Commencement will feature special guests, awards

President Alexander Gonzalez will officiate at his final graduation ceremonies as the University’s top Hornet, and NBC News anchor Lester Holt will receive an honorary doctorate when Sacramento State holds its Commencement ceremonies May 22 and 23 (www.csus.edu/commencement).

Almost 5,000 students – including bachelor’s, master’s, credential and doctorate in education candidates – will be eligible to walk down the aisle in their caps and gowns during the celebrations at Sleep Train Arena.

This spring’s graduates will also be among the “Class of 3 Million” as the California State University system celebrates its 3 millionth graduate. New alumni can sign an online yearbook at https://classof3million.calstate.edu.

Holt will receive his honorary doctorate during the College of Arts and Letters ceremony on Saturday, May 23. He is the anchor of NBC’s nightly newscast, graduated from Cordova High School and attended Sacramento State.

Gonzalez will present the President’s Medal for Distinguished Service to five exemplary campus volunteers: alumni Margot Bach ’72, Gary Quattrin ’65, Holly Tiche ’89 and Tina Treis ’80, and community supporter Sonney Chong. The medals will be awarded at four college ceremonies: Chong during the Natural Sciences and Mathematics ceremony, Bach during Arts and Letters, Quattrin during Health and Human Services, and Tiche and Treis during Business Administration.

One student from each college will receive a Dean’s Award for outstanding achievement in the classroom and the community. And one of them will be announced as the President’s Award recipient during that student’s college ceremony.

The Dean’s Award recipients (with their colleges and majors) are:

**Jamie Rose, Arts and Letters (History)** – Jamie Rose always wanted her education to make an impact. Her research on the Greek War Relief Association has uncovered significant and new material about how food and medical supplies were delivered to children during the 1941-42 famine in Greece. Professors in the Department of History characterize her as intelligent and determined, with the ability to make connections that other students can’t. She attributes her work ethic and perseverance to her desire to honor the memory of the twins she lost during her first semester at Sac State. She has been accepted to graduate study in Hellenic Studies at UC San Diego.

**Michael Bloss II, Business Administration (Entrepreneurship and General Management)** – Michael Bloss II embodies leadership. A founding member of the Business Honors Club and president of the Sacramento Association of Collegiate Entrepreneurs, he currently is completing his term as ASI vice president of finance, where he is responsible for creating a campus food pantry that will serve students in need. In addition, Michael helps fund his education and support his household by working more than 40 hours a week. After graduation, he plans to pursue his MBA and
later a doctorate with the intent to create a service-based corporation and eventually teach at the university level.

River Smith-Sayer, Education (Deaf Studies) – River Smith-Sayer enjoys serving the community through education, advocacy and encouraging empowerment. Smith-Sayer works as a part-time American Sign Language teacher and volunteers at the disability awareness organization called A Touch of Understanding as well as the Sac State Pride Center. He uses the opportunity to speak about living with bipolar disorder and how he came to terms with his transgender identity in an effort to teach students to not allow the challenges of a disability or difference become a roadblock to living a fulfilling life. His aspirations after graduation include becoming a social worker for the deaf.

Reaa Ali, Engineering and Computer Science (Civil Engineering) – As an 8-year-old girl, Reaa Ali immigrated to the United States from Pakistan in an effort for her family to pursue a better education and bright future after her father lost his job. Reaa had to overcome many obstacles, from economic hardship to unfamiliarity with the American education system. At Sac State, she supported herself by working more than 20 hours a week while holding leadership roles with multiple professional student organizations. Before graduating in December, Reaa was selected as the Department of Civil Engineering’s Outstanding Student. She is now a civil analyst for a transportation-engineering firm.

Dao Yang, Health and Human Services (Speech Pathology and Audiology) – Dao Yang’s professors say his academic performance, along with his professional, collaborative and compassionate demeanor, serves as an example for his peers. He is active in the National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association and serves as vice president of Kappa Omicron Nu and campus club ambassador for Golden Key National Honor Society. He also volunteers with Sacramento Reading Partners and in the Robla School District, aiding children with a variety of communication disorders. Dao received a certificate as a speech-language pathology assistant from American River College and hopes to eventually obtain a doctorate in the field.

Aurora Marks, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (Applied Mathematics and Statistics) – According to her professors, Aurora Marks has established herself as one of the most dedicated and hardworking students in the mathematics program. She presented her results from a summer research project at the 17th annual Women in Mathematics Conference at the University of Nebraska and is currently preparing her work for publication. She also tutors at a local elementary school and in both the Math Lab and the Student Athlete Resource Center on campus. Her work has made a strong impression on the larger academic community, earning her an assistantship to the University of California for doctoral study.

Roula Omary, Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies (Dietetics) – Roula Omary credits her passion for nutrition and her desire to assist her community as the driving forces of her academic success. Growing up as an immigrant in Kuwait and then settling in the United States, she pursued her goal of an education in science and nutrition, and has overcome economic and family barriers in the process. She is very
involved in the community, volunteering with the Sacramento Natural Foods Co-Op and Sutter Davis Hospital. Despite the challenges of raising young children and English serving as her second language, she will earn her bachelor’s degree this spring. She wishes to obtain a doctoral degree in nutrition and chronic diseases, eventually pursuing a career as a dietitian.

**Commencement Schedule** (graduates are to arrive one hour early):

**Friday, May 22**
11:30 a.m. – College of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Studies, 1,037 graduates
3:30 p.m. – College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, 302 graduates
6 p.m. – College of Education, 444 graduates, 214 credential/Ed.D./Ed.S.

**Saturday, May 23**
8:30 a.m. – College of Health and Human Services, 1,141 graduates
Noon – College of Engineering and Computer Science, 334 graduates
3 p.m. – College of Business Administration, 608 graduates
6 p.m. – College of Arts and Letters, 813 graduates

For more information, visit Sacramento State’s Commencement website, which includes information on parking, disability services, places to stay and more for students, their families and friends.

For media assistance, call the University’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Craig Koscho