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For Class of 2013 Grads, an Entreaty to Follow in the Footsteps of Roger Williams

Author and historian John Barry, other speakers encourage students to honor the legacy of the university's namesake in the years to come



May 18, 2013 | Public Affairs Staff

Bristol, R.I. – With an array of speakers urging them to live their lives according to the values treasured by the university's namesake himself, 1,080 graduates in the Roger Williams University Class of 2013 culminated their college careers on Saturday at the university's annual Commencement exercises.

More than 6,000 people turned out under the big tent in Bristol to watch the graduates cross the stage on a day that boasted bright sunshine and an abundantly agreeable 68 degrees on the thermometer along the bayside campus.

In addition to awarding bachelor's and master's degrees to the candidates, RWU President Donald J. Farish conferred honorary doctorates to two special guests: author and historian John M. Barry, who detailed the influence of the university's namesake in last year's award-winning *Roger Williams and the Creation of the American Soul*, and Larry Rachleff, music director of the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra.

Selected as the university's Commencement speaker as the State prepares to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Rhode Island Colonial Charter this summer, Barry promised in his opening to avoid the traditional, formulaic approach to graduation send-offs. He proceeded to invoke the ideas of Roger Williams – as well as other notable revolutionaries Vincent Van Gogh, Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs – to remind the graduates that talent and hard work are not enough to be competitive in the world they are about to enter. Rather, he told them that the key to success lies in doing work that is important, inspiring and history-making.

"This is your time. The next years are *your time*. You need to do something that allows the fire in your heart to keep blazing," Barry said. "As a historian, I can tell you that it is not inevitable that the world becomes as you find it. History does not happen. People make history. *You can make history.*"

In offering the Class of 2013 a direct charge upon leaving college, President Farish reminded graduates that they have a moral obligation to give back to the society that helped them achieve their educational objectives. He also implored them to remember that they are not just university graduates, but graduates of a university named for Rhode Island's founder, Roger Williams.

"Roger Williams embodied values that we treasure, even today – tolerance for the beliefs of others, a commitment to social engagement, civil discourse and treating others with compassion, decency and charity," he said. "He lived his life true to his beliefs and was passionate in expressing his opinions, but he was the enemy of no man. Roger Williams gave us a wonderful example of a life well-lived, and we could do no better than to follow his example."

Highlighting all of the volunteerism, service and commitment to community her classmates have demonstrated, student speaker and marine biology major Clare Harmon '13 – a young woman who in high school overcame a literacy deficit and battled extreme shyness – urged the graduates to continue working for social justice in a world that can only benefit from their youthful enthusiasm.

"If there's one thing I am certain of, it is that we are entering into a world that truly needs us," said Harmon, who will attend law school next fall. "There is no better day in history to cross this stage. For today, each and every one of us is needed by someone on the other side of this stage. Together as a class, we are a force to be reckoned with.

"When we leave here today, we will share what we know and will continue to inspire... So fear not what comes next: Being successful and igniting change is something that we've been doing since we arrived here, and it is something we will continue to do for a lifetime to come."

In what's become an annual tradition since its establishment in 2007, 13 students took home President's Core Values Medallions in recognition of their academic, professional and community-based accomplishments. And during the ceremony, Provost Andrew A. Workman presented the university's Sixth Annual Excellence in Teaching Award to Professor of Philosophy Robert Blackburn of the Feinstein College of Arts and Sciences.

The Class of 2013 featured a number of academic firsts at the university, including the graduation of the first student (Elsch Josiah Maisoh Jr.) in the *Learn, Apply, Build* construction management program with Gilbane Building Company and the Community College of Rhode Island. Maisoh was

also a President's Core Values Medallion recipient.

Lindsay C. Speicher became the first RWU graduate to receive a B.S. in business as part of the 3+3 accelerated business law program with the Mario J. Gabelli School of Business and the Roger Williams University School of Law. And as one of 126 students to earn graduate degrees, Amanda Wolfe became the University's first graduate of the 4+1 accelerated B.S./M.S. program in criminal justice.

Among the 807 undergraduate day students who graduated, the five most populous majors included architecture, criminal justice, psychology, marketing and media communication.

One day earlier, 164 students were awarded juris doctor degrees in a Roger Williams University School of Law ceremony highlighted by an address by legendary civil rights attorney Morris Dees.

For a Commencement 2013 At-a-Glance fact sheet, [click here](#).

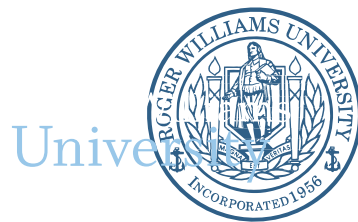
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