



THE MIND THAT NEVER RETIRED

SPECIAL ISSUE FOR THE 74TH COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES



TIMPUYOG:

Transcending Limitations Together

For 60 years, Urdaneta City University has journeyed beyond boundaries, building a legacy of academic excellence in both the local and international community. Its success was never shaped by one person alone, but by generations of students, faculty, personnel, and partners who worked with one vision and one purpose. Through every milestone, UCU has proven that greatness is strongest when it is shared.

At the heart of this legacy is Timpuyog—the Iloko spirit of togetherness, solidarity, and collective strength. It is the force that transforms individual effort into a greater achievement, reminding every graduate that success is never fully one's own. Behind every dream fulfilled are people who guided, supported, and believed when the road became uncertain.

As graduates, you now carry not only your own aspirations, but also the values of a university built on unity and teamwork. There will be moments of triumph, but there will also be moments of failure, doubt, and struggle. In all of these, remember this truth: you are never alone. Just as others stood with you in reaching this day, there will always be people who will walk beside you in the journeys yet to come.

To transcend limitations is not simply to rise above hardship as an individual, but to recognize the power of moving forward with others. True strength is found not only in personal excellence, but in shared courage, shared purpose, and shared hope. Through Timpuyog, limitations become impossible, challenges become bearable, and victories become more meaningful because they are carried by many.

Walang hangganan sa pusong sabay-sabay lumalaban.

This graduation, therefore, is more than a celebration of academic completion—it is a celebration of a community that made every achievement possible. May you step into the future with confidence, humility, and gratitude, knowing that your story will always be connected to the people who helped shape it. In the spirit of TIMPUYOG: Transcending Limitations Through Unity, may you continue to rise, serve, and succeed—together.



ANOTHER BREAKTHROUGH UNLOCKED! Graduates of Batch 2025–2026 toss their caps into the air after being formally conferred as graduates of Urdaneta City University. | Photo by Karol Ken Jairo A. Cachero

UCU confers degrees on 2,387 Timpuyog Graduates

BY JONALYN G. TACLIBONG

A total of 2,387 Batch Timpuyog graduates received their degrees during Urdaneta City University's 74th Commencement Exercises at the Urdaneta City Cultural and Sports Complex from June 24 to 26.

The commencement exercises were held in three clusters from June 24 to 26 under the theme "Timpuyog: Transcending Limitations Together."

"Choose integrity over profit"

The first cluster opened with 782 graduates from the College of Business Management and Accountancy, College of Pharmacy, College of Health Sciences, College of Information and Technology Education, and College of Engineering and Architecture.

CHED Regional Director Dr. Cherrie Melanie Ancheta-Diego, in her first appearance

before the university, urged the graduates to uphold accountability, public trust, and integrity in their chosen fields.

"Choose integrity over profit, truth over misinformation, dignity and accountability over popularity, transparency over concealment, and service to people and community over personal gain or self-interest," Ancheta-Diego said.

Patrick Jan T. Mones, a cum laude graduate from BSBA Financial Management, reminded his fellow graduates that true success is not defined by awards alone.

"Awards and accolades may mean something, but they do not define everything," Mones shared, encouraging his fellow graduates to push forward.

"Make a life—a meaningful life"

The second cluster

gathered 904 graduates from the College of Hospitality and Tourism Management and the College of Teacher Education.

The College of Hospitality and Tourism Management produced 487 graduates, while the College of Teacher Education recorded 417 graduates.

Teacher Education Council Director Dr. Adrian Lawrence P. Carvajal served as Guest of Honor and Speaker and reminded the graduates that education should go beyond earning a living.

"Education is meant to help us make a life—a meaningful life, a life of purpose, a life of contribution, a life that makes society better than we found it," Carvajal said.

In her speech, Alyssa Nicole A. Gotis, a BSHM graduate, reminded her fellow graduates that delays should not be seen as defeat.

"Every journey deserves respect because success is not measured by how quickly you arrive; it is measured by your courage to keep going," Gotis said.

"So, if your path took longer than expected, do not see yourself as behind—see yourself as someone who refused to surrender. You are not late, you are not less capable, and you are not less successful," Gotis added.

"Do not romanticize struggles"

The final cluster was led by the College of Criminal Justice Education with 460 graduates, followed by the College of Human Sciences with 115, Institute of Graduate and Advanced Studies with 108, and College of Arts and Sciences with 18.

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CHED exec hails UCU awardees as Orata vision bearers

BY ASHLEY R. DONCERAS

CHED Executive Director IV Atty. Cinderella Filipina Benitez-Jaro described the graduates and awardees as reflections of Dr. Pedro T. Orata's vision of education for all.

"I am confident that the graduates and awardees of Urdaneta City University are

◀ **ONWARD.** Atty. Cinderella Filipina Benitez-Jaro graces UCU's recognition rites, urging future professionals to uphold Dr. Pedro T. Orata's legacy of education and service. | Photo by Marvin V. Ferrer

ready to take on this challenge because you received what Dr. Orata would consider as education for life and throughout life," Benitez-Jaro said.

Benitez-Jaro served as the Guest of Honor and Speaker during the Aldaw ti Panagyaman ken Pamadayaw, which carried the theme "Timpuyog: Transcending Limitations Together."

The recognition rites honored students who excelled in academics, leadership, culture and the arts, journalism, athletics, service, research, and other fields during their stay in

the university.

The university conferred 543 awards, including 24 Latin honor distinctions and three University Leadership Awards.

Meanwhile, University Student Council President Althea Kate P. Menzon delivered the response on behalf of the awardees.

"To all the awardees remember this, your medal is not just a piece of metal, and your certificate is not just ink on paper; They are physical manifestations of sacrifices your parents made to keep you in school," Menzon reminded her fellow honorees.#

YES hinirang na Top Org

NI NEIL VINCENT V. CORPUZ

Hinirang na Most Outstanding Student Organization ang Young Educators' Society (YES) sa Aldaw ti Panagyaman ken Pamadayaw sa Urdaneta City Cultural & Sports Complex nitong Hunyo 23.

Kinilala ang YES mula sa 39 na akreditadong organisasyong pang-estudyante ng Urdaneta City University matapos itong manguna sa walong organisasyong

ginawaran ng Bronze Diploma.

Bilang flagship organization ng College of Teacher Education, nagtala ang YES ng natatanging pagganap sa katatapos na pang-akademikong taon.

