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Suddenly 'colleagues'

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Antioch graduates told 'world needs you now'

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A new wave of graduates from Antioch University New England in Keene was unleashed on the world Sunday with a message to tackle the many problems outside the classroom with creativity and compassion and a willingness to collaborate with others.

"Because the world needs you now," was the theme of the graduation ceremony in the auditorium at Keene High School, where 286 Antioch students received master's degrees in applied psychology, education, environmental studies and management. Another 38 students were awarded doctoral degrees in clinical psychology or environmental studies.

"You came here a few years ago as students and you leave today as colleagues of all of us," said university President David A. Caruso.

Vicky Morton, interim director of university alumni relations, gave an impassioned speech to the graduates before they took the stage, saying "We are the doers, the changers, the comforters, the leaders and the guides."

Commencement speaker Curtis Ogden, an adjunct faculty member and senior university associate with Interaction Institute for Social Change in Cambridge, Mass., told the graduates to become agents of change when they walked away from the university.

From the election of America's first black president to the recession and the climate fluctuations, recent history has been chock-full of change, Ogden said.

"Through all of this we were talking about change," he said, "and the world was a perfect laboratory and it continues to be. ... We know it would be a mistake not to see the opportunities in front of us."

Ogden outlined three movements of change during his speech, telling the graduates to collaborate with others outside their chosen fields to work toward a common goal, maintain strong social networks to spread new ideas and take a "deeper, holistic approach to your work."

"You have the chance to be the architect of new spaces and you have the tools to help people bring and be their very best," he said. "There are jobs to be filled, even if the descriptions haven't been written. ... Are you ready to bring it on? To bring your mind, body and spirit to the endeavor ahead? It is your time."



Graduate Katherine Elizabeth Pixley dances across stage Sunday during Antioch University New England commencement exercises at Keene High School. Pixley received a Master of Arts in Dance/Movement Therapy and Counseling. Below, graduate Nia Pecola-Imani Greene Keith carries a fairy wand during the processional. She and three fellow graduates call themselves the Dark Fairy Brigade.

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The crowd of about 1,000 gave Ogden a standing ovation when he concluded his speech.

Polly Chandler, chairman of Antioch's Organization and Management Department, said Ogden was an inspiration because of his ability to connect with an array of people from different walks of life.

"Through his work and teaching, he empowers people to make the changes they want to make in the world," she said. "He can speak to all of us."

During the ceremony, faculty members sat on stage behind Antioch's ceremonial staff – a handcrafted staff made from cherry, oak and maple and symbolic of the value the university places on preserving the environment.

Later in the evening, Amanda J. Costello, Bonnie E. Hudspeth and Jennifer F. Risley were recognized as this year's Environmental Excellence Alumni. The three women serve on the steering committee of the Cheshire County Conservation District's Monadnock Farm and Community Connection.

The program promotes the Farmers' Market of Keene, connects local farmers with area restaurants and has started planning the launch of a local food co-op. Costello, Hudspeth and Risley also convinced the Keene City Council to provide \$5,000 for a feasibility study on starting the co-op.

Also during the post-graduation ceremony, H. Meade Cadot, former director of the Harris Center for Conservation Education in Hancock, whose conservation work created a protected sanctuary of more than 20,000 acres in New Hampshire, was awarded the 2009 Community Member Environmental Excellence Award.

And Christina Oliva received the William R. Ginsberg and Thomas K. Wessels Environmental Studies Scholarship. She is Antioch's first recipient of this scholarship.

Oliva enrolled at Antioch after graduating from Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., where she founded a rape crisis center and performed counseling work in the college's dormitories. She also created a food waste composting plan for Skidmore and restaurants in downtown Saratoga Springs.

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