



UAF news and information / Friday Focus: Academic traditions: Our 101st commencement

# Friday Focus: Academic traditions: Our 101st commencement

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— By Anupma Prakash, provost

At the University of Alaska Fairbanks, we take great pride in following our academic traditions. From the time students arrive to the time they graduate, we have many events that serve as milestones in their academic journey. The academic year begins in the fall with [Rev-It-Up](#) to welcome new students, followed by the Academic Induction that signifies a student's formal entry into the community of learners. Shortly after, we have the [chancellor's convocation](#) to welcome faculty, staff and students back to UAF for a new academic year and to celebrate the accomplishments over the past year. Deans and directors of our [distributed campuses](#) and individual academic colleges also host more personalized convocation ceremonies. Students continue to participate in many annual [Nanook traditions](#) and [Nanook sports](#). The most coveted milestone in this academic journey is the conferral of a degree and the grand [commencement](#) ceremony that celebrates the achievement of our graduating students. The traditions and festivities don't end there. Once the students graduate, they become a part of the August [UAF alumni](#) class and spread the glory of blue and gold – the official UAF colors.



UAF graduates celebrate with members of university faculty and leadership during the 2019 commencement in Fairbanks, Alaska.

UAF is about to celebrate its 101st commencement on May 6 at the Carlson Center in Fairbanks, other commencement ceremonies at the community campuses, and special graduation events (see [schedule of events](#)). These celebrations are rooted in historic practices, have a deeper purpose, and great symbolic significance.

Professor Eric Heyne, the longest serving retiring faculty member receiving emeriti status this year, will lead the commencement procession as the Grand Marshal, carrying the University of Alaska ceremonial mace symbolizing the importance of the occasion. The procession line up will include the stage party composed of university regents, president, UAF chancellor, provost, vice-chancellors, deans and directors, registrar, and alumni, followed by graduating students and faculty members. Students will be wearing one of three types of black academic gowns or their Indigenous regalia. They will have a square back Oxford cap, or mortarboard, with a long tassel fastened to the middle of the top. The tassel will be all gold for doctoral students and blue and gold for all other students. Some students will personalize their mortarboard with jewels or designs. UAF masters and doctoral students will be in blue and gold hoods. Faculty hoods may be of [many different colors](#) depending on their academic discipline and the university they graduated from.

You will see students wearing different color sashes, stoles and cords, each symbolic of a group, affinity, achievement, or identity. Red sashes signify Alaska Native and Native American graduates. Red, white and blue honor cords pay tribute to active-duty service members, veterans and Gold Star families of the U.S. armed forces. Graduates who are the first in their family to earn a baccalaureate degree wear teal cords and graduates who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community wear rainbow cords. Check out the [key to UAF sashes, stoles, cords, and honors](#).

Indigenous dancers will start off the ceremony with traditional songs and dances and you can expect singing of the national anthem, live music, a balloon drop and much more. The floor will be abuzz with photographers and volunteers. You will also see benches lining the central arena filling up with families and friends who come from far and near in large numbers to witness the commencement ceremony that marks the rite of passage for the graduating student. As undergraduate degree recipient students flip their tassels from right to left, it signifies a change in identity, an entry to a new social landscape where they apply the knowledge and skills gained while seeking a degree, and a move from being a student to an alumna.

Commencement is a communal celebration that is deeply personal at an individual level. It is a celebration that students and their families anxiously and excitedly count down to. It symbolizes to the students that we see you, we recognize that you went through ups and downs, we know that you worked very hard, and we celebrate your success. It captures the pride and joy of the academic journey and leaves an indelible memory. On UAF's 101st commencement, I can assure you that you will witness laughter, tears, hugs, props, selfies, cheers, exploding social media posts, and post-commencement parties for days after.

I look forward to seeing many of you at the upcoming commencement and celebrating with you. For those, who can not be there in person, please join us online. The [ceremony will be streamed](#) on Facebook and YouTube.

A hearty congratulations to the Class of 2023!

*Friday Focus is written by a different member of UAF's leadership team every week.*



#NanookNation

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