"Sobrang grateful at blessed po kami sa recognition na ito. This achievement is not only a success of the officers but also of every YES member who continuously supported and participated in our programs

and activities," saad ni Jun Jun Paningbatan, Governor ng YES.

Ayon kay Paningbatan, magpapatuloy ang organisasyon sa pagsasagawa ng makabuluhang mga programang makatutulong hindi lamang sa mga miyembro nito kundi maging sa buong komunidad ng unibersidad.

"Patuloy din naming pahahalagahan ang teamwork, innovation, and excellence in every activity that we conduct," aniya.

Naungusan ng YES ang Junior Philippine Institute of Accountants (JPIA), na hinirang na Most Outstanding

Student Organization sa loob ng tatlong taon.

Kabilang sa pito pang tumanggap ng Bronze Diploma na may gradong 83-85% ang Hoteliers, Entrepreneurs & Restaurateurs Organization, Florence Nightingale Club, Junior Philippine Institute of Accountants, Tourism Movers Society, League of Language and Literature Leaders, Communication Student Council, at Psychology Students Society.

Samantala, walang organisasyon ang nakatanggap ng Silver at Gold Diploma.#

YES DA BES! Buong suporta ang ipinakita ng College of Teacher Education habang tinatanggap ng Young Educators' Society ang sertipiko nito bilang akreditadong organisasyong pang-estudyante sa nakalipas na akademikong taon. | Photo by Marvin V. Ferrer





► **UCU confers degrees on ... from page 2**

Dr. Jimmy G. Catanes, Director of the CHED Office of Programs and Standards Development, challenged the graduates to look beyond the usual celebration of success by reflecting on struggle, systems, and responsibility.

"Allow me to offer three something less ordinary today. My pabaon to our graduates. I offer three lessons of Timpuyog. The first one, do not romanticize struggles. Second, learn to read systems not only

► **IN FULL BLOOM.** Batch Timpuyog graduates receive their diplomas with pride, carrying with them the hope and resolve to build a better future beyond the university. | Photo by Denver C. Imbat

stories. Third, do not let your first success become your next prison," Catanes affirmed.

Sheena Mae C. Cabang, the lone cum laude graduate from BA Communication, urged her fellow graduates to give their best without fear of failure or regret.

"Always give your best. Never let the day come when you look back with regret 'cause you could have done more, tried harder, or believe in yourself a little longer. Give your best, hindi dahil madali, but because your dreams, sacrifices, and all people who believed in you are all worth it."

Batch Timpuyog turned to the audience and sang SB19's "MAPA" as a tribute to their families and loved ones whose support made their success possible.#

CHED, academe nanguna sa ika-74 pagtatapos

NI EZEKIEL EUN S. DE CASTRO

Sa halip na mga pulitiko, mga opisyal at kinatawan ng Commission on Higher Education at Teacher Education Council ang humarap sa mga nagsipagtapos sa 74th Commencement Exercises ng Urdaneta City University.

Sa mga nakaraang commencement exercises, ilang pulitiko ang humarap sa UCU graduates upang magbigay ng kani-kanilang mensahe, taliwas sa naging daloy ng seremonya ngayong taon.

Ngayong taon, pinangunahan nina CHED Executive Director IV Atty. Cinderella Filipina Benitez-Jaro, CHED Regional Director Dr. Cherrie Melanie Ancheta-Diego, Teacher Education Council Director Dr. Adrian Lawrence P. Carvajal, at Dr. Jimmy G. Catanes, Director of the CHED Office of Programs and Standards Development, ang mga talumpating nakatuon sa edukasyon, integridad, paglilingkod, at responsibilidad. Sa Aldaw ti Panagyaman

ken Pamadayaw, binigyang-diin ni Benitez-Jaro ang mahalagang papel ng komunidad sa tagumpay ng bawat nagtapos.

"No one succeeds alone because behind every graduate is a community that believes in your potential long before you could see it yourself"

Sa unang cluster ng pagtatapos, binigyang-diin ni Ancheta-Diego ang mga pagpapahalagang dapat magsilbing gabay ng mga nagtapos sa kanilang susunod na yugto.

"Maging matino, maging mahusay, at maging mapaglingkod."

"These are the virtues that will bring you to greater heights, these are the virtues that will make you rise together, serve together, and transcend limitations together," dagdag niya.

Sa ikalawang cluster, ipinaalala ni Carvajal ang mahalagang papel ng mga nagtapos sa paghubog ng kinabukasan ng lipunan.

"The future of our society depends on the quality of people we become. So, the future of our society, the future of our Philippines, depends on the quality of people you become."

Sa huling cluster, hinamon ni Catanes ang mga nagtapos na timbangin ang pananagutan sa pamilya at ang pagbuo ng sariling buhay.

"So, let me say something not often mentioned during commencement speeches: "Do not confuse being needed with being free." Yes, help your family. Yes, give back. Yes, you honor your family. But also learn how to build a life that can continue."

Ayon kay Shaina Mae Ara, USC CHTM Representative, naging mas may impact sa

kanya ang graduation ngayong taon dahil mas nakatuon ang programa sa mga nagtapos at sa kanilang akademikong paglalakbay.

"Para saakin mas naging makabuluhan talaga ang graduation ngayong taon dahil walang politikong nagsalita. Bukod kasi sa kaliwa't kanang isyu ng korapsyon sa gobyerno, paniguradong hindi namin mapapakinggan nang seryoso ang mga sasabihin nila," aniya.

"Mas maganda rin talaga na galing sa academe 'yung guest speaker dahil mas mauunawan yung kwento or yung maibabahagi nila—totoong buhay at sarili nilang journey bago sila naging successful sa life, so mas nakakainspire," dagdag pa nito.#

► **ISANG PAGBABALIK, ISANG PAALALA.** Sa pagbabalik ni Dr. Cherrie Melanie Ancheta-Diego bilang CHEDRO1 Director, mainit niyang tinanggap ang pagkakataong magbigay ng hamon sa mga nagsipagtapos na isabuhay ang integridad, kahusayan, at paglilingkod. | Larawan ni Karol Ken Jairo A. Cachero



A MENTOR'S HONOR. Rex Cairos B. Delmendo, UCU alumnus of 2014, receives his ceremonial hood from his thesis adviser, Dr. Sonny Soriano, as he completes his Master of Arts in Education major in Educational Management. | Photo by Karol Ken Jairo A. Cachero



Nagbalik, Nagtapos, Nagningning

NI TRISTAN JAY G. BERBON
MGA LARAWAN NI MARVIN V. FERRER

Noong una siyang tumigil sa pag-aaral, hindi alam ni Hershe P. Dayao kung kailan siya muling makababalik.

