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Two Graduation Celebrations

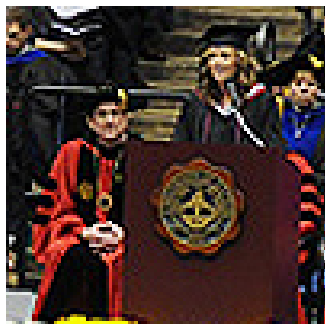
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Two Graduation Celebrations

05.06.2008 | Campus and Community, Business, Engineering, Education, Students For the first time in its history, the University of Dayton held separate undergraduate and graduate commencement ceremonies, allowing for special recognition for students earning advanced degrees.

An estimated 1,255 students picked up undergraduate diplomas in ceremonies at 9:45 a.m. on Sunday, May 4, at UD Arena. The top undergraduate majors were communication, marketing and psychology.

Clare Zlatic, chief of staff for the UD Student Government Association, brought down the house with a rousing Go Dayton Flyers cheer -- joined by graduates, family, friends and faculty.

About 290 post-graduate students -- including nine doctorates -- were honored at 9:45 a.m. on Saturday, May 3, at University of Dayton Arena, followed by a reception at the arena for family and friends. More than half of the advanced degrees came from the School of Education and Allied Professions.

F. Thomas Eggemeier said the separate commencement for recipients of advanced degrees was important.

"This distinctive ceremony will enable the University community to continue to enhance the stature and recognition of our graduate students and graduate education on campus," said F. Thomas Eggemeier, dean of the UD graduate school, noting that graduate students were overwhelmingly in favor of a separate ceremony.

Some UD graduates are distinctive either in the paths they have followed to reach this milestone or for their plans after graduation.

Vera Crowl, 55, overcame 30 years of drug abuse to graduate with a degree in psychology. She hopes to be a substance abuse counselor (read more below).

Lauren Balek and Brendan Fitzpatrick are answering God's call as to where they should head after graduation (read more below).

David King appeared headed to medical school but changed directions. He's now going to work for the Peace Corps in Mozambique (read more below).

She already has a master's and a doctorate. But Donna Cox, chair of UD's music department and Baptist minister, wanted to add another master's degree to deepen and transform her life and her teaching, leading her life into a new phase of fusing music with spirituality (read more below).

Vera Crowl: Making the most of a second chance

Vera Crowl has plenty of reasons to feel proud.

After 30 years of drug and alcohol addiction and five homeless years, the Richmond, Ind., resident will graduate from the University of Dayton at the age of 55 with a bachelor's degree in psychology.

But it's not pride she feels when she reflects on her life and educational accomplishment.

"I haven't allowed myself to feel proud, because I'm so full of gratitude," Crowl said. "Gratitude to God for calling me to his service and for his purpose. Gratitude to the recovery programs that have supported me, UD, my family, friends and the Richmond Catholic community."

Crowl started her recovery in 2001 and enrolled at UD in January 2006 to become a substance abuse counselor. She has taken a full schedule of classes every semester -- including summers -- commuting 50 miles each way sometimes three or four times a week.

Crowl is also the winner of the UD Nora Duffy award, presented each year to an adult learner who has overcome significant obstacles to achieve a baccalaureate degree and reflects the spirit of the Marianist tradition.

She plans to return to UD in the fall to pursue a master's degree in clinical counseling.

Crowl will be available on campus after 2 p.m. Tuesday and between 12 and 2 p.m. Wednesday. She is also available by phone throughout the week. For interviews, contact Cameron Fullam at 937-229-3256.

Lauren Balek and Brendan Fitzpatrick: A higher calling

With the number of people pursuing religious careers in decline, two University of Dayton history majors are going against that trend.

Lauren Balek, from St. Louis, will be entering the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist convent in Ann Arbor, Mich. Brendan Fitzpatrick, from Pittsburgh, has applied to do a year of service with the Vincentian Fathers in San Francisco, Los Angeles or Denver; the Neighborhood Academy in Pittsburgh or the Marianist Volunteer Program.

"I wouldn't really say I am choosing this, rather I believe that I am responding to an invitation to serve God, the Church, and the world through this way of life," Balek said. "Most people, especially students, have been very supportive, and above all, curious about the life."

Although not taking vows, Fitzpatrick is signing up for a year of service for two reasons: he said helping people truly makes him happy, and "the world isn't the prettiest place right now" with political, social, environmental and ethical issues.

"Through the Marianist experience at UD, I have learned I must be able to say 'yes' to whatever is asked of me by God or my fellow man and woman to best serve the world," Fitzpatrick said. "Only then will I achieve a career that I will enjoy and will better the world through serving others who will hopefully pass on that good will."

He is one of at least 46 graduating seniors choosing to perform a year of service after graduation, according to Nick Cardilino, director of the Center for Social Concern.

Balek said attending UD aided her understanding of her vocational calling. Fitzpatrick said his UD experience helped him focus on career goals that would serve others and try to make the world a better place.

The week of April 28-May 2, Balek is available Monday and Tuesday morning, all day Wednesday and Friday and late Thursday afternoon. Fitzpatrick is available all day Tuesday and Friday and before 3 p.m. Thursday. Both will leave Dayton after graduation May 4. For interviews, contact Shawn Robinson at 937-229-3391.

The Peace Corps path

Graduate school will just have to wait.

University of Dayton biochemistry major David King, of Sharonville, has already passed his medical school entrance exams and had also considered applying to law school.

But in September, he will begin a two-year stint with the Peace Corps teaching biology and chemistry in Mozambique.

"Joining the Peace Corps had been in the back of my mind since freshman year," said King, who graduates in May. "I like the idea of being immersed in another culture."

He got his first taste of such a life in the summer of 2006 when he participated in a UD-sponsored cultural immersion trip to India. He stayed in the Marianist community in Bangalore and helped serve the local population.

King said he may one day enter graduate school, but he's waiting to make a decision.

"I'll see if this experience changes my mind. I'm open to staying with the Peace Corps longer than two years," he said.

King is available for interviews anytime this week excluding Wednesday between 12 and 3 p.m. For interviews, contact Cameron Fullam at 937-229-3256.

Donna Cox: Merging music and ministry

The walk to pick up an advanced degree isn't new for Donna Cox, chair of the University of Dayton's music department. After all, she already has a master's and doctorate in choral conducting.

But she expects this second master's to deepen and transform her life and her teaching, leading her life into a new phase of fusing music with spirituality.

Cox, the director of UD's gospel choir, the Ebony Heritage Singers, will receive a master's degree in theological studies May 3. She then will step down after seven years as department chair to pursue a more direct connection between her ministry and music. She's been a member of the UD faculty for 18 years, and will return to teaching in January 2009 after a sabbatical.

Her specialty is African-American sacred music and, now with a degree in theology, she expects to be able to deepen what and how she teaches music.

"I'm a licensed Baptist minister and so I have a whole life in that area. I'm excited that I can now think of ways to begin to merge ministry and music at UD," Cox said. "I now can look for ways to merge what had been two separate sides of my life and my interests."

She will continue to direct UD's gospel choir and serve as associate minister at Omega Baptist Church in Dayton, where she leads the Marriage Builders program. Her voice will be heard at the graduate commencement, where she will perform the national anthem and the University Dayton alma mater.

For interviews, contact Cilla Shindell at 937-229-3257.

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