TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY-SEVENTH
Commencement Exercises

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
THE TWENTY-EIGHTH OF MAY
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FOUR
Processional

The audience will please rise when the faculty marshals enter.

Chief Marshal for University Convocations
Sandra L. Bermann

Marshal for Degree Candidates
Stacy E. Wolf

Marshals for Advanced Degrees
Claire F. Gmachl
Rosina A. Lozano

Marshals for Bachelor Degrees
Stacey A. Sinclair
Keith A. Wailoo

Candidates for Advanced Degrees

Candidates for Bachelor Degrees

Marshals for Faculty and Administration
Simon E. Gikandi
Frederick F. Wherry

The Faculty and Administrative Officers

Associate Chief Marshal
Richard A. Register

Marshal for Recipients of Honorary Degrees
and Trustee Escorts
Eric S. Gregory

Recipients of Honorary Degrees and Trustee Escorts

The Trustees and Trustees Emeriti

Processional Guests

Mace-Bearer
Jeff E. Nunokawa

Invocation

Alison L. Boden
Dean of Religious Life and of the Chapel

Greeting

Christopher L. Eisgruber
President of the University

Latin Salutatory Oration

John Freeman

The Latin salutatory is awarded by vote of the faculty to one of the highest-ranking candidates for bachelor degrees. The special qualifications of a student as salutatorian are taken into account, as well as scholastic standing.

Secondary School Teaching Prizes

Recognition, by Provost Jennifer L. Rexford, of recipients of prizes for distinguished secondary school teaching in the State of New Jersey.

Ahmed Moustafa Hassanein
Joseph H. Brensinger Public School 17, Jersey City
Teacher of Science and Health

Whether they are circulating among STEM stations in his seventh and eighth grade science classes, or banding together on a team or a club that he coaches, Ahmed Hassanein’s students invariably achieve more than they imagined they could. “His eyes light up when kids learn,” said a school administrator. Under his guidance, the Brensinger LEGO robotics team and its soccer team both became district dynasties. The pollinator garden at Liberty State Park is the proud work of his Eagle Engineers. Students at Brensinger speak twenty-six different languages; like Mr. Hassanein, many are first-generation immigrants. His devotion to them knows no bounds. “He stepped up to coach flag football when he knew nothing about it,” said one colleague. “He’s our American Ted Lasso.”

Sandra V. Keel-Huff
Orange High School
Teacher of Biology and Environmental Science

Sandra Keel-Huff’s resolute purpose as a high school educator is to “reinvent science teaching to include labs for all students.” On the pathway to college and career, she has come to realize, “they need science labs so they have a shot.” In a stunning feat of pedagogic planning and focus, she bends time so that her students’ forty-two-minute class periods can accommodate rigorous observation and data collection, meaningful lab notes, and cleanup. As one colleague described it, “Her class is structure—with a lot of love.” She volunteers on Saturdays so her Advanced Placement students can complete their curriculum’s more substantial lab units. Showing “unwavering commitment,” a school administrator said, “Ms. Keel-Huff has been an inspirational force in our school community.”
What does it mean to “establish” a religion or to “exercise” a First Amendment freedom? Bess Spero Li asks her students to scrutinize the nation’s founding documents, word by word, to lay the foundation for the rigorous study of democratic ideals. “She taught us to wield our brightly colored highlighters like scalpels,” a former eighth grade student recalled. Colleagues say she is equally attuned to the nuance of every student’s motivations and challenges, and each one’s potential. “She is relentless in her goal of meeting all students’ needs,” a school administrator said. She holds a master’s degree from Princeton’s School of Public and International Affairs and is a graduate of the Princeton Teacher Preparation Program. A teacher since 2012, she carries forth the University’s ethos of service in her Crossroads South Middle School classroom.

Theresa Ann Riccardi
High Point Regional High School, Sussex
Teacher of Performing Arts

Her choral students have performed at Carnegie Hall. The exquisite theater productions she directs—the Fall Play, the Spring Musical, a Night of One Act Plays, and an Evening of Broadway and Jazz—are treasured community events across the rural High Point district. Her mastery as a teacher of the performing arts gives her students the technical skills to execute at competition level. But it is the faith that Theresa Riccardi places in them, and the confidence her faith engenders, that her community says is her signature gift as an educator. One former student who is now a music teacher is determined to pay that gift forward. “For my students, I want to be the person that pushes them to reach their fullest potential. I want to be their safe space to discover themselves,” she said. “I want to be their ‘Ms. Riccardi.’”

