

## Boulder's Naropa University puts 'deep trust and confidence' in graduates

Buddhist-inspired university is celebrating 50th anniversary



*Julianna Childs celebrates her graduation from Naropa University on Saturday at Macky Auditorium, 1595 Pleasant St., at the University of Colorado Boulder. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)*



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UPDATED: May 13, 2024 at 4:20 PM MST

Instead of delivering a traditional graduation speech, Roxana Astemborski opted to lead a giant dance party.

Astemborski, who graduated with a master's degree from Naropa University on Saturday, invited everyone at the ceremony to "dance freely, take up space and connect."

"Class of 2024, we did it!" she said.

The dancing was one of many joyous celebrations that took place during Naropa's graduation ceremony on Saturday at Macky Auditorium on the University of Colorado Boulder campus.

The ceremony featured a vocal and instrumental student performance, bagpipes and several commencement speakers who offered words of wisdom.

"We trust in you. We believe in your basic goodness fully," Naropa professor Uğur Kocataşkın said. "We know that what you have learned here in theory, practice and embodiment will benefit you and the world around you. We send you off with our deep trust and confidence."

"Be who you are, and continue to become who you are, more and more fully," Kocataşkın said.



*Nick Sharp, left, Daniel Delany and Karen Deremo put on their purple graduation sashes before Naropa University's graduation ceremony on Saturday. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)*

Naropa University offers students a contemplative education reflective of its Buddhist roots, which goes beyond traditional education by learning through a lens of self-exploration, self-reflection and mindfulness.



Peace Twesigye, director of Buddhist Studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, delivered the keynote address. She offered the graduates advice on how to live compassionately amid suffering in the world while also allowing for joy.

“When there is pain, we should allow our many forms of compassion to lead our deeper understanding,” Twesigye said.

She advised the graduates to remember their Naropa education and remain connected to their identity and values.

“When we look deeply we can understand that no one is free when others are marginalized and oppressed,” Twesigye said, adding, “Start where you are, and do what you can.”

Graduates wore Naropa’s purple graduation sash, foregoing traditional graduation robes and showcasing their individuality through their attire. They danced, jumped and twirled across the stage in celebration of their accomplishment.



*Ribbons were flying as graduates entered Macky Auditorium during the 2024 Naropa University commencement. (Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer)*

“I’m excited just because of the fact that this is a very fun degree I moved across the country for, it was fun to get back into poetry,” said J. Gagne, who graduated with a master’s degree in creative writing.

The ceremony began and ended with the ring of a gong and a bow, a Naropa tradition led by President Chuck Lief.

“Anything is possible, and you can have a direct path or you can have a winding path,” Lief said. “Both will be wonderful, and probably you’ll experience more than one of them.”

Caleb Cheadle graduated with a master’s degree in creative writing. He feels he has experienced a lot of personal growth at Naropa and enjoyed its slower speed and strong sense of community.

“I definitely feel more confident owning what I put out into the world, whereas I think before I wasn’t very conscious about what I was putting out,” Cheadle said. “Not only am I more conscious, but I’m more confident in the work that I create and the art that I create.”

Lief reflected on the fact that Naropa will celebrate its 50th anniversary as a university beginning this summer.

“I want to thank you all for enriching this community,” Lief said. “We’re 10% along the way of our 500-year experiment as set out by our founder, and I offer a deep thanks to each graduate who leave here with a degree but also leave behind the genetic markers of your wisdom and kindness for the benefit of all those who will graduate in years to come.”

Originally Published: May 11, 2024 at 5:12 PM MST