Ang dating pangarap na makapagtapos ng kolehiyo ay napalitan muna ng mas mabibigat na responsibilidad—hanapbuhay, pamilya, gastusin, at mga sitwasyong hindi niya lubos na kontrolado.

 **74** Commencement Exercises



Tubong San Manuel, Tarlac, si Dayao ay minsang kumuha ng BS in Hospitality Management, ngunit hindi niya natapos ang kurso matapos siyang mawalan ng sigla at direksiyon sa kaniyang pag-aaral.

“Hindi ko nararamdaman ‘yong pinag-aaralan ko, ito ba talaga ‘yong gusto ko?” paggunita niya sa mga tanong na bumabagabag sa kaniya noon.

Kalaunan, nag-asawa siya, nagkaroon ng mga anak, at nagpasiyang magtrabaho sa ibang bansa. Ngunit sa gitna ng paghahanapbuhay, unti-unti niyang napagtanto ang bigat ng isang reyalidad na matagal niyang kinailangang harapin.

“Ang hirap kumuha ng work na wala kang natapos.”

Mula roon, muling nabuksan ang pagnanais niyang bumalik sa kolehiyo—hindi lamang upang makamit ang diploma, kundi upang magkaroon ng mas matatag na trabaho at kita para sa pangangailangan ng kaniyang pamilya.

Sa edad na 43, nagtapos si Dayao sa kursong Bachelor of Special Needs Education at ginawaran ng parangal bilang Cum Laude.

“Hindi ko talaga ito in-

expect, maybe si God talaga nagbigay nito sa akin,” sambit niya matapos matanggap ang parangal.

Ayon kay Dayao, diploma lamang ang una niyang hinahangad. Ngunit sa muling pagbabalik niya sa pag-aaral, mas naging malinaw sa kaniya ang halaga ng pagkakataong minsan na niyang nabitawan.

Hindi naging magaan ang kaniyang paglalakbay.

Bumibiyahe siya nang alas-kuwatro ng madaling araw upang makarating sa klase. Sa mga araw ng pagsusulit, may mga pagkakataong sampung minuto lamang ang naisasabay niyang oras para makapag-review. Pag-uwi sa gabi, hindi pa natatapos ang kaniyang araw dahil naghihintay pa ang kaniyang mga anak at mga tungkulin sa bahay.

Sa klase, dala niya ang bigat ng mga karanasang iyon.

Hindi siya bumalik sa kolehiyo upang sayangin ang oras. Alam niya kung gaano kahirap makipagsapalaran sa labas, maghanap ng pantustos, at humanap ng oportunidad nang walang natapos na digri.

Kaya sa bawat biyahe, bawat puyat, at bawat sandaling kinailangan niyang paghatian ang pagiging ina, manggagawa, at estudyante, pinili ni Dayao na manatili.

“When you feel lost, always talk to God,” aniya.

Para kay Dayao, iyon ang naging sandigan sa mga panahong muli niyang kinuwestiyon ang sarili, ang kaniyang kurso, at ang direksiyon ng kaniyang buhay.

Mula sa pangarap na minsang naantala, tinapos niya ang kolehiyo hindi lamang bilang isang graduate, kundi bilang isang ina, manggagawa, at mag-aaral na muling humawak sa pagkakataong matagal niyang hinintay.#







ONE LAST CONDUCT. BA
Communication graduate Justin
Jefferson A. Cruz leads the Orata
Chamber Singers, fulfilling a long-
held wish as he ends his tenure
with the choir. | Photo by Karol
Ken Jairo A. Cachero

The Spark he found after After 10 years

BY NORMA JESUSA B. BERTUSO

Ten years after he first entered college unsure of where he truly belonged, Jan Enrico M. Limson finally walked across the stage yesterday to receive his diploma in Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts.

Limson first enrolled in college during the 2015–2016 academic year, but his path did not follow a straight line.

He moved from Engineering to Education before eventually finding his place in Communication Arts, the program where he said his interest finally began to take root.

“Siguro, late bloomer kasi ako, kaya ang hirap kong nahanap yung spark ko sa college. Kaya no’ng napadpad ako dito sa Communication, okay, ito na yung spark ko,” he shared.

Before that turning point, Limson admitted that he

struggled to stay connected with his lessons.

“Hindi po ako ginaganahan sa mga lessons. Wala ‘yung attention ko po doon. Pero simula noong nandito ako sa Communication Arts, okay na po. Hindi na ako nakakuha ng low grades. Nakaka-focus na ako lalo,” he said.

In 2018, he stopped studying to work.

At the time, earning money seemed more urgent than finishing a degree, and Limson thought he could move forward even without a diploma.

But work gave him more than income. It also showed him the limits of opportunities

available to someone who had yet to finish college.

“In the long run, ang pangit pala ng trabaho, ang hirap! Ang bababa lang ng nakukuha ko na sahod, parang wala lang. Kaya

“Akala ko okay na, kahit hindi na ako magka-diploma, basta may trabaho na at least nagkaka-pera ako.”