Bachelor Degrees
Presentation to the president, by Dean of the College Jill S. Dolan, of candidates for bachelor degrees; conferral of the degrees by the president.

Bachelor of Arts
Bachelor of Science in Engineering

Valedictory Oration
Genrietta Churbanova
The valedictory is awarded by vote of the faculty to one of the highest-ranking candidates for bachelor degrees. The special qualifications of a student as valedictorian are taken into account, as well as scholastic standing.

Advanced Degrees
Presentation to the president, by Dean of the Graduate School Rodney D. Priestley, of candidates for advanced degrees; conferral of the degrees by the president.

Master of Arts
Master of Fine Arts
Master of Architecture
Master in Finance
Master of Science in Engineering
Master of Engineering
Master in Public Affairs
Master in Public Policy
Doctor of Philosophy

The President’s Awards for Distinguished Teaching

Recognition, by Dean of the Faculty Gene A. Jarrett, of recipients of awards for sustained records of excellence in undergraduate- and graduate-level teaching by Princeton University faculty members.

Gary J. Bass
William P. Boswell Professor of World Politics of Peace and War and Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton School of Public and International Affairs

With a finely calibrated balance of brilliance and warmth, and an abiding reverence for his students, Professor Gary Bass turns wrenching topics—including human rights violations and the waging of war—into challenging yet inspiring courses that students consistently rate among the best they have ever taken. Said one former student, “He employed his... deep knowledge of the subject and decisive classroom leadership” to shape “the most rigorous and fruitful discussions of any class I have taken.” Now in his twenty-fifth year at Princeton, Professor Bass has cultivated generations of human rights advocates, legal scholars, lawmakers, and military leaders. Students who followed him into academia say they deliberately pattern their teaching after his. “He is the best of the best,” said a former student now teaching human rights law. He is “whip smart, but humble; rigorous and demanding, but compassionate and supportive; creative, inspirational, and tireless.”

Laura Kalin
Associate Professor of Linguistics in the Council of the Humanities

From dynamic introductory classes to penetrating inquiries within her own academic specialty, Professor Laura Kalin has built a following at Princeton through teaching transformative courses that explore the significance of language to the world. Students praise her engaging and scrupulously organized lectures, provocative in-class discussions, and infectious enthusiasm as she reveals the universalities among languages. At the same time, she opens their minds to the splendors of linguistic variety. Colleagues note her meticulous pedagogy, along with the accolades that have followed. In selecting her for its 2024 Early Career Award, the Linguistics Society of America commended her “inventive reformation” of course offerings in linguistics. Students recall even her challenging assignments and final exams with fondness. One student in a technically advanced morphology course described Professor Kalin and her lectures as being “flawless,” saying, “One could never do better than this absolute icon of a professor.”

Seth A. Perry
Associate Professor of Religion

Compassion, humor, and deep expertise are hallmarks of Professor Seth Perry’s courses, which range from American religious history to broader explorations such as “What is scripture?” Past and current students gush over his intellectual passion, his commitment to his students, and, above all, the alchemy with which he transmutes ancient tomes into vibrant scholarly discussions. Undergraduates name Professor Perry as the reason they have joined or remained with the religion department. Graduate students cite “the kind of teaching that turns students into scholars.” Woven through his courses are presentation opportunities, broad and deep discussions, and “How would you teach this?” assignments. All these activities equip students for speaking at conferences, defending dissertations, and, ultimately, becoming compassionate teachers in academia. Said one former student, “His passion for intellectual inquiry, unparalleled gift for teaching, and genuine care for students epitomize all of Princeton’s highest ideals.”
Lamar Alexander
Doctor of Laws

Lamar Alexander is a former two-term Republican governor (1979–1987) and three-term U.S. senator (2003-2021) from Tennessee. He was U.S. Secretary of Education under President George H.W. Bush from 1991 to 1993 and president of the University of Tennessee from 1988 to 1991. While governor, Alexander was chairman of the National Governors Association and President Reagan’s Commission on Americans Outdoors. He served as chairman of the Senate Republican Conference from 2008 to 2012. As chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee from 2015 to 2021, he steered dozens of bills into law including legislation fixing No Child Left Behind; 21st Century Cures, accelerating approval of new medicines including vaccines, tests, and treatments that helped tame the COVID-19 pandemic; and the Great American Outdoors Act, funding national parks and other public lands. In private life, Alexander cofounded a Nashville law firm and two successful businesses. A seventh-generation East Tennessean, he is also a classical and country pianist and the author of seven books.

