

COMMENCEMENT – 2022/2023

Good evening and welcome to the 33rd Paradise Valley Community College Commencement Ceremony. Please be seated. I am Dr. Tiffany Hunter, President of Paradise Valley Community College.

Joining me tonight on the platform are Maricopa Community College District leadership, the college's administrators, faculty, staff and student speaker.

We are delighted that the families and friends of our graduates are with us tonight at this important commencement event.

At this time, I am pleased to introduce Ms. Heather Reaume, Maricopa Student Senator for PVCC, who will greet you on behalf of our students.

Thank you Dr. Hunter. On behalf of the PVCC Students I would like to extend congratulations to all of the graduates and wish them well in the future.

Will you all now please rise for the National Anthem performed by Ms. Natalia Kelly followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

On behalf of tonight's graduates, I would like to thank Ms. Natalia Kelly for her contribution to this commencement ceremony.

At this time it is my pleasure to invite Mr. Herman Gonzalez to the podium to read the Land Acknowledgement.

Land Acknowledgement

Paradise Valley Community College is located on the traditional lands of the Akimel O'odham (Pima), Piipaash (Maricopa), and Yavapai people. There

are 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona and 574 across the United States.

We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory, and we honor and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land on which we gather. Without them, we would not have access to our education or the land we live, work, learn and commune on. We take this opportunity to thank the original caretakers of this land. We offer our respect to their Elders and to all

Indigenous people of the past, present and future.

Paradise Valley Community College (PVCC) credits the diverse Indigenous people still connected to the land on which we gather. Our college is

celebrating our students on the tribal territory of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRP-MIC). SRP-MIC is a federally recognized nation. We remain appreciative of our ability to teach, learn and serve in a space of such importance and reverence.

It is now my pleasure to invite back to the podium the President of Paradise Valley Community College ... Dr. Tiffany Hunter.

Now, please let me introduce the members of the platform party. To my far right is:

- Dr. Jon Storslee, Faculty Senate President-Elect;
- Mr. Herman Gonzalez, Vice President of Administrative Services;

- Ms. Susan Bitter Smith, Maricopa Community College Governing Board Member;
- Dr. Georgetta Kelly, Chief Human Resources Officer;

And to my far left is:

- Dr. Jana Schwartz, Vice President of Student Affairs;
- Dr. Amardeep Kahlon Vice President of Academic Affairs;
- Ms. Heather Reaume, Maricopa Student Senator for PVCC
and
- Our Student Speaker: Ms. Violet Anderson

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2023 Commencement Remarks

Good Evening and welcome to Paradise Valley's 2022-2023 Academic Year Commencement! It is my absolute honor to be here with you tonight to celebrate with you. I stand here in awe of all that you have accomplished throughout your time with us. Tonight is such an extraordinary night, as you are a part of my journey as the first class of graduates in my tenure as President of Paradise Valley Community College and you will forever hold a special place in my heart.

You are sitting here tonight as college graduates and I know with much certainty that many of you

could not have imagined being in this place when you began your college career, but here you are doing what many thought was not possible. Throughout your educational journey all of you have persevered through highs and lows but you have successfully achieved your goals and your family, spouses, partners, children, parents, friends, and the faculty and staff at Paradise Valley are beyond thrilled to celebrate you.

In reflecting on your past few years, the challenges and the unknowns of a global pandemic are still very vivid in our minds as it impacted our lives in so many life altering ways.

**You had to change the way that you participated
in your learning experiences, there was
uncertainty about life, and challenges that you
could not have imagined were present, but here
you are a Paradise Valley Community College
Puma for life; A College Graduate!**

**I truly believe that Education Can Be Your
Catalyst for change and it is my hope that many
of you believe that as well. To those of you who
sit here as a First-Generation College student,
you are forever changing the trajectory of your
family; Education was your catalyst for change.**

To those of you who are sitting here knowing that you now have access to a career with a livable sustaining wage that will allow you to take good care of your family; Education was your catalyst for change. To those of you who are sitting here knowing that all you needed was access to an equitable education; Education was your catalyst for change. To those of you sitting here tonight ready to forge ahead at the 4-year institution of your choice; Education was your catalyst for change. I know that PVCC has set you up for many years of continued success and I am so proud that we get to celebrate you. As you begin to wrap-up this chapter of your life and prepare to

move to the next, I encourage you to strive to make a positive difference in your community, serve as a role model, and find some time to encourage those who are on their educational journey behind you.

I will begin to close by sharing a quote by Lao Tzu that states, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.” You took the one step necessary to begin your educational journey and although the journey for each of you has looked very different, you are here tonight as proof that no matter how long it has taken you or how many steps you had to take to arrive at this

milestone, you conquered the journey.

