the earth.

We offer our prayers of gratitude and ask for blessings, all who have made this day possible. We give you thanks for these young men and young women who have accomplished so much and worked so hard to make this day, this dream a reality.

We thank you for their families who have sacrificed and given so much for this moment in the lives of the students and for their future. We thank you for our faculty, and for their rich contribution to the learning experience. We thank you for all those who have given so generously of their resources to make this wonderful place of possibility.

And now, we ask for your blessings on this special moment as we celebrate the class of 2021. Amen.

## Deans Welcoming Remarks

Welcome, School of Education graduates, to our school and University of Redlands 2021 Commencement. Whether you are a graduate from our teaching and learning, counseling, or leadership and higher education

department, you are a School of Education graduate. This means you have chosen a life of service; you have Found the Others that you wish to serve. The Others you have Found include those who you will teach, who you will counsel (for educational and mental health purposes), and who you will serve alongside with, in school districts and institutions of higher education.

Your choice to study with us and embark on a career of service aligns with the School's vision to "Inspire more justice-related dialogue and action" and its mission to "Strengthen social and educational justice through student, staff, and faculty engagement."

Your choice to study with us and embark on your next chapter means we rely on you to actualize the principles of **social** justice we hold dear, which speak to equity and democracy, diversity, and being part of systemic change. We rely on you to actualize principles of **educational** justice, which means working toward accessibility and inclusivity in education and a commitment to self-awareness as we are on a continual path of growth ourselves, open to learning and new ideas.

Your passion for service—to Find the Others—is rooted in your own experiences or perhaps what you have seen that has ignited this passion. For example, the first student I met when I arrived as the new dean in the School of Education was a student whose parents came to California from Mexico, and who never thought it possible that their daughter could attend a private institution and work toward a career working with and helping students herself. Another student I met carries a passion to counsel and help young people from single-parent homes. The stories go on.

What I want to emphasize to you today, on your graduation day, is that your passion for service is what binds you to us—to your administrators,

professors, and staff members in the School of Education. Many of us come from backgrounds where our parents did not have the benefits of higher education, but they wanted nothing more than to see us get it—that is my story, and that is the story of many of your faculty and staff in the school of education. Our faculty and staff, who are second or perhaps even third-generation university graduates, are serving our students and the school because they have recognized the privilege of education they enjoyed and the possibility for a better life that a degree in education offers.

Graduates, you are not alone in carrying the torch that helps make our world a better place through education and counseling. You will not carry the torch alone because we are with you. But a journey requires many, and we need you and depend on you to Inspire more justice-related dialogue and action. We need and depend on you to help us strengthen social and educational justice throughout the Inland Empire, California, the nation, or wherever your path leads you for this next chapter.

Thank you for being part of the School of Education and University of Redlands family. Accept our best. Thank you for all you have given to us by studying and learning with us these last years.

*It is my pleasure to now welcome our University of Redlands  
President Ralph Kuncl, who will deliver his opening remarks.*

## **President's Welcome Remarks**

Good afternoon. I'm Ralph Kuncl, the 11th president of your great University, and it is a privilege to speak to you today at our virtual Commencement Ceremony at the University of Redlands.

I'm here to honor you—our 2021 graduates—on this important occasion in your lives and in the life of our University. On behalf of the entire University of Redlands community, we are enormously inspired by your achievements and congratulate you today.

To your families, we salute you as well. In countless ways, your graduates' accomplishments are also yours, for, without you, many of today's graduates would not have arrived at this milestone in their educational journey.

I am standing in front of Memorial Chapel, looking out over the Quad—one of my very favorite places on our historic Redlands campus.

And I feel certain that, as you graduate today, this is precisely the place you would wish you could be: at **YOUR** Redlands—here, being celebrated by all who know just how hard you have worked to earn your degree—your family, your faculty, and your friends. It is not the same without you here, and oh, how we miss you.

It has been a year where so much has been lost and sacrificed, and demanded. The only constant during this pandemic year has been change, which has been thrust upon you and all of us. Many of these changes have been hard, and some have been extremely hard.

And yet, you are here. You made it to the finish line.

It is a tremendous accomplishment. And it occurs to me that, on such a day as this, we should take stock of our triumphs—like those we celebrate today—and maybe even also our failings along the way, and ask: what will we carry with us to the **NEXT** chapter of our lives?

Perhaps most important, of course, is your University of Redlands degree—representing your hard work, your resilience, and the critical thinking

and problem-solving skills you honed during your Redlands education. After all, this past year was the most consequential in a century. Your Redlands degree and the knowledge you gained will take you far, and that, in and of itself, is cause for great celebration.

You also carry with you *all that you have learned* here at Redlands—in your coursework in your activities in your friendships and in all of your experiences on your campus and beyond.