Vanderbilt University (B.A., 1962)
New York University (J.D., 1965)

Admired for his legacy of substantive and bipartisan policy initiatives as a United States senator, secretary of education, and governor of Tennessee, he steered dozens of bills into law as chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. His tenacity against partisan headwinds helped to resolve vexing issues in federal education policy and to reaffirm support for scientific research as a Congressional imperative. The seventh-generation Tennessean has also served the Volunteer State as president of the University of Tennessee. Beyond his prodigious record of accomplishment in government, he is a successful lawyer and businessman, was a decorated student-athlete and record-setting track star at Vanderbilt University, and is a talented classical and country music pianist who has performed at the Grand Ole Opry. The proud son of a preschool teacher and elementary school principal, his record of accomplishment on behalf of educational priorities both honors the legacy of his parents and serves the nation’s highest ideals.

Rubén Blades Bellido de Luna
Doctor of Music

Composer, vocalist, actor, and activist Rubén Blades has recorded more than twenty-five albums and has won a total of twenty-three Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards. Born in Panama and one of the most successful salsa musicians of all time, he played a key role in the “salsa revolution” in New York City in the 1970s. His work has had a profound influence on Latin and Latin American music over the last five decades. In 2021, he was named Person of the Year by the Latin Recording Academy. Blades has collaborated with rock, jazz, pop, hip-hop, reggaeton, and salsa musicians. He has been recognized for his contributions to the arts by Spain’s Ministry of Culture and Sport, Chile’s National Council of Culture and the Arts, the Hispanic Heritage Foundation in Washington, D.C., and other organizations. An Emmy-nominated actor who has starred in television and movie roles, Blades was the subject of the award-winning documentary Yo No Me Llamo Rubén Blades. Beyond his artistic success, Blades is known for his political work and social activism. In the 1990s, he founded the political party Movimiento Papa Egoró in Panama and ran for president of the country in 1994. He served as Panama’s Minister of Tourism from 2004 to 2009 and was named a UN World Ambassador Against Racism in 2000.

A versatile composer and singer who also uses his voice and political acumen to advocate for justice, he has left an indelible mark on music and has made the world a more equitable place. Lin-Manuel Miranda, an admirer since childhood, called his songs “some of the most profound poetry I’ve ever heard.” Known for Afro-Cuban salsa influenced by rock, jazz, pop, and other genres, he has won a combined twenty-three Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards; he is also an Emmy-nominated actor. Born to humble circumstances in a rooming house in Panama, he would go on to run for president of the country after establishing the political party Movimiento Papa Egoró, or Mother Earth in the indigenous Emberá language. Celebrated by the United Nations in 2000 as World Ambassador Against Racism, he has continued to collaborate with new generations of musical artists inspired by his global impact.

Dr. Paula A. Johnson
Doctor of Laws

Dr. Paula A. Johnson was named the 14th president of Wellesley College in 2016, becoming the first Black woman to lead the liberal arts college dedicated to advancing women’s higher education. Johnson, a physician-scientist trained in internal and cardiovascular medicine, was previously the Grayce A. Young Family Professor of Medicine in Women’s Health at Harvard Medical School and a professor of epidemiology at the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health. Her medical career focused on improving the quality of care for women and women of color. Johnson established and was the first executive director of the Mary Horrigan Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. She was chair of the state of Massachusetts’s higher education COVID-19 testing group and chaired the Boston Public Health Commission from 2007 to 2016. She has served on a number of state and national commissions related to women’s health, cardiovascular health, and women in science and engineering. In 2018, she co-chaired the committee that produced a groundbreaking comprehensive report published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine regarding sexual harassment of women in academic science, engineering, and medicine. Johnson is a member of the National Academy of Medicine and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Harvard Radcliffe Colleges (B.A., 1980)
Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health (M.P.H., 1985)
Harvard Medical School (M.D., 1985)

As a physician-scientist and college president, her cross-disciplinary work at the intersection of education, medicine, and social justice
Randall Kennedy
Doctor of Laws

Randall Kennedy is the Michael R. Klein Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, where he has served on the faculty since 1984. He is a legal scholar whose work bridges the topics of law, race, civil rights, free expression, politics, and history. His books include Say It Loud: On Race, Law, History, and Culture (2021), For Discrimination: Race, Affirmative Action, and the Law (2013), The Persistence of the Color Line: Racial Politics and the Obama Presidency (2011), Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal (2008), and Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption (2003). After graduating from Princeton in 1977, Kennedy studied at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and earned his law degree from Yale Law School. He is a member of the bar of the District of Columbia and the Supreme Court of the United States. Earlier in his career, he served as a law clerk for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and for Judge J. Skelly Wright of the United States Court of Appeals. Kennedy is a member of the American Law Institute, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Association. He was a Princeton University trustee from 1994 to 1998 and from 2005 to 2015, and was the Princeton Class of 2016's Baccalaureate speaker.