We thank you for your decision to make Paradise Valley your college of choice and for allowing us to play a small part on your educational path.

**Congratulations Paradise Valley Community
College Class Of 2023!**

And now I would like to introduce Ms. Susan Bitter Smith, who brings greetings to you on behalf of the Maricopa County Community College District Governing Board.

Ms. Bitter Smith currently serves as the Secretary for the Maricopa Community College Governing Board. She has an undergraduate and graduate degrees in Business Administration from ASU.

Ms. Bitter Smith has been involved in association management and public affairs work for the past 40 years. In addition to her extensive public service, Ms. Bitter

Smith is the President of Technical Solutions, a family-based public affairs firm and serves as the Executive Director of the Southwest Cable Communications Association. She also brings higher education experience from alumni roles with Arizona State University Please join me in welcoming Governing Board Member Ms. Susan Bitter Smith.

Thank you Ms. Bitter Smith. On behalf of Paradise Valley Community College, please accept this small token of appreciation.

I am now pleased to introduce the President-Elect of the Faculty Senate, Dr. Jon Storslee.

—Dr. Jon Storslee’s Remarks—

You probably won’t remember the speeches today; I know I didn’t, so I will keep this short.

I hope you remember how proud we are of you.

Remember all the friends and interesting people you met along the way.

Remember all the good times.

Remember all the obstacles you overcame,

**so you have the confidence to overcome
the new ones you will encounter.**

**Remember the mistakes you made so you
don't repeat them.**

**Remember, the only constant in the
universe is change
Remember the power of learning.**

**Dr. Schwartz wouldn't forgive me if I didn't
remind you to Show Love.**

**And please remember not to drink and
drive.**

Thank you

Thank you Dr. Storslee for your
remarks. Although she is not with us
tonight, I would be remiss if I did not
thank our 2022-2023 Faculty Senate
President, Dr. Versha Anderson who
has provided exemplary leadership for
our Faculty Senate the past two
academic years. Thank you for your

excellent leadership during your tenure in office.

Introducing our outstanding student speaker tonight will be Dr. Jana Schwartz, Vice President of Student Affairs.

Thank you, Dr. Hunter.

Good evening. My name is Jana Schwartz and I have the distinct pleasure of introducing our student speaker, ***Ms. Violet Anderson.***

Violet is a first-gen student, receiving her AAS in Sociology and Computer Science. During her time at PVCC, Violet was heavily involved on campus serving as a peer mentor, honor's student, president of the PTK Chapter; she designed award winning projects, hosted workshops, became a published author, and received the Arizona Academic Team Scholarship and MCCC Foundation scholarship.

She will be studying abroad this summer in England and Scotland, before returning in the fall to attend Arizona State University's New College of

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences and the Barrett Honors College, where she plans to major in sociology and computer science. Violet would like to continue her education after ASU, attending the University of Copenhagen's Social Data Science Masters' program. Her goal: to work in societal research, studying countries' best practices and designing databases for improved research on a national and global scale.

Please welcome *Ms. Violet Anderson*.

“Thank you Dr. Schwartz” -

—*Violet Anderson Speech*—

Violet Anderson's Commencement speech:

I am so proud of you. Before I even sat down to write this, I knew what my first sentence to you would be. Let me say it again, let it really sink in: I am so proud of you. Now, if you're anything like me, you might have some tears in your eyes already, we'll see how long it takes for me to join you, I think my family has bets at around 90 seconds.

I am so proud of you. And, I am so proud of myself. Before I started at PVCC, I never, in my wildest dreams, thought I could stand in front of you all today. Frankly, that has a lot to do with why I'm up here. I'd like to share a bit of my story, and in doing so want to acknowledge that while my story is unique, it is not uncommon. I enrolled at PVCC August of 2021; I was working from home 40 hours a week at a job I hated. I had recently moved back home to Arizona after living in Washington state for a few years, during which time I was in an abusive relationship. That relationship drained my passion and stripped me of all the confidence I had in myself. It suffocated me with self-doubt: I didn't take chances because I had already decided I would not succeed. Luckily for me, that didn't sit well with the extraordinary people I've met during my time here. PVCC and these incredible people have, in many ways, saved my life and altered what I

considered possible for my future. My journey here has been all about trying things, accomplishing things, thriving at things I never thought I could even start. It has been about being courageous in the face of self-doubt, being courageous despite the self-imposed threat of failure. My first small, courageous act was simply the desire for something better. It allowed me to take one step, one small shuffle towards an unknown future, and enroll in two classes at PVCC.