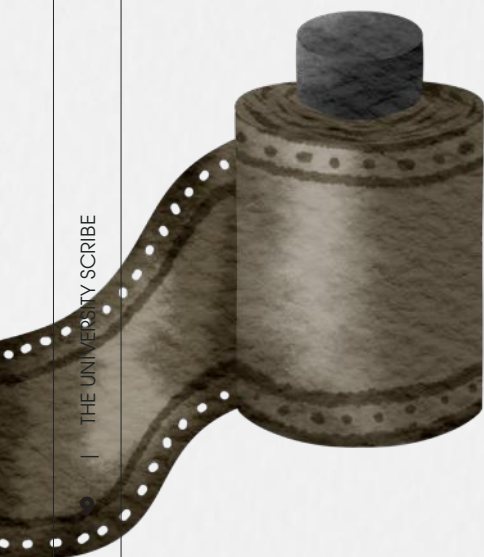
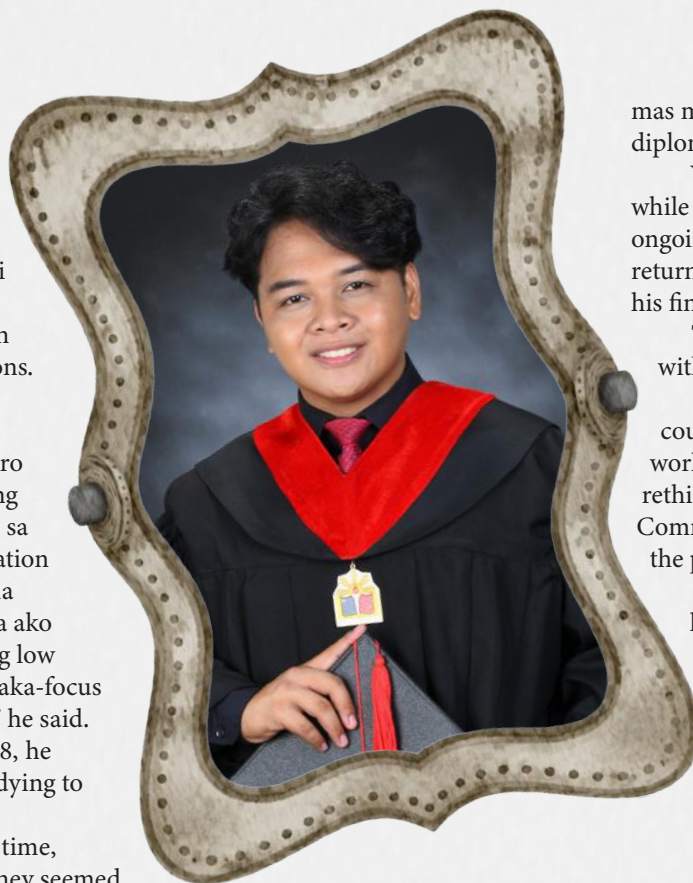
mas maganda talaga ata na may diploma ka,” he added.

Years later, around 2021, while online classes were still ongoing, Limson decided to return to college and complete his final program.

This time, he came back with a clearer reason.

After years of shifting courses, leaving school, and working jobs that made him rethink the value of a degree, Communication Arts became the path he chose to finish.

Now, after a decade-long journey through uncertainty, work, and delayed plans, Limson finally leaves college with the diploma he once thought he could live without. #

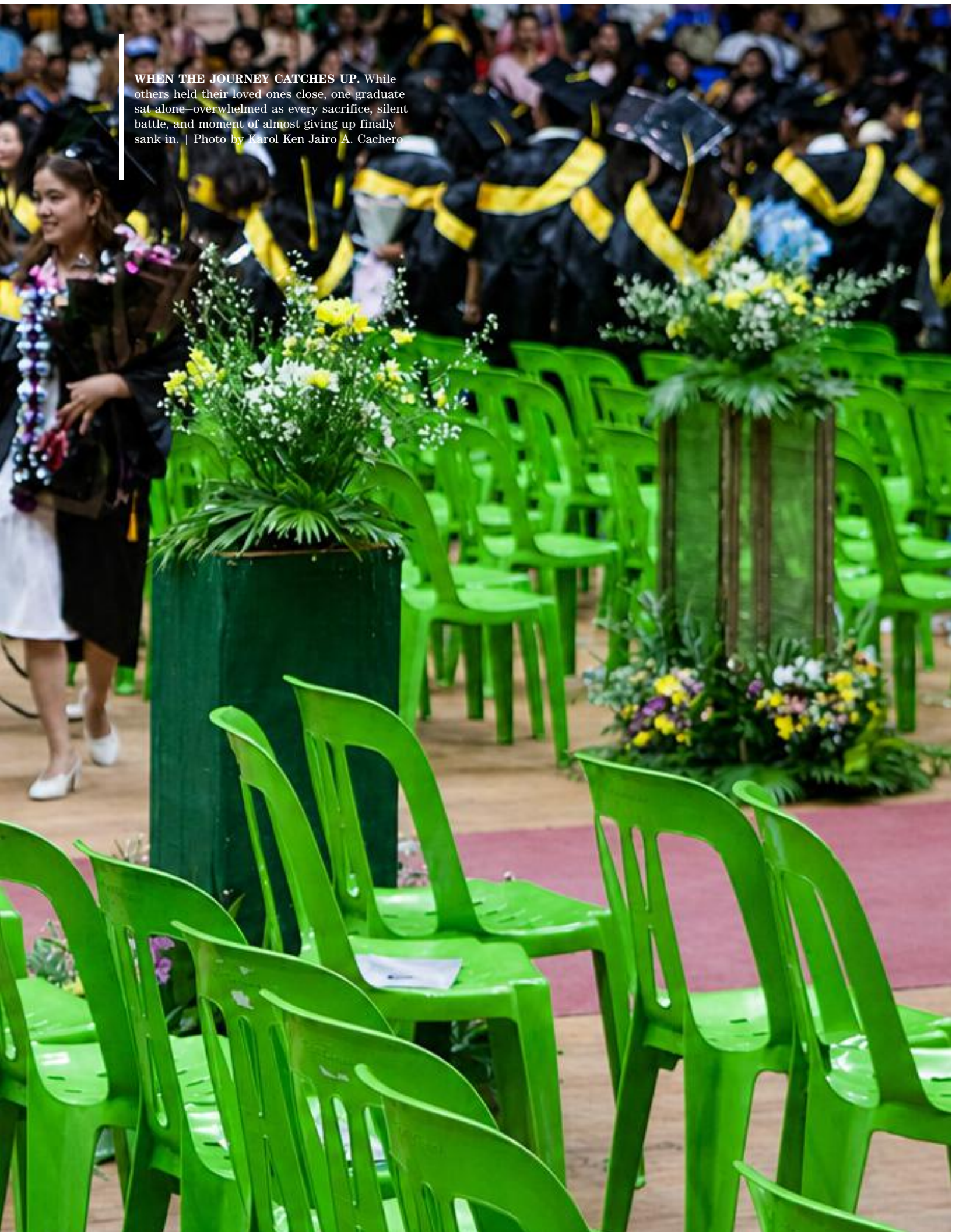


**WHEN A MOTHER'S TEARS SAY
EVERYTHING.** In his mother's tears
and embrace, a son's degree becomes
their shared victory. | Photo by
Nathalie Gail G. Aquino





WHEN THE JOURNEY CATCHES UP. While others held their loved ones close, one graduate sat alone—overwhelmed as every sacrifice, silent battle, and moment of almost giving up finally sank in. | Photo by Karol Ken Jairo A. Cachero





THE MIND
THAT
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BY DANIELA ROSE R. DACANAY

“Knowledge
is the only wealth no
one can steal.”