Princeton University (A.B., 1977)
Yale Law School (J.D., 1982)

Joyce Carol Oates
Doctor of Humane Letters

Joyce Carol Oates, the Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor of the Humanities, Emeritus, joined Princeton's faculty in 1978 and has taught generations of writers in her creative writing seminars. She has been a seminal figure in shaping Princeton's Program in Creative Writing. In her decades-long career, she has published more than 150 titles across genres. Her novel Them won the 1970 National Book Award, and three of her novels and two of her short story collections were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize. Born in rural upstate New York and educated as a child in a one-room schoolhouse, she is the first in her family to finish high school and the first to attend college. She won Mademoiselle magazine's college short story contest at age nineteen while attending Syracuse University on a scholarship and has since received dozens of noteworthy literary prizes. In 2011, she was awarded the National Humanities Medal from President Barack Obama. In 2012, she received Princeton's Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities. Many of the students whom Oates has taught have gone on to build prestigious writing careers. She transferred to emeritus status in 2015 and continues to teach.

Syracuse University (B.A., 1960)
University of Wisconsin–Madison (M.A., 1961)

Mark A. Milley
Doctor of Laws

Retired General Mark A. Milley served as the 20th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 2019 to 2023. As the country’s highest-ranking military officer, Milley was the military adviser to the President, Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. Milley served as the 39th Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 2015 to 2019. Before that, he was the 21st Commander of U.S. Army Forces Command, having earlier served in six Army divisions and Special Forces. His joint military assignments included the Joint Staff Operations Directorate and military assistant to the Secretary of Defense. He helped lead U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and elsewhere. A member of Princeton’s Class of 1980, Milley was commissioned as an officer through Princeton Army ROTC and has returned to campus to serve as keynote speaker at recent ROTC Commissioning ceremonies. In 2016, he received the Woodrow Wilson Award, the University’s highest honor in recognition of undergraduate alumni. Milley has master’s degrees in international relations from Columbia University and in national security and strategic studies from the U.S. Naval War College. He is also a graduate of the MIT Seminar XXI National Security Studies Program. He is currently a visiting lecturer and the Charles and Marie Robertson Visiting Professor in the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs.

Princeton (A.B., 1980)
Columbia University (M.A., 1992)
U.S. Naval War College (M.A., 2000)

“A patriot uncompromising in his duty, unfinching in the face of danger, and unwavering in the service to the country,” as President Biden has described him, he has secured through his brave defense of the United States Constitution a place in this nation’s history. Commissioned through Princeton Army ROTC, he went on to become the highest-ranking military officer in the United States, serving as the 20th chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. When he addresses newly sworn officers, he welcomes them as fellow warriors in service to the founding document they are sworn to defend. As he told the Princeton ROTC Class of 2022: “You’re taking an oath to an idea, the idea that is America. And you will do anything and everything—if necessary, sacrifice even your life—to preserve that idea, and pass it on unscathed to the next generation.”

Joyce Carol Oates
Doctor of Humane Letters

Joyce Carol Oates, the Roger S. Berlind ’52 Professor of the Humanities, Emeritus, joined Princeton’s faculty in 1978 and has taught generations of writers in her creative writing seminars. She has been a seminal figure in shaping Princeton’s Program in Creative Writing. In her decades-long career, she has published more than 150 titles across genres. Her novel Them won the 1970 National Book Award, and three of her novels and two of her short story collections were finalists for the Pulitzer Prize. Born in rural upstate New York and educated as a child in a one-room schoolhouse, she is the first in her family to finish high school and the first to attend college. She won Mademoiselle magazine’s college short story contest at age nineteen while attending Syracuse University on a scholarship and has since received dozens of noteworthy literary prizes. In 2011, she was awarded the National Humanities Medal from President Barack Obama. In 2012, she received Princeton’s Howard T. Behrman Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Humanities. Many of the students whom Oates has taught have gone on to build prestigious writing careers. She transferred to emeritus status in 2015 and continues to teach.

