



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 22, 2023

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UOG commencement celebrates overcoming hurdles; three tie for valedictorian

Perseverance and resilience became a common thread as speakers took the stage in the Fañomnåkan 2023 Commencement celebrating the achievements of 303 graduates Sunday, May 21, at the University of Guam Calvo Field House.

UOG conferred 237 bachelor's degrees and 66 master's degrees in its Fañomnåkan semester, producing the latest batch of future nurses, teachers, business and public administration professionals, social workers, scientists, artists, engineers, and others.

Three tied for valedictorian, with all three achieving 4.0 in their academic ranking. Twins Hunter Greigh Aquino Orland and Madison Gage Aquino Orland, both Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts graduates, shared the co-valedictorian honor with Britney Joy Babasa Sison, who achieved a Bachelor of Science dual degree in Chemistry and Biology.

Of the three co-valedictorians, Sison gave the valedictory speech after the UOG administration took into consideration the totality of her achievements, including her dual degree. Sison also discovered potentially undocumented algae in mud samples from Palau, Yap, Pohnpei, and the Marshall Islands.

She aims to become a physician-scientist one day. The Orland twins plan to showcase their works of art through exhibits and shows.

"Perseverance requires patience, dedication, and belief in our abilities," Sison said in her commencement speech, describing the challenges she and other students

overcame during and after the pandemic's shift to remote learning and transition back to in-person classes.

"We must rise after every fall, push through obstacles, and keep moving forward – even when uncertainty looms," she added. "Remember that we are equipped with the strength to persevere through any challenge that comes our way."

"Lived in the moment"

Fleurdeliza de Peralta, an engineer who spent most of her childhood in Guam and whose professional experience spans nuclear energy safety, renewable energy, and cyber security, encouraged the new graduates to continue to remain curious. De Peralta is a Senior Advisor in the Risk and Environmental Assessment Group, Energy and Environment Directorate, at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory.

She shared her journey from being a student who gave her first commencement speech at the former Simon Sanchez Middle School to earning a mechanical engineering degree from the University of California Los Angeles, initially focusing on nuclear energy and then transitioning to renewable energy and more recently cyber security. For 25 years, she owned and ran a business that provided consulting work to help keep nuclear power plants safe.

There's an emphasis on becoming resilient these days, she said, including being able to harness renewable energy resources to produce power, and it's particularly important for an island community like Guam.

De Peralta expressed gratitude to Guam where she grew up and learned the importance of making the best out of limited resources on the island and learning to appreciate the simple joys and values that a small island community can offer.

She encouraged the graduates to open their minds to a host of possibilities, and to try new things.

"I took opportunities when they came – and lived in the moment," the commencement speaker said.

When things don't work out as planned, she said to the new graduates, they can always change their direction.

President recognizes leadership in Guam, at UOG

President Thomas W. Krise also spoke about resiliency, particularly during the pandemic that tested the UOG Community and the broader Guam community. He presented the President's Medal to Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero and Lt. Gov. Josh Tenorio for leading Guam through the COVID-19 crisis. "(They) have not only supported UOG in

every possible way, but they've also led Guam through the challenging years, through the pandemic, economic recession, and international events.”

President Krise also recognized two UOG administrators – Cathleen Moore-Linn and Carlos R. Taitano with Distinguished Service Medals — the highest award available from the University to its employees — for their exemplary service to UOG and its mission of Ina, Deskubre, Setbe (Enlightenment, Discovery, Service). President Krise recognized Moore-Linn, Executive Director of the Research Corporation of the University of Guam, for her role in bringing recognition to UOG as one of the top universities in the nation to receive federal research funding. Taitano, Director of Global Learning and Engagement, received recognition for leading through partnerships and engagement with various agencies, organizations, and institutions in his role as one of UOG’s main coordinators in Guam’s response to the pandemic.

President Krise bestowed Baskas Mark with the honorary degree of Master of Micronesia and Traditional Knowledge. Mark is recognized in the Western Pacific as a Rapiniwog — grandmaster navigator in traditional seafaring — and is originally from Polwat Atoll, Chuuk State, in the Federated States of Micronesia.

For more information and to view the recording of the Fañomnåkan 2023 Commencement Ceremony, visit: <https://www.uog.edu/commencements/fanomnakan-2023/>

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Photo captions:

2023-commencement-1

Britney Joy Babasa Sison, left, who achieved a Bachelor of Science dual degree in Chemistry and Biology, shares co-valedictorian honor with twins Hunter Greigh Aquino Orland and Madison Gage Aquino Orland.

2023-commencement-2

Commencement speaker Fleurdeliza de Peralta, an expert in nuclear power, renewable energy and cyber security, encourages the new graduates to keep their curiosity.

2023-commencement-3

The Fañomnåkan 2023 Commencement on Sunday, May 21, celebrates the achievements of 303 graduates at the University of Guam Calvo Field House.

2023-commencement-4

President Thomas W. Krise addresses the Fañomnåkan 2023 graduates on Sunday, May 21, at the University of Guam Calvo Field House.

2023-commencement-5

Baskas Mark, a navigator in traditional seafaring, and a native of Polowat Atoll in the Federated States of Micronesia, receives the honorary degree Master of Micronesian Traditional Knowledge.

2023-commencement-6

Commencement speaker Fleurdeliza de Peralta, an expert in nuclear power, renewable energy and cyber security, congratulates the three co-valedictorians Britney Joy Babasa Sison, and twins Hunter Greigh Aquino Orland and Madison Gage Aquino Orland.