For Benjamin S. Naoe, the line is not merely something to quote. It is something he has lived through a long chain of losses, labor, distance, and returns.

At 83, Naoe, known to many as Tatay Ben, walked the graduation stage as the oldest graduate of Academic Year 2025–2026, earning his Master in Public Administration degree after a life that had once pulled him away from school: early marriage, interrupted

education, years as a mechanic, 36 years as an overseas Filipino worker, and a career that took him from regular worker to supervisor.

But the diploma was never just about adding another title to his name.

When asked why he

still chose to study, Tatay Ben answered from the world he continues to observe closely—the digital age, public affairs, young people, and the many ways a person can be left behind when the mind stops learning.

“Sa panahon ngayon, digital age, iba na ang may alam. Paano ka makikialam kung wala kang alam, ‘di ba?” he said.

To him, knowledge gives a person the right footing to understand, question, and participate. It is not enough to simply react to what is wrong; one must first learn enough to know what is wrong.

“Kaya dapat, pasukan mo muna ang utak mo ng kaalaman, para ‘pag may nalaman kang mali, puwede ka makialam,” he added. “Para mas maging malawak po ‘yong knowledge natin, para mag-continue sa studying. Sabi ko nga eh, ang pag-aaral ay walang hangganan yan. Learning has no limit, has no age, as long as you are interested to learn.”

A Rule he Lived by

Long before he returned to the classroom, Tatay Ben had already carried a personal rule he attributes to Mahatma Gandhi: “Learn as if you were to live forever.”

“Tama nga naman ‘yun,” he said. “Hanggat buhay ka, natututo ka. Pag patay ka na, wala ka nang alam. Pero sa totoo lang, iba na ang may alam—lalo na sa panahon na ito.”

That belief did not remain abstract for him.

The more he learned, the more he looked at the country with concern—especially at corruption, public service, and the values he believes must

be formed before a person is entrusted with power.

“Ang dami nang corruption. Utang ng Pilipinas—kung magkakaanak kayo, may utang na, hindi pa nilalabas. Eh kasi, ‘yung mga leaders corrupt. Kasi kung walang corrupt, maganda ang Pilipinas,” he said.

It was this concern that

daw ako,” he recalled.

To Tatay Ben, moral recovery cannot be reduced to a program, seminar, or public campaign. It must begin where character first takes root: at home.

“Sabi nila meron nang gumawa noon—parang kay dating Senador Leticia Ramos-Shahani—pero parang hindi

he said.

For him, the earliest lessons should begin with faith and honesty.

“Unang-una, turuan mo tungkol sa Panginoon Diyos. Sabi ko, ang Diyos ayaw niya ng bata na magnanakaw. Ayaw niya ng bata na sinungaling,” he said.

Then comes the harder lesson: integrity when no one is watching.

“Pag naitanim sa bata ‘yun, magdadalawang isip na yun pagka nakarinig, pag nakakita ng bagay na mali kasi malalaman mo ang honesty ng isang tao—hindi pag may nakakakita eh, ‘di ba? Kundi kahit walang nakakakita. Diyan nagsisimula ang tunay na pagbabago,” he said.

His concern also reaches the younger generation, whom he believes are growing up amid weaker guidance and stronger distractions.

“Eh, kasi siguro kulang ng gabay. Tingnan mo mga bata ngayon—wala nang galang, napupuna mo ba? Iba na ang panahon ngayon. Naaapektuhan ng digital, ng barkada. Kaya mas lalong kailangan ng pag-aaral: walang limitasyon. There’s no limit. Hanggang may panahon, dapat nag-aaral ka pa rin,” he said.

Lessons beyond the classroom

That is why Tatay Ben does not leave his ideas inside lecture rooms, thesis discussions, or graduation speeches.

On ordinary commutes, Tatay Ben said he sometimes talks to students he meets on the road, especially those carrying notebooks. He asks about their studies, then offers the kind of advice that sounds simple only because it comes from a life that has already



once led him to consider Moral Recovery as a thesis topic.

“Yan ang gusto kong gawin sanang thesis noon. Sabi nu’ng advisor ko, hindi akma—dahil Public Administration

naging successful. Siguro kulang ng pundasyon. Kasi para sa akin, ang values ay hindi natatapos sa seminar lang—dapat itinuturo sa bata, sa bahay, mula sa magulang,”



Photo by Karol Ken Jairo A. Cachero

known consequence.

“Kapag sa sakayan nga, parating ‘pag may nakita batang may dalang notebook, tinatanong ko: ‘Estudyante ka, ‘no? Anong year ka na?’ ‘2nd year po.’ Sabi ko agad: ‘Wag ka muna magsyosyota,’” he said.

His warning is direct, but not careless. Behind it is his own memory of how early responsibilities can change the shape of a person’s life.

“Bakit? ‘Pag nagsyota ka, karamihan ay nawawalan ng kontrol. Oh ‘pag nabuntis ka—sino susuporta sa pag-aaral mo? Magiging nanay ka muna. Pagtapos ka muna ng pag-aaral—bago ang iba,” he added.

Tatay Ben knows this not as a theory, but as a chapter of his own story.

“Maniwala ka bang ako’y high school dropout? Kasi maaga akong nag-asawa,” he said.

A Long Pause, not a Full Stop

When he married young, formal schooling had to give way to work. Life moved faster than his education, and the classroom became a place he had to leave behind.

But leaving school did not mean he stopped learning.

His father gave him a practical instruction that would later carry him across decades and countries: “Mag-aral ka ng mekaniko.”

Tatay Ben followed the advice and completed a one-year vocational course. The skill became more than a trade; it became the work that fed his family and eventually opened the door for him to go abroad.

“Ayon ang trabaho ko na bumuhay sa pamilya ko. Hanggang makapag-abroad ako,” he said.

Before leaving the Philippines, he worked in Manila for around 10 years. In 1979, he went overseas,

beginning a 36-year stretch as an OFW.

He started as a regular mechanic and eventually became a supervisor.

Even after reaching the company’s automatic retirement age of 60, Naoe said he was kept by his employer because of the quality of his work. He finally chose to retire at 73.

“Okay pa sa manager, gusto nila ang trabaho ko eh,” he said.

