

Celebrating UNH Manchester Class of 2020

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

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Motivational speaker, author and UNH alum Randy Pierce delivered the keynote address to the Class of 2020 during Sunday's ceremony.

Resiliency. That was Randy Pierce's main message to [UNH Manchester's](#) Class of 2020.

“A year has passed since the initial expectation for your event. Talk about resiliency, here you are!” Pierce said. “Yes, here you are and I am here with you as well, still blind and still impressed with the resiliency demonstrated even in the reality of you being here. Covid-19 was not an excuse for you to miss your graduation, it was the reason it was delayed.”

Pierce is the founder and president of 2020 Vision Quest, an organization that leads and inspires students and professionals to reach their peak potential while providing financial support for crucial vision services. At the age of 22, a devastating neurological disease caused the unexpected loss of his vision. This neural disorder continued to attack his vision and eventually briefly confined Pierce to a wheelchair.

Sunday’s ceremony celebrated the achievements of 176 undergraduates, with the proceedings led by UNH President James Dean, Jr.

“You tackled every challenge with quiet dignity, respect and hard work. You innovated and mastered new paths to success. You found joy – and you gave us reasons to rejoice with you,” Dean told the graduates. “You inspired each other, and everyone who worked with you, including me. That is the New Hampshire way: When it has to be done, we do it. And indeed, you have.”

One of those graduates is Vanessa Cleary '20, who delivered the class’s student address. Earning magna cum laude honors, the [psychology](#) graduate shared the rocky road it took her to get to graduation day. After having to cope with traumatic loss and severe medical impairments, Cleary wasn’t confident she’d ever receive a high school diploma, never mind a bachelor’s degree.

“Life is unpredictable. It will throw you curveballs. It will make you pivot. Events and people will stand in your way. These facts are simply inevitable. But what you do with these facts is in your hands,” Cleary said. “We are leaving UNH today, changed. We are leaving here with a different perspective than we entered those doors with. With a deeper understanding of our futures, our world, our society, and how we can change it for the better.”

The ceremony included the presentation of the Granite State Award to Bill Rider, president, and CEO of The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester, New Hampshire’s largest community mental health center.

Several faculty excellence awards were also presented:

- Excellence in Teaching: [Dr. Nicholas Mian](#), assistant professor of [psychology](#)
- Adjunct Excellence in Teaching: [Cheryl Wood](#), adjunct professor of [biology](#)
- Excellence in Service: [Annie Donahue](#), associate professor emerita and [Dr. Gail Fensom](#), associate professor emerita
- Excellence in Research and Scholarship: [Dr. Patricia Halpin](#), associate professor of [biological sciences](#), [Dr. Karen Jin](#), assistant professor of [computer science](#), and [Dr. James Ramsay](#), professor of [security studies](#)

Congratulations to the resilient Class of 2020!

- COMPILED BY:

Christina Casinelli | UNH Manchester

PHOTOGRAPHER:

David Vogt | Communications and Public Affairs

UNH MANCHESTER



University of New Hampshire

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