

Hall tells Downstate graduates: You are heroes

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Charles M. Edmondson, Scott Brenner, William M. Hall

The 64 graduates of Alfred University&s Downstate Program who received their master&s degrees in counseling or literacy education during the sixth annual commencement ceremonies at Kingsborough Community College earlier today each know what it is to be hero, said AU Provost William M. Hall.

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Among the characteristics of a hero, said Hall, who is retiring at the end of the month after a 33-year career at Alfred University, are “courage, determination and independence.”

The graduates of AU&s Downstate Programs who attend classes weekends and during the summers while working full-time and taking care of family responsibilities needed those same characteristics to make it through the program to earn their degrees.

Earning their master&s degrees is “more than just learning the facts in the curriculum,” Hall said, telling the graduates, “You have taken the challenge, and you have met the challenge.”

Jay Cerio, director of the Downstate Program that the University offers through the Center for Integrated Teacher Education, and Robert Bitting, associate director, presented Hall with a framed print of the Brooklyn Bridge for “building bridges between Brooklyn and Manhattan and Alfred, NY.”

While Cerio and Bitting have led the program since it began during the 2006-07 school year, it took the “visionary support” of Hall to make it happen, said AU President Charles M. Edmondson.

Kiia Mack, chosen by the literacy faculty to be the student speaker for its program, said her “purpose and passion since I was a child” have been to be an educator.

Her grandmother wrote on every birthday card she gave her: “Always try. Never say ‘I can&t.&’ That&s the mantra she&s lived by and that&s the mantra she tries to instill in the children she teaches, Mack said.

Stefan Phillips, speaking on behalf of the counseling students, described his journey through the program through the metaphor of four quarters of a basketball game, likening the final year of the program in which the students are pushed to complete their practicum and their professional portfolios to the pressure of the fourth quarter of a hard-fought game, one in which the members of the cohort bonded as a team.

David Robinson, who received his master's in counseling from AU in 2008 as a member of the first cohort to go through the Downstate Program, was recognized as the supervisor of the year by Bitting. Robinson, who is a guidance counselor at Manhattan Comprehensive Night and Day School, oversaw the practicum experiences of three students in counseling this year.

Recipients of the James Dougherty Award for Counseling, who are chosen by the faculty based on academic excellence, and recommendations from the faculty for their individual growth while enrolled, sometimes in spite of the circumstances, were: Jamal Horsley, Joanna Ventura, Amira Rehawi, Yvonne Sternemann and Candice Walker.

Recipient of the Dougherty Award for Literacy was Grace Curatolo.

Outstanding students who earned 4.0 grade-point averages, the highest possible, for 16 courses in counseling were: Althea Aarons-Ferguson, Theresa Amelio, Paul Bonney, Beth Cheikes, Florencio Diaz, Rita Himmelstein, Jamal Horsley, Robin Medina, Amira Rehawi, Heather Roldan, Sari Schoenfeld, Yvonne Sternemann, Sathyra Stewart, Salvatore Tinervia and Jocelyn Vargas.

Literacy graduates who earned 4.0 grade-point averages were: Samantha Bisbal, Grace Curatolo and Erin Foley.

Scott Brenner, a 1984 alumnus of Alfred University and a member of the Alumni Council, inducted the new graduates into the Alfred University Alumni Association.

Alfred University's motto is Fiat Lux, Latin for "Let there be light," Brenner said, but that's a "grossly simplistic" interpretation of the phrase. He said a deeper meaning alludes to the creation of the universe, when darkness was "the natural state. Light, or knowledge, is an acquired state."

Alfred University, he told the graduates, "is the place I acquired the light" of learning.