

CEHS Commencement Events to Honor Dedication and Sacrifice of Graduates

05/04/2023



CEHS graduates wave to their families at the 2022 commencement ceremony.

CEHS Class of 2023 at a Glance

Associate's degrees: **70**
Bachelor's degrees: **1174**
Master's degrees: **250**

Doctorate degrees: **57**
Certificates/specialists: **61**
Total graduates: 1612

The Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services will honor over 1600 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral candidates for graduation at commencement events this week. Both the University's main commencement and the College's individual commencement ceremonies honor the contributions and achievements of this year's graduates as they prepare to move into the next phase of their education, careers, and lives.

This year's graduate commencement speaker, Rachael Redford, exemplifies the hard work, tenacity, and sacrifice exhibited by 2023 graduates. Redford is a clinical doctoral student in Audiology program of the department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education. She is completing her training in the Hearing and Balance Clinic under the direction Dr. Tiffany Shelton.

Redford is this year's college recipient of the Legacy of Utah State award, which recognizes a student who

represents the heart and soul of this university. This prestigious honor is presented to a student who shows deep commitment to the institution and to their program of study, who demonstrates service and perseverance during times of adversity, and who makes substantial contributions behind the scenes.



Rachael Redford, 2023 graduate commencement speaker

The oldest of five children, Redford was raised by a single mother who worked nights as a nurse. She describes often finding her mother asleep in the car following a 12-hour shift. Redford's mother was divided between her job and her children, and as the oldest Redford was often tasked with making meals as well as tending to her younger siblings and taking them to their activities and events. Redford attended school less and less as these responsibilities took over her time, "By the time I was a senior," she said, "I had missed more days than I attended." After barely graduating high school, Redford had no intention of attending college.

Instead, Redford went to cosmetology school. After her first daughter was born, she felt the strong desire to cultivate a love of learning in her children. Redford enrolled at her local community college, exchanging haircuts for babysitting so she could attend classes. She received her first-ever 4.0 GPA, something she had never thought she was capable of achieving. But after just two semesters, Redford quit school when her husband's education moved their family to another state.

Redford divorced in 2017 and found herself needing to support four children aged 3 to 12 with only her certificate in cosmetology. Redford knew she had to return to school to provide a better life for her family and began making the sacrifices needed for it to happen. The family moved

into a small duplex with an oven that had to be taped shut when in use and “more wasp nests than people living in the home.”

Though Redford was accepted into multiple audiology programs, she knew that she would need a supportive community to make it through school as a single mom. She chose to attend Utah State for this reason. Redford lives in South Davis County, and she felt that moving her children closer to Logan was not a good option for them. Instead, she rented a room from a friend she had been before school began and stayed in Logan three days a week during her children’s time with their father, going to campus early in the morning and staying late into the night to finish her homework and be available for her children when they were with her. “It felt like I had two different lives,” Redford said. “One as a student, and one as a mom.”

Redford began her doctoral program when she was 39 years old, and often felt inadequate and overwhelmed to be attending classes with a much younger cohort. Learning from professors younger than Redford proved to be humbling as well. However, she often reflects on her first day of grad school, when a fellow student said, “You deserve to be here. You are exactly where you are supposed to be.”

These experiences have all helped Redford see the potential for growth in adversity, and she has used her own journey to inspire other students to persevere and overcome their hardships. While maintaining an excellent GPA in rigorous coursework, Redford makes mentorship in her department a priority. She guides and encourages first-year graduate students, volunteers her time and abilities to support hearing screenings for those on campus and in the community, and promotes hearing health care on campus and throughout the state.

Despite how demanding her education has been and the significant sacrifices she has had to make to pursue it, Redford confidently declares that her education at Utah State University has completely transformed her life and the lives of her family members. Her children, her supportive professors, and her sense of deep gratitude have given her the strength to endure the long drives to campus in bad weather, to push herself through long nights and early mornings, and to overcome her feelings of inadequacy. In the end, Redford knows the sacrifices have been worth it, and would do it over again to reach where she is today.