

Grad asks peers to recognize the 'champion' inside

HIGHER EDUCATION

Speaker encourages MU students to look at life with new perspectives

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Nearly 1,000 graduates were tasked with living their lives and pursuing their dreams with perspective at the 163rd annual spring commencement ceremony at Millersville University.

The event went on in ideally sunny-but-mild weather at Biemesderfer Stadium, where an estimated 7,000 people watched 976 students receive their degrees Saturday morning.

Another 198 students, including 10 doctoral candidates, received their graduate degrees Friday night.

Class of 2019 graduate Markisha Renee Peace spoke to the audience about her tribulations over her five-year undergraduate career at Millersville.

Peace said she suffered several health issues, including a thyroid disorder, depression and suicidal thoughts. She credited the support of family, staff, doctors and friends as helping her cross the finish line, as well as perseverance.

Toward the end of her remarks, Peace asked the crowd and her fellow peers to close their eyes and recite "I am important. I am a champion. I believe in me. I can, and I will."

"The power of perspective"

This year's commencement speaker was Pennsylvania Education Secretary Pedro Rivera. The former School District of Lancaster superintendent told graduates a story about taking his son Lucas on his first fishing trip.

He said he planned the trip meticulously, gathering all the bait, hooks, water bottles and juice boxes needed for the day to go perfectly.

Instead, it was marred by interruptions, accidents, mosquito bites and a meager one-fish haul.

When he and his son returned home, Rivera's wife, Erika, asked how the trip went. Before Rivera could answer, Lucas jumped in and excitedly said, "It was great!"

"We drank juice, we ate sandwiches, we hiked," Rivera remembers his son spouting off. "We even caught a fish!"

"At that moment," Rivera said, "my son completely had a different perspective on that day. ... That's a memory I sometimes use to remind myself about the power of perspective."

He said the perspective students choose to adopt will decide what direction their lives will take.

"Focus on the juice boxes, not the mosquitoes," he added.



Above, Pennsylvania Education Secretary Pedro Rivera speaks at the Millersville University commencement ceremony Saturday. Right, a graduate waves while waiting to receive her diploma. Below right, Millersville University President Daniel A. Wubah applauds.

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