By then, the work that began with a vocational skill had already helped him fulfill one of his biggest duties as a father: sending all six of his children to school.

“Pero okay lang—napatapos ko naman lahat ng anak ko. Anim sila—lahat nakatapos ng pag-aaral dahil sa kita ko doon,” he said.

For many, that would have been enough. For Tatay Ben, it only made the unfinished part of his own education more visible.

Back to school

After decades of work abroad, Tatay Ben returned home with the body of a retired worker but the restlessness of a student who still wanted to know more.

“Ang sarap mag-aral, gusto ko pa ring matuto,” he said.

He began looking for schools, but the cost nearly discouraged him.

“Nag-canvas-canvas ako. Sa Metro Dagupan, 10,000 ang bayad—hindi ko kaya. Hindi ko alam na libre pala dito sa UCU,” he recalled. “Mahilig lang akong magtanong-tanong. Sabi sa akin: puwede ka sa Alternative Learning System.”

He first took the equivalency examination at Juan G. Macaraeg National High School and passed, opening the path for him to continue what had been

interrupted decades earlier.

What many people do not know is that Tatay Ben first stepped into a university classroom when he was already 75.

“Nag-first year ako sa UPANG, Political Science. Ngayon ko lang naalaman na libre pala ang Bachelor’s noon sa UCU. Kung nalaman ko sana dati, baka dito na rin ako sa UCU nagtapos agad. Pero lumipas ang panahon hanggang bumalik ako—mas matanda na, pero mas determinado pa rin,” he said.

His return to school later drew the attention of national media, including ABS-CBN and GMA, as well as a university in Makati. Some reporters, he said, even stayed overnight at his home to document his journey.

The attention surprised him, but it did not become the center of the story.

What mattered more to him was the idea that a person could still look for a door, ask how to enter, and begin again even after many years away.

After earning his bachelor’s degree, he was asked whether he was done.

His answer was firm: “Bakit titigil pa?”

He then enrolled in the MPA program, using his SSS pension to support his studies.

He knew the cost, and he felt it.

“Magastos. Biruin mo—bawat thesis, 10,000. Eh, may dalawa akong thesis: 20,000 agad. Pwera pa ang token para sa adviser at panel—apat sila. Pwera pa ang tuition,” he said. “Pero enjoy ako. Gusto kong mag-aral, gusto kong matuto—kaya sulit lahat.”

This time, the classroom was no longer just a place he had returned to. It had become a continuation of everything he had learned from work,

fatherhood, public life, and age.

It also sharpened the way he understood law, rights, and public responsibility.

Even while finishing his degree, Tatay Ben said he had begun thinking about the next level.

“Iniisip ko pa nga—kung mag-e-enroll pa ba ako ng Law? Juris Doctor—maganda ‘yan, lalo na sa panahon na ito. Maganda ang Law. Pero pinag-aaralan ko muna ang gastusin kasi maliit lang ang pension ko,” he said.

To him, studying is not memorization for its own sake. It is protection, participation, and power against deception.

“Tandang-tanda ko ‘yun eh. Article 3 Section 1—Bill of Rights. Alam mo ba ‘yun? ‘No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law.’ Napakahalaga ‘yan,” he said. “Kapag hinuli ka ng pulis, alam mo kung ano ang karapatan mo. Sa panahon ngayon, maraming loko-loko. Baka bigla kang sitahin, lagyan ng gamot sa bulsa. Pero kapag may pinag-aralan ka—hindi ka madaling dayain.”

“Ako nga eh nagkataka dito sa UCU—mayroon palang libre, pero ayaw pa rin mag-aral ng marami. Marami ang istambay lang, samantalang ang dami namang pagkakataon: TESDA courses—libre. Vocational—libre. Kung gusto mo lang talaga, hindi ka mauubusan ng daan.”

That is why Tatay Ben sometimes wonders why others hesitate when opportunities are already within reach.

For those Afraid to Begin Again

For older people who are afraid to return to school, Tatay Ben's answer is not sentimental. It is practical.

"Kailangan mayroon siyang motivation. Iyon ang tutulak sa'yo," he said. "Ano ba ang gusto nilang maging? Gusto lang ba nilang nakaupo at nanonood ng TV? O gusto nilang lumawak ang isipan at may maibahagi? Kung wala kang motivation, parang pakaining baboy ka na lang. Pero kung meron kang gustong maabot, gagawin mo ang lahat."

He also reminds young people that skills and education must work hand in hand.

"Kasi mekaniko ako eh—iyon ang bumuhay sa amin. Pero habang tumatagal, nakita ko: mas maganda pa rin kapag may kasamang mas malawak na kaalaman," he said. "Kahit wala kang trabaho, bata pa—mag-aral ka ng vocational. Maraming libre. Huwag sayangin ang panahon."

For Tatay Ben, knowledge is not only for those who can afford it early, those who finish on time, or those whose lives unfold without interruption.

It is for anyone willing to begin where they are.

The Body slows, the Mind continues

The decision to continue studying was not without difficulty.

There were days when walking from the Urdaneta City Cultural and Sports Complex or waiting for buses in Urdaneta City reminded him that the body has its own limits. Sometimes, he had to hold on carefully to keep his balance. He now takes vitamins, walks more slowly, and rests more often.

Still, he continued until he finished.

When asked whether he still plans to study again, Tatay Ben did not close the door.

"Magpapalakas muna ako kasi, siyempre 83 na eh. Kailangan ko munang palakasin ang katawan," he said.

"Pero kung maganda na ang pakiramdam ko, at kung may pagnanais pa, aba'y sabi ko nga, 'Learn as if you were to live forever.' Hindi ako nagsasabi ng 'hinding-hindi.'"

When his name—Benjamin S. Naoe—was finally called on graduation day, it carried more than the

completion of another academic requirement.

It carried the long arc of a life interrupted and rebuilt: high school dropout, young husband and father, mechanic, OFW, supervisor, provider, returning student, bachelor's degree holder, and finally, graduate degree holder.

For Tatay Ben, the reason he continued studying has always been simple.

"Importante ang pag-aaral—walang tatalo sa may pinag-aralan," he said. "Dahil unang-una: hindi yan ninanakaw, hindi yan mananakaw."

Money can be lost. Work can end. The body can slow down. But knowledge, Tatay Ben believes, remains.