You carry with you also *the people* who helped to spark your passions and inspire you to learn, both about the subjects that interested you *and about yourself*. Here, of course, I speak of your professors, your coaches, your friends, the outstanding staff who supported you, and the mentors who guided you along the way, helping you overcome hurdles and find your purpose in life.

Mark Twain once said, that “*the two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.*”

*Finding out why* is, for many of you, the reason you came to Redlands, and you have become the person you are today in great part because you are now a Redlands graduate, the person *who earned your degree*—step by difficult step—with the guidance of others who invested in you. These realities about yourself are gifts, and ones you will carry to sustain and nourish you as you grow into the next chapter of your life—and for the rest of your life.

I am reminded of a poem about saying goodbye to friends, by Southern Californian poet Flavia Weedn:

*Some people come into our lives and quickly go.*

*Some people **MOVE OUR SOULS** to dance.*

*They awaken us to a new understanding with the passing whisper  
of their wisdom.*

*Some people make the sky more beautiful to gaze upon.*

*They stay in our lives for a while leave footprints on our hearts and  
we are never ever the same.*

Today, on this momentous day of Commencement, we all cannot be physically together. But I stand here for you on our campus in Redlands, while our beloved university community is scattered far and wide, including you, our resilient graduates.

Here, now, I speak to you from our hearts, from your faculty and trustees, your staff and your community: with time and distance, our bonds have been severely stretched over the past year. But they will **NEVER** break—they **CAN** never break. You have left a footprint on our hearts, and we, on yours, and none of us will ever be the same.

Congratulations, Class of 2021! And Godspeed.

## **Introduction of Student Speaker by Dean Martinez**

This year's speaker will hold a special place in the School of Education's history because of his leadership, along with several fellow students, to establish the graduate student voice. Last August, Kevin Velez, a Master's student in our Higher Education Student Affairs program, approached me about formally starting a graduate student association in the School of Education. We have now taken steps that have advanced the student voice in the school of education. While there is still work to do, the Graduate Student Association in our school is now established;

and the student voice will be a part of our coming activities and regular meetings, from representation on advisory groups to planning of major events. I would like to now welcome Kevin, our student speaker for 2021!

## **Student Speaker Kevin Velez '21: *Seeds of the Future***

Hello and Congratulations to the School of Education Graduating Class of 2021.

We can all agree that the class of 2021 will always remember the extraordinary circumstances that surrounded our last year-and-a-half of education. Our virtual ceremony is a reminder that we are still in the world-altering event that is COVID-19. It has been a time of profound change, as we have all lost our “usual” ways of life. Some of us have lost employment, family and friends, and the peace of mind that comes from being certain of what’s next.

We have also experienced an amazing and agonizing movement for civil rights that exploded over the summer of 2020. That movement has sparked conversations about how we, as a country, must oppose structural and systemic racism.

Through all this adversity, many of us diligently (or maybe distractedly) went to class, wrote papers, read research articles, and struggled through internships. Most of all, and perhaps most importantly, in each of our ways -both big and small—we found a way to shine.

Malcolm X called adversity, such as what we’ve experienced, the best teacher. He said that every defeat, every heartbreak, and every loss contain its own seed. These seeds are the blueprint of the future. They

are vivid reminders of what we've been through, what we've lost, and what we can become. And they will eventually become our legacy.

The class of 2021 has A LOT of seeds because we know adversity so well.

Adversity over the course of our programs likely came in many forms. For myself, the adversity looked like heartbreaking losses of family members. In February of 2020, my grandmother passed away, followed by my cousin at the end of summer. In February of this year, my sister unexpectedly passed.

Along with feeling grief and the tremendous sense of loss, I am also constantly pulled to remember beautiful words they wrote to me years before their passing.

I carry these words with me as seeds. I open them and read them at times when the darkness seems unbearable. I plant them at times when I need them the most. I offer them so that you may be encouraged and inspired to recognize what seeds adversity has gifted you.

At the beginning of my senior year in undergrad, my grandmother wrote to me, "I knew my special guy was going to be something great." I carry that seed as a reminder that greatness is not just from what I accomplish but also from what I dare to attempt.

Another seed I carry are words written by my sister, who passed in February. In a letter given to me days before I left on an undergraduate study abroad trip, she wrote that "great things are just around the corner." I plant this seed so that it blooms perseverance whenever I feel like giving up.

I share these seeds given to me through loss to remind us that although the world we are graduating into is uncertain and vastly different than the



one that existed when we entered our programs—we are no less equipped, we are no less capable, and we are no less alone.

So, here we find ourselves, celebrating the culmination of long programs that tested us in every way, even as it sometimes felt like everything was crumbling around us.

I hope we carry our degree with pride, knowing that we are going into the world with seeds to build a future that is more just, equitable, and compassionate.

