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## Dominican awards 576 degrees at Commencement 2014

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Of the 576 students receiving degrees, 384 were undergraduates and 192 were graduate students.

“This day is about a deep and profound journey of personal transformation,” said [Leona George-Davidson](#), who, at age 50, received her BA in Humanities and Cultural Studies and delivered the senior speech for the Class of 2014. “At Dominican, we are called upon to strive for the greatest levels of excellence, leadership, scholarship, integrity, commitment, stamina and perseverance. By our efforts we are equipped and empowered with a depth of knowledge, confidence, skills and resilience to not only go out and find a job but also to find ourselves, our passion and our life’s work.”

George-Davidson, who in high school in 1981 was voted “least likely to attend college,” followed Alex Shragg to the stage under the commencement ceremony tent. He was the graduate student speaker. The 30-year-old, who plans to work with children with autism and aide in providing resources to children who are homeless, received his MS in Occupational Therapy.

President Marcy also recognized Virginia Roche Rossi, calling her onto the stage to receive a certificate of diploma alongside her grandson, Ross, 71 years after a family tragedy prevented her from graduating from Dominican College. In the spring of 1943, as Virginia was preparing to take her finals, she received a call from home back in Illinois that her sister had passed away. Virginia went home immediately and was never able to take her finals and attend Dominican’s commencement ceremony. She did graduate, however, receiving her diploma in the mail and on Saturday President Marcy gave her the moment she missed 71 years ago.

[Connor Haysbert](#), who graduated with honors and a bachelor’s degree in Biology and was co-captain of the Penguins’ record-setting NCAA Division II men’s basketball this year, received Dominican’s Outstanding Student Award. The 6-foot-8 Haysbert, who plans to become an orthopedic surgeon, is applying for medical school this summer.

Haysbert participated in the Kaiser Permanente Scholars/Mentors program at Dominican and volunteered at Marin General Hospital in the Med unit to help nurses. He is also participated in research dealing with stem cell differentiation. He is a member of the Tri-Beta Society, Gamma Sigma Epsilon and Chi Alpha Sigma. A four-time member of the Pacific West Conference Academic All-Conference team, Haysbert this spring was named to the Capital One Academic All-District team as a student-athlete.

[Rebecca Morgenstern](#), a Nursing major who minored in Psychology and Leadership Studies, was awarded the Veritas Cup, given to a graduating senior who has been a “friend of the class” or especially supportive of the Class of 2014. Morgenstern, a Resident Advisor on campus, participated in Campus Ministry cultural immersion trips to El Salvador, alternative spring break service trips to Tijuana, Mexico and for Habitat for Humanity in Yakima, Wash. She volunteered for numerous fund-raising events for service organizations on campus and in the community as well. She also was instrumental in creating the Siena Leadership Team and reviving the annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony at Angelico Hall.

After orientation this summer in Wisconsin, Morgenstern, a member of Sigma Theta Tau and Psi Chi honor societies, will join Dominican Volunteers USA in New York City.

The Outstanding Graduate Student awards were given to Wallace Harvey (School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences), David Hamasaki (Barowsky School of Business), Daniel Gasparini (School of Education and Counseling Psychology), and Kenneth Wilson, Jr. (School of Health and Natural Sciences), who has been accepted to the University of Southern California PhD program.

Graciela Carranza, assistant professor of Chemistry, was named Teacher of the Year and Caroline Hanssen, assistant professor of English, was named Adjunct Teacher of the Year.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information about “Dominican Commencement 2014” and profiles of some graduates on the Commencement page on Dominican’s website.

[CLICK HERE](#) to hear the podcast replay of “Dominican Commencement 2014” ceremonies aired live over Penguin Radio.

President Marcy introduced Jennifer Siebel Newsom as “someone through her work and her life who has lived the Dominican values.” Newsom received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Dominican.

Newsom, who graduated from Stanford University and the Stanford School of Business, pursued an acting career after college. She is now Founder and CEO of the non-profit organization, The Representation Project, which uses film and media content to expose injustices created by gender stereotypes and to shift people’s consciousness towards change.

“My experiences were all part of the larger exploration to help me find my true north. That is what I’m hoping to leave you with today: Inspiration to uncover your true north if you haven’t already.” Newsom said. “We must all stand true to our convictions, challenge what has become the norm and continually aspire toward our democratic freedoms.”

Newsom wrote, directed, and produced the documentary film *Miss Representation*, which explores how inaccurate portrayals of women in mass media led to the under-representation of women in positions of power and influence. *Miss Representation* premiered at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival.

Newsom serves as a KQED board member, a Global Advisory Board member of the Dove Self Esteem Project, a member of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting’s Women and Girls Lead Leadership Council, and a commissioner on the Girl Scouts’ Healthy MEDIA Commission. Newsom resides in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband, California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, and their three young children.

*May 17, 2014*