"Mag-iipon ka ng pera? Baka may mananakaw. Mag-ipon ka ng knowledge? Puwede mo pang i-share sa nangangailangan. Kaya napakaganda sa isang taong may kaalaman—lalo na sa panahon na ito, puno ng panlilinlang," he said.

In the end, the stage did not make him a learner. It only made visible what he had been doing all along.

Across fatherhood, labor, migration, retirement, and return, Benjamin S. Naoe had been gathering the one wealth he believed no one could take from him—and the one wealth he could still give away.

As he walked away from the stage, diploma in hand, the same rule stayed with him: learn as if you were to live forever.#



avenue

THE OFFICIAL STUDENT MAGAZINE OF THE UNIVERSITY SCRIBE

A SPECIAL COVERAGE ISSUE ON URDANETA CITY UNIVERSITY'S 74TH COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

PHOTO BY
NATHALIE GAIL G. AQUINO

COVER DESIGN BY
RAFAEL U. BAGALAY



Photo by Nathalie Gail G. Aquino



LOUD AND PROUD. From the top bleacher, a UCU graduate spreads his arms wide—standing high, free, and fulfilled as years of hard work finally turn into a moment worth shouting to the world. | Photo by Nathalie Gail G. Aquino





TULSA

NO LABEL COULD LIMIT ED

BY MELJEM LESTER ADUCA

For many graduates, the stage marks the end of years spent chasing a degree but for Eduardo P. Delos Reyes Jr., it marked something heavier.

It was the moment he stood before his family, classmates, professors, and community not only as a graduate of the College of Criminal Justice Education, but as someone who had learned to walk through fear without letting it decide his future.

At 23, Ed, as he is known to many, carried more than academic requirements on his way to graduation. He carried the quiet pressure of being seen, judged, and sometimes reduced to his identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

But when his name was finally called, it was not fear that answered, it was the work he had done.

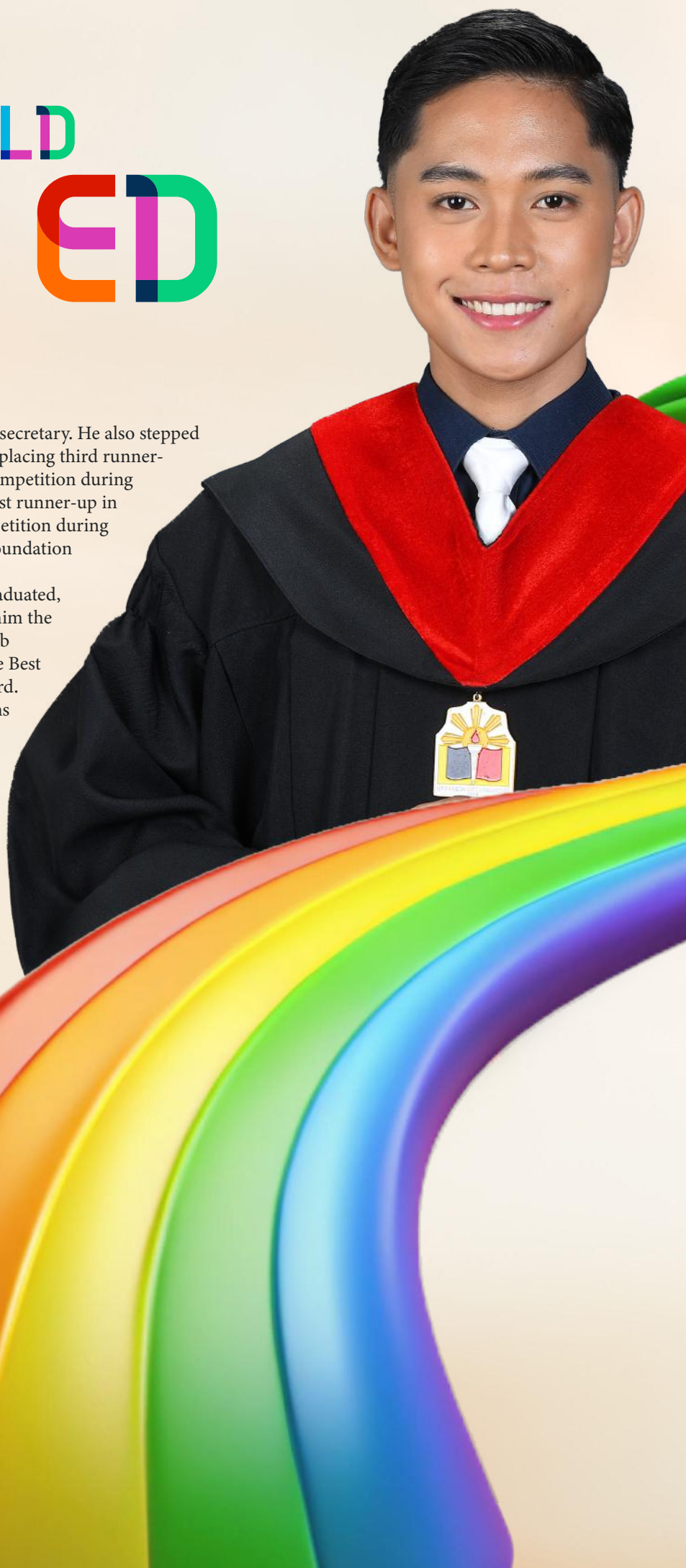
During his first year in college, Ed became a class marcher. In his second

year, he served as class secretary. He also stepped beyond the classroom, placing third runner-up in the Balagtas competition during Buwan ng Wika and first runner-up in the Street Dance Competition during the institution's 58th Foundation Anniversary.

By the time he graduated, his efforts had earned him the Outstanding On-the-Job Training Award and the Best in Research Paper Award.

These recognitions were not accidental decorations on his college record. They were proof of the discipline he built in spaces where he sometimes felt he had to prove that he belonged.

Ed admitted that one of the hardest parts of his journey was not the long hours of study, the



pressure of academic work, or the demands of training. It was the fear of being judged because of who he was.

There were moments when that fear made him feel as if he had to work twice as hard just to be taken seriously.

Still, he chose not to let doubt become the loudest voice in his life. Instead, he kept showing up.

He showed up
in class. He
showed up
in

kind of support that allowed him to keep going, especially during moments when he questioned his own strength. Their encouragement reminded him that he was more than other people's assumptions.

He was a student. A son. A partner. A future criminal justice professional. A person still becoming.