That small, courageous step in wanting something better for myself is why I am able to stand in front of you today. I was terrified, and in all honesty, at times-like right now- I still am, but I no longer let that fear dictate what I am capable of. I no longer allow fear, self-doubt, and other people's predictions of who I will be stand in my way of going after everything I know I am capable of. I'm sure there are a few of you here tonight who enjoy Disney movies; they're a staple in my family, particularly Cinderella. One lesson, given to Cinderella by her father just as my father has given to me, shapes my outlook and my actions: have courage, and be kind. Have the courage to stand up for yourself, advocate for yourself, show up for yourself and do the hard work. Maintain the kindness to uplift others, to add light to a too often dark world, to say "I am here for you, I believe in you, I will hold your hand". Have courage, even when your voice shakes, be kind, even when the world is not.

Courage is compounding. When you use a little bit, you gain more; when you get comfortable using it, it changes your outlook on life and what possibilities you consider for yourself. I gained more courage the first time I reached out to a teacher here at PVCC. One of my first two classes was Sociology 101 with Dr. Michele Marion. At the end of the class, I sent her a message, one I reread at least 12 times, asking her what other courses she taught. Now days, I send like 15 canvas messages in an afternoon and don't even blink. But man, that first one was absolutely terrifying. It was the one I needed the most courage for and was thus the most rewarding. Dr. Marion was the kindness from the world I needed. She said, in not so many words, I see your potential, I will remind you. What she actually said was you need to be in honors and I'm signing you up to be a peer mentor, simultaneously exciting and terrifying me. Thank you, Dr. Marion, for reminding me just how capable I am.

This small act of courage became a springboard for me to become the person I am today. Sending that canvas message gave me the courage to not only quit my job, but take on a 19-credit semester, formally declare sociology as my major and add computer science, serve as a peer mentor, become the President of our Phi Theta Kappa chapter, design award winning projects, earn the All-Arizona Academic team

scholarship, and dream of attending an international master's program.

You ever try to summarize your achievements and get a little impressed with yourself? That is what today is for. Today is about being kind to yourself, celebrating your accomplishments, and allowing others to be proud of you. I am so proud of us. I am so proud of what we are becoming. The courage of the people I see in front of me today is palpable. We've overcome setbacks, traumas, loss, and far too many 'unprecedented' events for the word unprecedented to still have meaning. But despite it all, we are here, we've done the hard work, we've shown up for ourselves and for others. We are courageous.

Today, as we celebrate our achievements and look back on our tribulations, do not forget to look forward. To what you can become: the leader you hope to be, the provider, the artist, the politician, the changemaker. Let us not forget how our time at PVCC has changed us, encouraged us to come into the best versions of ourselves, reminding us we are continuously growing and improving. Reminding us of our potential, so we may go forth and remind others. PVCC has taught us how to continue moving forward despite our setbacks, PVCC has taught us to have courage and be kind.

My hope for us is that we will maintain our kindness while we stand in our courage. As we go out into the

world, do not forget that it takes courage to be kind. Please, stand in that courage, share that kindness; we need leaders who understand the importance of having both. Looking out at you now, I know we will be compassionate leaders who are courageous enough to speak up about injustice, unfairness, and unkindness. One of the most influential female anthropologists, Margaret Mead, believed that for the “future to remain open and free, we need people who can tolerate the unknown”. PVCC has prepared us to not only tolerate the unknown, but to take confident steps into it, shedding our self-doubt and embracing our potential. As we step into the unknown of the future, I know we will be the leaders we would be proud to have, continuing to uplift those around us, just as Paradise Valley Community College has done for us.

Congratulations, class of 2023, I am so proud of us.

Thank you, *Violet Anderson*, for
your inspirational message.

Thank you, *Violet Anderson*, for those
thoughtful remarks.

Now, Dr. Amardeep Kahlon, please
begin the presentation of the Class of
2022 – 2023.

Thank you Dr. Hunter

Would the 2022-2023 Paradise Valley Community College graduates please stand.

On behalf of the PVCC faculty, staff, and administration, and by the authority vested in me by the MCCCD Governing Board, I am pleased to certify that the members of the class of 2022-2023 of Paradise Valley Community College have met all the requirements, pending posting of satisfactory completion of final grades, to be graduated and awarded Associate Degrees or certificates as stipulated by the policies of the Governing Board of the Maricopa County Community College District.

Dr. Hunter will now confer the degrees.

Thank you Dr. Kahlon.