Syracuse University (B.A., 1960)
University of Wisconsin–Madison (M.A., 1961)

One of America’s most decorated authors and a giant in the Princeton pantheon, she has written more than 150 titles across nearly every genre—novels, novellas, poetry, short fiction, children’s fiction, detective fiction, horror fiction, plays, nonfiction, literary criticism, memoir, and a noteworthy libretto for an opera. She is the recipient of the National Book Award, for her novel them, and was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama for her contributions to American letters. In her heart, she is also and always a teacher, to the enduring gratitude of generations of Princeton students. At a University event held in her honor prior to her retirement, she memorably told her audience of admirers: “Writing is just something that one does. If I have to put it down on some form, I write ‘teacher.’”
Terrence J. Sejnowski
Doctor of Science

Terrence J. Sejnowski is the Francis Crick Chair and professor and laboratory head of the Computational Neurobiology Laboratory at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies. He is also a distinguished professor and codirector of the Institute for Neural Computation and Computational Neurobiology at the University of California San Diego. Sejnowski is a leader in the field of computational neuroscience and a pioneer in the development of neural networks and learning algorithms for artificial intelligence based on the brain. His lab is focused on creating and refining computational models that explore how particular cells and signals function to form thoughts and memories, to direct our attention, and to accomplish other activities. Sejnowski has published more than 1,000 scientific papers, reports, and book chapters and numerous books, including The Deep Learning Revolution in 2018; his next book, ChatGPT and the Future of AI: The Deep Language Revolution, is slated for publication this fall. He previously served on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University and was a Wiersma Visiting Professor of Neurobiology and a Sherman Fairchild Distinguished Scholar at the California Institute of Technology. His many awards and honors include the 2024 Brain Prize from the Lundbeck Foundation, the 2024 Helmholtz Prize from the International Neural Network Society, and the 2022 Gruber Neuroscience Prize. Sejnowski is a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, the National Academy of Medicine, the National Academy of Inventors, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Case Western Reserve University (B.S., 1968)  
Princeton University (Ph.D., 1978)

At the dawn of an era where artificial intelligence promises to transform our understanding of human biology, he stands among the foremost pioneers. His inventive use of physics, mathematics, and statistics to study the brain, and his development of artificial intelligence tools to harness complex data, have served to revolutionize the practice of neuroscience research. In application, his pursuits at Salk Institute’s Computational Neurobiology Laboratory have opened promising new windows into the basis of neurological disorders such as schizophrenia and Parkinson’s disease. Earlier this year, he was recognized with the Lundbeck Foundation Brain Prize—a preeminent global neuroscience honor—for his “seminal” insights in the field. In bestowing the award, the foundation commended the Princeton Graduate School alumnus for five decades of devotion to the discipline and for “a determination, courage, and persistence” that should “serve as an inspiration for other scientists.”

Remarks by the President of the University  
Christopher L. Eisgruber

Benediction

Theresa S. Thames  
Associate Dean of Religious Life and of the Chapel

Alma Mater

Old Nassau
Tune ev’ry heart and ev’ry voice,  
Bid ev’ry care withdraw;  
Let all with one accord rejoice,  
In praise of Old Nassau.

In praise of Old Nassau, we sing,  
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!  
Our hearts will give  
while we shall live,  
Three cheers for Old Nassau.

Recessional

The audience will please remain in place until the academic procession leaves the stadium.

AVETE ATQVE VALETE

In Memoriam

The University remembers with great sadness two members of this graduating class.

Maura Coursey, Master in Public Affairs, 2024  
Misrach Ewunetie, Class of 2024

A Commentary on Commencement

Princeton traces its founding to a royal charter granted on October 22, 1746, by King George the Second of England. The first Commencement Exercises were held in 1748, in Newark, then home of the College of New Jersey, as Princeton was originally called. Six students were graduated at the first Commencement. One of Princeton’s first graduate students was James Madison 1771, later the fourth president of the United States. He remained at the college after graduation to continue his studies with President John Witherspoon, who was the only college president as well as the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence. Systematic graduate instruction began in the 1870s, and the Graduate School, as it is known today, was formally organized in 1900.

Princeton’s Commencements have been held in late spring only since 1844. Before then the ceremony took place in the fall because the College was in session all summer long. Since the College moved to Princeton in 1756, Commencement has been held in a variety of locations on or near campus, including Alexander Hall, the First Presbyterian Church, and Nassau Hall. From 1922 until 2019, the front lawn of Nassau Hall (known as front campus) was the site of Commencement, weather permitting. Commencement was held for the first time in Princeton Stadium in May 2021.
To view live captioning of speakers' remarks during the ceremony, please scan this QR code.