In college, Ed said he found professors who encouraged students to do their best and gave them fair opportunities to participate and succeed. That kind of environment mattered to him because it gave students like him room not only to study, but to exist without having to shrink themselves.

His experience also shaped the way he came to understand justice.

For Ed, justice is not only about law, discipline, and authority. It is also about fairness, dignity, and the ability to see people beyond stereotypes. Being part of the LGBTQIA+ community strengthened his belief that public service must be grounded in respect for every person, regardless of gender identity, background, or circumstance.

This is why he hopes educational institutions will continue building spaces where students do not have to choose between being accepted and being ambitious.

"I encourage educational institutions to continue building an environment where every student feels accepted, respected, and safe."

"Promoting inclusivity through awareness programs, equal opportunities, and strong anti-discrimination policies can help students feel more confident and supported throughout their academic journey."

For him, inclusivity should not remain a word repeated during programs or written in policies only when needed. It must be felt in classrooms, training grounds, student activities, and everyday conversations where young people are still learning how to see themselves and others with respect.

Looking back, Ed saw his graduation not only as a personal victory, but as a message to students who may be afraid to enter spaces where they think they will be judged before they are understood.

His story does not deny that prejudice exists. It does not pretend that confidence comes easily. What it shows is that fear can be present—and still not be powerful enough to stop someone from moving forward.

For fellow LGBTQIA+ students who dream of joining criminal justice or any field where they fear they may not be accepted, Ed left a message shaped by his own experience.

"Never let fear stop you from chasing your dreams," he said. "There may be obstacles along the way, but your determination, skills, and dedication will always speak for themselves. Stay true to who you are, believe in your potential, and keep moving forward with confidence."

As he steps beyond the university, Ed hopes to become the kind of professional who serves with compassion, patience, integrity, and respect for diversity.

The road ahead will ask more from him. It will test not only what he learned in college, but the values he carried through it.

But if his journey has shown anything, it is this: Ed did not graduate because the path was easy.

He graduated because he refused to let fear, judgment, or labels decide how far he could go.#

Our next Category is...

PAMMADAYAW

BY NEIL VINCENT V. CORPUZ
PHOTOS BY MARVIN V. FERRER,
DENVER C. IMBAT

FEATURE



UCUians once again bring color and creativity to Aldaw ti Panagyaman ken Pammadayaw at the Urdaneta City Cultural & Sports Complex, June 23.

Through their stunning Filipino-inspired attire, the awardees celebrate culture in motion—honoring tradition while embracing its continuous evolution, innovation, and transformation.

AW COUTURE



Hindi ako Nag-iisa



NI EZEKIEL EUN S. DE CASTRO

*Hindi man sabay-sabay ang bawat paghakbang,
nagtagpo pa rin tayo sa iisang pangarap at
laban.*

*Sa dami ng mukha, kwento, at pinagdaanan,
pagkakaisa ang naging daan.*

*Sa pagitan ng tawanan at pangungulila,
nabuo ang mga alaalang hindi kukupas sa
tuwina.*

*Hindi lamang tayo naging magkakaklase sa loob
ng silid,
kundi tahanang babalik-balikan ng puso at isip.*

*Sa pagtingala, nasilayan ang dating pinangarap:
pagod at hirap, ngayo'y naging ginhawa sa
palad.*

*Ang sumbrerong itim na minsang inasam,
sa himpapawid ay naging tanda ng tagumpay na
nakamtan.*

*Sa bawat payo at gabay na iniwan,
landas ng pangarap ang ating natunton.
Hindi lamang dunong ang naging handog,
kundi tapang na habambuhay nating baon.*

*Maraming kamay, iisang mithiin,
dugo't pawis ang inilaan sa bawat gampanin.
Sa diwa ng Timpuyog na ating pinanday,
walang imposible kapag sama-samang
naglalakbay.*

*Ang diplomang tangan ay hindi lamang papel,
kundi bunga ng gabing puyat at araw na matindi
ang tiis.*

*Hindi ito wakas ng ating paglalakbay,
kundi simula ng mas malawak na mundong
haharapin.*

*Sa likod ng bawat tagumpay na natamo,
naron ang mga pusong hindi bumitaw.
Ang karangalang ito ay hindi lamang atin,
kundi para sa pamilyang naging lakas, dasal, at
sandigan.*

*Hindi lahat ng alaala ay nasusukat sa marka,
minsan, nasa simpleng halakhak at pagsasama.
Mga sandaling walang kapalit na halaga,
mananatiling buhay sa bawat gunita.*

*Bawat hakbang papunta sa entablado
ay kwento ng pananalig, sakripisyo, at
pagsubok.*

*Kasama ang mga taong naniwala at tumulong,
patuloy tayong hahakbang sa hinaharap na
ating bubuuin.*

*At kung may luhang pumatak sa araw na ito,
hayaan itong magsalita sa ngalan ng lahat ng
pinagdaanan.*

*Sapagkat ang luhang minsang bunga ng pagod
at hirap,
ngayon ay patunay ng pangarap na
naipaglaban.*

*Mula sa iba't ibang pangarap at pinagmulan,
nabuo ang lakas na hindi madaling matitinag.
Ito ang Timpuyog—pagkakaisang tunay,
baon natin saanman tayo dalhin ng buhay.*

Adayo ngem adayo pay

NI NEIL VINCENT V. CORPUZ

*Medalya, toga ken diploma
Nagbunga dagiti inaramid ko nga rigat.
Nakasagana ak kadi iti pudno a biag?
Kasatno met saan pay a nangrugi, ngem kasla mabayag.*

*Ti panagpagnak iti maudi a tukad
Ti pusok ket napunno iti damag.
“Anyangata ti sumaruno nga pagnaan?”
“Ayan na ti turong ti biag manipud tattan?”*

*Saan ko ammo no anyangata ti sumaruno nga aramidek
Basta ammok laeng ket nakagradwarakon.
Adu dagiti rigat a sumangpet
Ngem saan a rason tapno agsardeng ak met.*

*Dagiti rigat ket mabalin nga mang-uyog
Ngem haan ak to a maabak no adda timpuyog.
Ti panagtinnulong ken panagkaykaysa a pudno
Amin nga pangarap ket mabalin a matungpal to.*

MGA LARAWAN NINA MARVIN V. FERRER,
BENCH R. YANGAT, AT KAROL KEN
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the university
scribe

THE UNIVERSITY SCRIBE
The Official Student Publication
of Urdaneta City University
Academic Year 2025-2026
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