

Zupan charges downstate graduates: 'Do us proud'

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Speaker and alumnus Robert Meltzer, happy grads, a celebratory motorboard

Alfred University last week awarded master's degrees and Certificates of Advanced Study to over 150 students who completed their coursework in five graduate programs offered in partnership with the Center for Integrated Teacher Education (CITE) in the greater New York City area.

The 10th commencement ceremony was held on June 2, 2017, at the Brooklyn Center for Performing Arts at Brooklyn College, where almost 1,000 family members, friends and downstate faculty attended the event.

Ninety-two students in the counseling program, the largest class in that program's history, received master degrees in school counseling and mental health counseling. The master of public administration program graduated 25 students; master of education in literacy, 25 students; and the advanced certificate program in mental health counseling, 14 students.

President Mark Zupan presided over the ceremony, with Dr. Richard Stephens, Provost, and Dr. Jay Cerio, Dean of External Programs, assisting in the awarding of degrees. The commencement speaker was Alfred University Trustee Robert Meltzer, a 1960 graduate of the University.

Meltzer earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics from Alfred University and went on to earn his MBA from Columbia University in 1963. He spent more than 30 years at Keystone Paper Company, Inc., in New York City, and was president from 1983-1995. He then held the position of president of Keystone Paper Division of the Spiro-Wallach Co. Inc., of New York City. He is currently vice president of Supply One-New York.

"I'm extremely proud to be celebrating with all of you," Meltzer told the graduates. "Your hard work and perseverance made this day possible. I'm speaking to a dedicated group who worked days and went to school evenings and weekends, who took advantage of everything America has to offer."

Meltzer urged the students to remember the importance of the day, and how education has transformed and will continue to transform their lives.

"Education will change your dreams into reality," he said. "Learning is a treasure. Taking nothing for granted will keep you one step ahead."

Meltzer, who was honored during Friday's ceremony with the Alfred University Order of Merit for his support of the University and its NYC-area programs, spoke of his affinity for Alfred University and said the 2017 graduates will share that bond. "My love for Alfred has never left me," he said. "Remember your attachment to Alfred University will never end."

Student speaker Ashley Ortiz described her experience as an Alfred University student and reflected on the common experience that the students had during their campus residencies.

“We had to balance work and family to make it here today,” she said. “I’m proud of all the graduates for their hard work and dedication.”

Ortiz exhorted the graduates of all the programs to remember the people in their lives — friends and family — who helped them succeed. And she asked her classmates to remember the bonds they formed during their time studying at Alfred University.

“We gained valuable knowledge and made great friendships. No matter what, we supported each other and helped each other out,” she said. “We’ve gone through some amazing times together.”

Zupan commended the graduates for the success they achieved and, like Ortiz, urged them to appreciate others who helped them along the way. “Always be mindful of family and loved ones who allowed you to realize this opportunity,” he said.

“I have three requests,” he continued. “One: do us proud. The Alumni Association you’re joining is an august group of alums around the world. Add to their impact. Two: count on us as family. It’s been an honor and privilege to work with you. If there are ways we can help you, call on us. Three: always keep dreaming, and if you come across other promising students, send them our way.”

The Dr. James F. Dougherty Award, presented by CITE in memory of one of its founders, was given to: Kimberly Howard, Judith Matthews, Wesley Williams, Rukiya Shannon and Aldwin Abel, from the counseling program; Jacqueline Meditz, literacy program; and James Fitzgerald, public administration program.

Ms. Effie Coyle, a longtime instructor in the counseling program, and coordinator of the school counseling field experience, and Ms. Marie Calder, coordinator of the literacy program, received special gifts in commemoration of their retirement from the programs. Coyle has been instrumental in finding internship placements for students and conducted hundreds of visits to internship sites during the 10 years she was associated with the program. Calder has been a key recruiter and instructor for the literacy program since its inception in 2007.

AU began offering master degrees in school counseling through CITE in fall 2006. The offerings expanded over the next five years to include the five programs represented in the ceremony. An additional program, the Certificate of Advanced Study in Care Management, was launched this year in partnership with the 1199 Service Employees International Union Education and Training Fund.

The programs are specifically designed for non-traditional students who are working during the week, with classes scheduled only on weekends. Students attend classes year-round for up to two years, depending on the program. Courses are offered at sites in Downtown Brooklyn, Manhattan, the Bronx, Long Island, and Westchester County. All students are required to complete residencies on the AU campus during the summers that they are enrolled in their programs.

Over 1,000 graduates of the programs are employed in the NYC metropolitan area as school counselors, mental health counselors, teachers and agency administrators.