May 14, 2014

Thousands to make transition from student to graduate

Guest speakers, special awards and, of course, thousands of thrilled graduates. It’s all there during Sacramento State’s Spring Commencement (www.csus.edu/commencement) ceremonies, May 23-24 at Sleep Train Arena.

Approximately 4,880 seniors, master’s candidates and doctoral candidates are eligible for graduation this spring, and most of them will take part in the two-day commencement featuring ceremonies for each of the University’s seven academic colleges. The ceremonies will be led by University President Alexander Gonzalez.

Each college will bestow a student with a Dean’s Award for outstanding achievement – in the classroom and the community – from that particular college. One of those students will be announced during the ceremony as the President’s Award winner.

Dean’s Award winners

- **Jamil Kochai**, Arts and Letters: A refugee from Afghanistan, Kochai did not read or write English until he was 8. Since then, he has developed a love of English literature, contributing to literary magazines on campus and winning Bazanella Literary Awards for poetry and short fiction. He also sets up free educational events to inform students about modern-day Islam, and holds a clothing drive for children in Afghanistan.

- **Terry Petlowany**, Business Administration: Petlowany is a member of the inaugural Business Honors cohort and provides leadership on and off campus. She represented Sac State on a team of engineering and business students at the CSUPERB annual Biotechnology Symposium, and interned at Intel Corp., where she earned special recognition for outstanding work. After graduation, her goal is to become a human resources manager, positively affecting change in the organizational culture.
• **Wamona Dates**, Education: After a 16-year career in sales for the newspaper industry, Dates decided she wanted to make a difference in the lives of others and began pursuing a degree in child development. She overcame academic challenges by developing techniques to help her balance schoolwork and family life, which included gaining the support of her four children. She has volunteered at several elementary schools, interned with the Children's Receiving Home and was a substitute for the Head Start program. She plans to earn a multiple-subject teaching credential.

• **Troy Miller**, Engineering and Computer Science: While working full time and raising a family of three, Miller resumed the pursuit of his engineering degree. He has worked at the California Smart Grid Center on campus and has assisted with outreach events to encourage high school students to explore careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). His senior design project took him to Uganda, where he helped Toggo International Children’s Center better use its power resources. He plans to return this summer to upgrade the school's power system.

• **Chinonyerem Kamalu**, Health and Human Services: “Nonye” Kamalu came to the United States from Nigeria determined to carry on her father’s love of education, and was inspired to come to Sacramento State after President Gonzalez came to do outreach at her church. She has been a leader in organizations such as the Student Social Work Association, the Community Engagement Center, Family Promise and Phi Alpha National Honor Society for Social Workers Epsilon Chapter. She has accepted a fellowship to pursue her master’s and doctoral degrees at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

• **Jacob Russell-Madonia**, Natural Sciences and Mathematics: Russell-Madonia’s professors say they have not had a student with such excellent prospects in mathematical research in at least 30 years. He has taken all of the pure mathematics courses the department offers. He also participates in research seminars well above the level of graduate coursework. A paper he wrote based on a summer research experience is under consideration for publication. He has been accepted to high-ranking graduate programs around the country, and in the fall will begin his doctoral studies.

• **Maryam Ahmad**, Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies: Ahmad’s professors call her one of the most impressive students to have passed through the International Relations major. She is active in the Model
United Nations and took home a Best Delegation in Committee Award at last fall’s Model U.N. conference. She founded and is president of the American Civil Liberties Union Club on campus and interns in Assemblymember Roger Dickinson’s office. Her work with the International Rescue Committee helped resettle refugees in Sacramento. She is a member of the Golden Key International Honor Society and the Delta Epsilon Iota Academic Honor Society.

**Distinguished Service Award**

Another honor, the President’s Award of Distinguished Service, will be given to attorney Mark S. Drobny, who volunteers his time to educate alumni, faculty and Sac State friends about estate planning and providing gifts to the University.

Drobny is also on the board of directors of The University Foundation at Sacramento State. His efforts on behalf of Sacramento State have helped secure more than $42 million in testamentary commitments to provide scholarships and support for students, faculty and programs on campus.

**Guest speakers**

Special guests will address graduates at selected ceremonies. CSU Trustee Hugo N. Morales will give brief remarks during the College of Education ceremony. Assemblymember Roger Dickinson will speak at the College of Health and Human Services assembly. James Mayer, president and CEO of California Forward, is commencement speaker for the College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies.

**International MBA program**

Members of the inaugural International MBA Program in Singapore will participate in person at the College of Business Administration commencement ceremony. This group of graduates pioneered Sacramento State’s connection, collaboration and contribution to the international communities, as well as advancing the opportunities of all University stakeholders.
**Commencement schedule** (graduate figures are approximate and subject to change)

**Friday, May 23**
- Noon: College of Business Administration; 620 eligible graduates; doors open at 11 a.m.; Dean’s Award student: Terry Petlowany
- 3 p.m.: College of Arts and Letters; 860 eligible graduates; doors open at 2 p.m.; Dean’s Award student: Jamil Kochai
- 6 p.m.: College of Education; 460 eligible graduates; doors open at 5 p.m.; Dean’s Award student: Wamona Dates

**Saturday, May 24**
- 8:30 a.m.: College of Health and Human Services; 1,150 eligible graduates; doors open at 7:30 a.m.; Dean’s Award student: Chinonyerem Kamalu
- Noon: College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies; 1,100 eligible graduates; doors open at 11 a.m.; Dean’s Award student: Maryam Ahmad
- 3:30 p.m.: College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics; 290 eligible graduates; doors open 2:30 p.m.; Dean’s Award student: Jacob Russell-Madonia
- 6 p.m.: College of Engineering and Computer Science; 380 eligible graduates; doors open at 5 p.m.; Dean’s Award student: Troy Miller

More details on Spring Commencement, including information for family and guests, is available at the website. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs Office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho

Sacramento State is making a difference in California’s Capital Region and beyond. We offer a life-changing opportunity for our 28,000 students, preparing them to be leaders in their professions and communities. Our professors are known for their dedication to great teaching. And our location in the capital of the nation’s most populous state allows students to pursue unique internships and research.

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