

SIUE Continues Commencement Ceremonies With College Of Arts And Sciences

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The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville College of Arts and Sciences continued the SIUE commencement season Saturday, May 8, at First Community Arena at the Vadalabene Center as Chancellor Randy Pembroke conferred degrees upon the Class of 2021. Originally planned for Korte Stadium, the ceremonies were moved indoors to avoid expected inclement weather.

To return to in-person commencement exercises during the COVID-19 era, Pembroke is overseeing a series of 10 smaller indoor and outdoor ceremonies for 2,325 eligible graduates during the first two weekends in May. All ceremonies are streamed live on siue.edu/tv.

Pembrook noted that life is about change and adjustments, and also about changing the world through one's own actions. He quoted human rights activist Desmond Tutu, "Do your little bit of good where you are. It's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world."

College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) held three sessions, beginning in the morning and continuing through the afternoon. Student speaker Kenzie Holzinger, of Highland, earned a bachelor's in fine art with a specialization in drawing and an interest in painting.

In her virtual commencement address, Holzinger recognized that graduation is not a final destination at all, but a powerful step along the path toward future moments of impact. "Upon graduation, our next assignment is not to enter society, we're already a part of it," she said. "Instead, SIUE has given us the invaluable tools and knowledge to operate in society with more effect. Once college is finished, there are no course deadlines and professors to keep you motivated. But if you need a life assignment to gain momentum, let it be this: no matter what you think you know, continue to learn. No matter what someone tells you, continue to question. When the world seems to stop because of a pandemic, continue to persevere."

Previously at noon on Friday, May 7, School of Business students received their undergraduate and graduate degrees. The School had two student speakers with Samuel Childerson, of Altamont, who is earning a bachelor's in economics and finance, and Ronald Akpan, of Dunlap, who is earning a bachelor's in accountancy.

Childerson urged his fellow grads to persevere through these uncertain times. "We are entering a world that is being forced to change, hopefully for the better," he said. "Luckily, we are entering this world uniquely positioned to adapt and create our own change. With our degrees in hand, we are now the next generation shaping this ever-changing world. As we move toward new experiences, we are in a position where taking a risk is not only a reasonable choice, it may just be the default option. While intimidating, an uncertain world is a perfect space for trailblazers to leave their mark."

Akpan praised his classmates' resilience. "We have spent the past year working through technological errors, Zoom fatigue and an even more competitive job market than usual," he said. "That speaks volumes to our unique resilience. As community contributors and future employees, it underscores our ability to adapt, get creative and serve as high-achieving, committed individuals no matter the obstacles in front of us."

Later that afternoon, the School of Nursing combined its traditional pinning ceremony with commencement. Bailey Johnston, of Benton, earned a doctor of nursing practice (DNP)/family nurse practitioner (FNP), and served as the student speaker.

Johnston was thankful for the SON faculty's dedication and her family's support. The encouraged her classmates to reflect upon their achievements through discipline, hard work and perseverance. "I have thoroughly enjoyed learning from all of you as you shared your practice experiences and thoughts in group work and various discussion posts," she said. "Good luck to all as you embark on your new journey to becoming great nurse practitioners. We all hold great responsibility to deliver high-quality primary care to a nation which desperately needs it. Your future patients will be lucky to have you."

The School of Education, Health and Human Behavior will have two exercises on Sunday, May 9, beginning at 9 a.m. and noon. The student speaker is Peter Romero, of Edwardsville, who is receiving a bachelor's in elementary education.

Spring 2021 Commencement concludes at 3 p.m. with the School of Engineering. Leanne Montgomery, of Belleville, who is receiving a bachelor's in mechanical engineering, is the student speaker.

On Saturday, May 1, the School of Pharmacy began the SIUE commencement season as Pembroke and Dean Mark Luer conferred degrees upon 79 graduates in the 2021 class. Conner McClain, of St. Louis, earned a doctorate in pharmacy and provided the student address.

McClain praised his classmates for their perseverance. "Our class has utilized our competitive nature to propel us forward amid adversity," he said. "Our perseverance and ambition began when we exceeded expectations on difficult exams that have left our professors saying they should have written harder questions. It continued when we ranked number one on the Pharmacy Curriculum Outcomes Assessment exam out of 142 pharmacy schools in the United States. And it was further exemplified amid the pandemic as we upheld the prestigious nature of the SIUE School of Pharmacy despite the drastic changes made to our clinical rotations.

"We have proven that no matter the obstacle, not only will we overcome it, but also we will grow as individuals and further develop our pharmaceutical knowledge and skills along the way."

On Thursday, May 6, SIUE alumni, who were unable to celebrate with an in-person experience for their respective spring or fall 2020 ceremonies as a result of COVID-19 mitigations, had the opportunity to cross the stage.

SIUE is also offering virtual spring 2021 ceremonies that went live today on the [virtual commencement website](#). These pre-recorded virtual ceremonies will include brief remarks from Chancellor Pembroke, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Denise Cobb, and SIU President Dan Mahony along with the student speakers.