By the virtue and authority vested in me by the policies of the Maricopa County Community College District, based on the expectation of successful program completion, I now confer upon you, the members of the 2022-2023 graduating class, the Associate Degree and certificates of completion and grant and bestow upon you all the honors, rights, privileges, and obligations pertaining there to.

Would the first row of candidates remain standing, and would the remaining candidates be seated.

Candidates, please come forward to receive your degree and/or certificates as directed by the student marshals.

We are proud to continue a tradition here at PVCC. Military Challenge coins have been a long-standing tradition in the military. Service members and Veterans carry the coins as a way to symbolize unit identity and camaraderie. They have since been expanded to recognize military milestone accomplishments such as promotions and graduations. PVCC is proud to recognize our outstanding veteran students by presenting the coin to those who graduate.

This year GradImages will be providing professional photos of the students, taking photos from center stage as they receive their diploma and over to my right, in front of the backdrop, as the graduates return to their seats. Family members are invited to take photographs from the audience, but please leave the area to my right clear for the photographer.

Candidates you may now move your tassels to the left side of your caps.

President Hunter, this completes the conferring of the degrees and certificates. I present to you the PVCC graduating class of 2022-2023.

Congratulations Graduates!!!!

I would now like to invite our Alumni Association Representative, *Mr. Oscar Hernandez*, to say a few words. After graduating from PVCC, Oscar went on to ASU to earn a Bachelor's degree in Public Policy and a Master's degree in Education. He is committed to a career in public service and is now working on the Executive Team for the Arizona Attorney General.

Congratulations graduates! My name is Oscar Hernandez Ortiz. As an alumnus of the Class of 2016, it is my honor to serve as the alumni representative for your graduating class of 2023.

As a graduate of PVCC, you join a legacy of thousands of individuals who have transformed their lives through learning. You are now the proud alumna and alumnus of Paradise Valley, a network of proud Paradise Pumas supporting each other, staying connected to the college and our community, and encouraging new students to achieve their dreams.

Looking at all the graduates in the crowd, it gets me excited to think about all you are going to accomplish for yourselves, your families, and our state. And I say that because I believe a college degree affords opportunities that have an impact on not only your life, but that of others, too. However, a college degree may also afford many unexpected opportunities.

Take it from me, having been a 5th grade teacher was not exactly planned. By interning at the state capitol, I got to see the dire state of

education from a policy perspective. This along with many other experiences being involved on campus, are just some of the reasons I unexpectedly chose to be a teacher. But boy oh boy, is being a teacher more challenging than ever.

But don't forget: unexpected opportunities lead to unexpected lessons.

Teaching was challenging because no matter how hard I worked, how much I invested in the kids - it sometimes felt like what I was doing was not valued by anyone. And I'll be honest, I felt that way several times. Or, at least that was the case until one of my trouble-makers gave me an unexpected gift.

Halfway through my second year, a student gave me a card that she made. It was an outline of her hand and when you opened it, it said:

“Thank you for always making us do what is right”.

My unexpected lesson was something I think most of us already know: that what is important is not always going to be the type of degree, the job title we have, or the salary we receive. Instead, it's the impact we bring forward.

You probably have heard of imposter syndrome, right? About not feeling worthy of something, or that you don't belong? That's how I felt while teaching, while getting my Master's, and many other times.

But in reality, I learned that the real imposters are those who ultimately only worry about those types of things- the degree, the title, the salary - and not on doing what is right for them.

When I was graduating, just like you, I was anxious about what I was supposed to do next. I could feel the innocent pressure my peers would place upon me, thinking it was going to be clear skies from now on for me.

Unfortunately, I can assure that that won't be how it goes. But what I can assure you is that as long as you spend your time doing something that is worthwhile to you and that is the right thing for you, your family, and communities - you will never feel like an imposter.

As an alumni of PVCC you are now part of a large community that will support your goals and aspirations. I encourage you to stay connected to the college. There are countless ways for you to do so and support the alumni community from networking & special events, to supporting future students through scholarships and fundraising. Our community

and PVCC can continue to thrive, but it takes people like you, to show the rest of us how to live imposter-free.

I welcome you into the Paradise Valley Community College Alumni Association. Congratulations and best wishes, go Pumas!

A few comments of instruction regarding the recessional—the platform party will recess, followed by the PVCC Faculty and the graduates.

Audience members, I ask that you remain in your seats, until all of the commencement participants have exited the seating area.

Plan to meet your graduates on the main concourse level near the main entrance.

Graduates, you are now a lifelong Puma. It is with the deepest of pride that I welcome you now as an alum of PVCC. I am proud to be a Puma and I hope you are too!

Family and friends thank you so much for attending tonight and participating in this celebration.

This concludes the 2023 Commencement Celebration.