



### Friday Focus: Traditions and celebrations

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UAF photo by JR Ancheta. Provost Anupma Prakash speaks at the new-faculty orientation during the fall 2018 semester.

— by Anupma Prakash, provost and executive vice chancellor

The end of spring was a very special time for me. I had the opportunity to participate in a series of commencements and to witness firsthand the power and impact of traditions and celebrations. At UAF's 97th [commencement ceremony](#) I walked up to the stage with the Rev. Anna Frank, the beloved elder from Minto who has served Alaskans for more than half a century as a community health aide, counselor and priest. Words just don't capture the emotions in the room as Rev. Frank received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree amid a standing ovation from a packed Carlson Center. Following that, nearly 1,400 students were recognized, and 650 students walked across the stage to join more than 35,000 UAF alumni. Family, friends, faculty, staff and community members joined to demonstrate their pride and joy as graduates celebrated this momentous milestone in their journey.

Adorning their regalia, some graduates wore symbolic cords, leis, Native and traditional gear and accessories, and creatively decorated caps. Two new cords introduced this year were the rainbow and teal cords. Rainbow cords were bestowed during the first [lavender graduation](#) ceremony to recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions of UAF's LGBTQ+ graduates. UAF now joins more than 200 colleges that hold a lavender graduation. Teal cords were conferred during the first-generation cord ceremony, which recognizes graduating baccalaureate students who are the first in their family to attain a four-year degree. More than 290 baccalaureate degree students in this year's graduating class identified as first-generation.

These cords have more than a symbolic significance. For some it is deeply connected to identity, while for others it demonstrates the shared sense of jubilant victory of a cohort, group or community.

Other unique celebrations I attended were the graduation of a cohort of students in the mining and petroleum training service program that took place 3,000 feet underground, and a commencement at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, where our first group of veterinary medicine students graduated after completing two years at UAF and two years at CSU. They have the special privilege of being Nanooks and Rams at the same time. Finally, I attended the graduation ceremony for homeschool students from Raven School, part of the Yukon-Koyukuk School District. Their personal stories and aspirations just took my breath away.

As I reflect on traditions and celebrations both in academia and in my personal life, I recognize that they have the power to transcend all boundaries and bring people together. They emphasize a deeper purpose of the work we do. That thought helps me tremendously in navigating through the everyday challenges in my job.