

AU Graduate Follows in Her Daughter's Footsteps as Top Student

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Alfred, NY - In 1991, when Melissa Cutler Vernacotola received her B.S. degree in ceramic engineering, she was the top graduate in what is now the School of Ceramic Engineering and Materials Science at Alfred University. Today, when her mother, Jean M. Cutler, walks across the McLane Center stage, it will be as the top student in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences with a grade point average (GPA) of 3.90. She will receive a B.A. degree in elementary education. Mrs. Cutler enrolled in Alfred University in the fall of 1997, after earning an associate's degree from Alfred State College. "I had gone to college right after high school, but I knew it just wasn't what I wanted to do at that time," said Mrs. Cutler, who was graduated from Port Allegany (PA) High School. "In the back of my mind, though, I knew I wanted to go back," she said. She ran a daycare center for 25 years, until her own three children were out of school, then it was her turn to go back. The time was right, she thought, to allow her to "settle down, and center on my studies." That was not exactly the way things went. Right after she enrolled at AU, she learned that she was to become a grandmother for the first time, and that her son-in-law, Dean Vernacotola, who received both his B.S. ('92) and M.S. ('93) degrees in ceramic engineering from AU, had cancer. Even through the birth of her grandchild and the death this past winter of her son-in-law, Mrs. Cutler managed to maintain her academic standing. "The bottom line was school was my release," she said. "It was a lifesaver. Instead of adding stress, it relieved it." Going back to school after so many years away "is a whole different thing," she said. She believes her education "means so much more to me. I got so much more out of it." While others say they couldn't face the rigors of classes, and homework, and papers, and tests, Mrs. Cutler found "it was not a chore. It was great." She completed her student teaching with Patty Peters at Wellsville Elementary School, and hopes to secure a teaching job. She is married to Charles Cutler, superintendent of Whitesville Central School, whom, she says, was "so supportive" throughout the years she was in school. In addition to Melissa, who also earned an M.S. degree in ceramic engineering from AU in 1993, the Cutlers have two other children: Carin, a '94 alumna of Alfred University with a B.A. degree, and Charles, Jr., who works for an electronics firm. Other top graduates are: School of Art and Design: Heather Marie Seeley, 3.87 GPA. Heather is a graduate of Gloversville High School, and is the daughter of Christopher and Susan Seeley of Lincoln Street, Gloversville. School of Ceramic Engineering and Materials Science: Laura Ann Bustard, 3.91 GPA. She is a graduate of Webster High School and is the daughter of John and Christine Bustard of Klem Road, Webster. College of Engineering and Professional Studies: Jennifer Rebecca McLaughlin, 3.90. An electrical engineering major, Jennifer is a graduate of Susan McLaughlin of Grove Springs Road, Hammondsport. She is a graduate of Hammondsport Central School. College of Business: Mark J. Tedisky, with a 3.84 GPA. Mark is a graduate of Marianapolis Prep School, and is the son of Donna Rawson of Munyan Road, Putnam, CT, and Steven J. Tedisky of Bunny Road, Preston, CT. The five top graduates are among the 325 who will receive bachelor's degrees today. Another 90 will receive their master's degrees, and 15 will receive doctoral degrees, bringing to 585 the total number of degrees Alfred University has conferred during the 1998-99 academic year. Robert Turner, professor emeritus of ceramic art at Alfred, a distinguished teacher and internationally recognized artist, will deliver the commencement address. Receiving honorary degrees will be Carole Lee Hulse Coll, wife of AU President Edward G. Coll, Jr., and Eileen Stevens of Sayville, NY, who is being honored for her 20-year crusade to increase awareness to the dangers of hazing and to bring it to a halt on college campuses. Alfred University commencement was at 10 a.m. in McLane Center.