I challenge you, class of 2021, to identify your seeds. What has adversity gifted you? What are those small words, learnings, concepts, revelations, and experiences that you are going to take with you into the world?

What are those things you will call upon to be difference makers and shape the future? What will you be planting?

We, the School of Education graduating class of 2021, carry the seeds of the future. In both the large and small things you do, remember that you are making a difference. I am hopeful that our lights will shine bright during these incredible times. Once again, congratulations to the class of 2021, the world is waiting for us to bloom.

## **Recognition of Outstanding Faculty: Provost Kathy Ogren**

Good afternoon and congratulations to the Class of 2021. Your successful conclusion to this extraordinary journey to reach this Commencement in a year of pandemic disrupted expectations is commendable. It's my privilege to acknowledge faculty colleagues who

aided and guided you on that journey. They, too, are proud of your success.

Please join me in recognizing faculty members who have received awards for excellence:

- For **Teaching**: Dr. Adriana Alvarado
- For **Research**: Dr. Nicol Howard
- For **Service**: Dr. Conroy Reynolds

Several faculty will retire at the end of this academic year. Please join me in thanking them for their dedicated service to the College and University:

- Rod Goodyear and Phillip Mirci.

## **Recognition of Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Awards: Dean Martinez**

In addition to our outstanding faculty that Provost Ogren helps us celebrate, it is critical for us to acknowledge and celebrate all of our part-time faculty, who are so crucial to the School of Education's vision to Inspire More Justice-Related Dialogue and Action. Our part-time faculty bring academic and practitioner experiences to the classroom, which is so critical to the student experience. While I extend my true thanks to all our part-time faculty in the school of education, I would like to celebrate the following three who received the *Excellence in Teaching Awards*:

- **Marcina Riley**, Department of Counseling & Human Services
- **Melissa Bazanos-Hutton**, Department of Leadership & Higher Education
- **July Hill-Wilkinson**, Department of Teaching & Learning

## Recognition of Veterans and Others: Dean Martinez

I am happy to recognize the veterans of our Armed Forces who are in attendance this evening. These individuals are being recognized for their outstanding service to our country.

## Presentation of Commencement Recipients

The candidates whose names are featured in this program have satisfactorily completed all requirements for graduation or soon will do so and are recommended by the faculty for their credentials and degrees.

## Conferring of Graduate Degrees: President Kuncel

Here is the moment you've been waiting for:

*By virtue of the authority vested in me by the Board of Trustees of the University of Redlands and the laws of the State of California, I confer upon you the respective masters' degrees with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities appertaining thereto.*

## Benediction by John Walsh

As is my tradition, I want to paraphrase an ancient blessing:

*Goodbye...*

*which is short for 'God be with you.'*

*God be with you as you say goodbye to this place to venture out into an unknown experience.*

*God be with you as you seek to bring wisdom and compassion with you into this new world.*

*God be with you as you work to enable lasting peace and true justice to be a part of everyone's experience--not just yours.*  
*God be with you as you endeavor to save this planet and preserve the beauty of our common universe for generations to come.*  
*God be with you in all your endeavors...personal and professional.*  
*God be with you...*  
*Good-bye.*

## **Alma Mater (SONG)**

*O, that dear old U of R,  
Thy children near and far  
Will sing to thee and all thy glories tell;  
Where the orange blossoms grow  
And the waters gently flow,  
That dear old U of R we love so well.*

*O, that dear old U of R,  
Whose emblem shines afar,  
Eternal as the hills we love so well;  
Where the mountains tall and grand  
Like an inspiration stand  
That dear old U of R we love so well.*

*O, that dear old U of R,  
The years can never mar  
The memories of thee we love so well;  
Where the friendships are so dear  
That we leave them with a tear,  
That dear old U of R we love so well.*

## **Closing Remarks: Dean Martinez**

Graduates, you are among the fortunate few in this country to have had the opportunity to experience higher education and persist to a Master's or doctoral degree. Congratulations.

Within all of us is a spirit and desire to learn. Through your student experience here at the University of Redlands in the School of Education, you were able to feed that spirit, to nourish that desire to learn. While there may have been both successes and challenges along the way—whether academic, co-curricular, or personal—this was all part of your education and learning journey.

Ironically, your education has only just begun. It is the seed that your formal education plants that will help you on your next chapter of success, whether that be in counseling, teaching, K-12 or higher education administration, or any service profession. May your degree be a complement to the many assets and gifts you already brought to us, as you allowed us to travel with you through your student experience. I hope you will look back on your experience with us in fondness. I hope your experience with us helps you help others—helps others to find the opportunity and access that feeds and nourishes their spirit and desire to learn about themselves, about others, and about the world around them.

Thank you.

**END OF CEREMONY**