

## **Alfred University Class of 2020 honored with virtual ceremony**

5/16/20

ALFRED, NY (May 16, 2020) — Alfred University, which postponed its annual Spring Commencement ceremonies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, held a virtual celebration today to honor members of the Class of 2020.

The University was to have hosted its Commencement ceremonies today, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced the University to cancel or postpone on-campus events, including Commencement. The University will now hold an on-campus Commencement ceremony for the Class of 2020, including December graduates, on Dec. 19, 2020.

Today's virtual celebration also honored Spring graduates from Alfred University's AU-NYC programs, who on June 18 will receive degrees in counseling, public administration and mental health counseling. The AU-NYC graduation ceremonies were also postponed due to COVID-19.

### [Class of 2020 Virtual Celebration](#)

Members of the Class of 2020 are familiar with the virtual setting of today's celebration. Students went home in March as part of the University's response to COVID-19, and completed the remainder of their studies in an online format. During today's celebration, Mark Zupan, Alfred University president, praised students for their ability to adapt to and persevere.

"It is an honor to be with you this morning to celebrate the Class of 2020," Zupan said. "We are so happy for you and proud of you, and so grateful for the resiliency you've displayed for the last two months. I applaud and commend you, and our faculty and staff, for rising to the occasion. You've done us immensely proud."

Peter Cuneo '67, '13 H, was keynote speaker for Saturday's ceremony. Cuneo, a member of the University's Board of Trustees and Board chair emeritus, is renowned for turning around struggling businesses, among them Clairol, Black & Decker, Remington, and, most notably, Marvel Comics.

"The most profound aspect of today is the world we live in, which has changed so drastically over the past couple of months—a world that certainly the older generations never expected to experience," Cuneo commented. "This will provide very unique challenges for our graduates as they go forth after Commencement."

Cuneo offered a historical perspective on how he envisions graduates meeting those challenges. He referred to King Alfred, the namesake of Alfred University. Alfred, King of the Saxons, was known as the Education King for his promotion of learning, and also was known as a Warrior King.

"In the past, a warrior meant someone who was very brave in battle. I think today, we use warrior to describe someone who is very committed to a particular cause or goal—someone who never gives up," he said. "Alfred is sending its graduates out to be warriors tomorrow. I like to think that Alfred's culture, Alfred's diversity, and its scholarship has prepared all of our graduates today to be warriors. Alfred has prepared its graduates to be warrior leaders, something this country needs very badly."

Cuneo advised members of the Class of 2020 to take "measured risks" in their professional and personal endeavors. "Always think about reaching higher than you think you can go. You'll be surprised and delighted by the results," he said.

Amber Smith and Anastasia Campbell, recipients of the Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior Awards—named in honor of Marlin Miller '54, H '89, H '19, a Board of Trustees member and Board chair emeritus—addressed their classmates.

“Graduation is no small milestone, especially with what we’ve had to endure during our final semester,” said Smith, a biomaterials engineering major (minors in business administration, chemistry, biology, and mathematics) from Prattsburgh, NY, and a graduate of Prattsburgh Central High School. “We are a truly unique group of seniors—robust in overcoming hardships and the ultimate survivors of change.”

“Thank you for being here. Thank you for rising above the adversity when the world around you seemed to be crumbling,” commented Campbell, a criminal justice studies major (public law minor) from Rochester and a Wheatland-Chili High School graduate. “I’m proud of every one of you, and honored to speak here today as we have weathered this storm together.”

The deans of the University’s colleges and schools also addressed students, as did Greg Connors ’92, chair of the Board of Trustees. Connors congratulated members of the Class of 2020 and encouraged them to return to Alfred for the Dec. 19 Commencement.

“What a way to celebrate the many accomplishments that you have achieved,” he said. “Even though you leave this magic valley of Alfred, when you come back as graduates, that magic is still here. When we open back up, we want you to come back. We hope to see you in December, in person, to celebrate your great accomplishments.”

In closing, Zupan praised students for their accomplishments and their response to a difficult situation.

“You don’t get to choose all the challenges you face, but you do choose how you confront those challenges. We commend you for how you’ve risen to the occasion,” he said. “Do yourselves proud, as well as your classmates, your families, the faculty and staff, and most of all our University. I look forward to having you back on campus in December for a real commencement.”