



COLLEGE
of the
DESERT



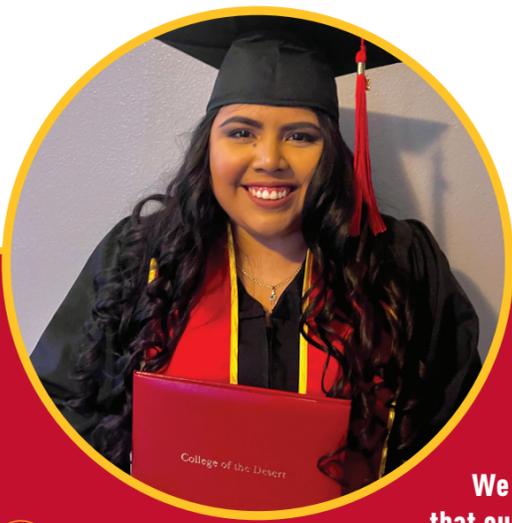
CONGRATULATIONS

College of the Desert

CLASS OF 2021

Your legacy is so much more than a worldwide pandemic. You should be proud not just for overcoming extraordinary obstacles, but for doing so with resilience and determination.

WE APPLAUD YOU FOR YOUR EXCEPTIONAL COMMITMENT TOWARD A HIGHER EDUCATION.



Defining Tomorrow

CREATING TOMORROW

This year is College of the Desert's 57th annual commencement. Though it looks different than past ceremonies, this milestone is no less important for the Class of 2021. In fact, it may be even more important.

We will confer more than 1,600 associate degrees and almost 300 certificates. We are confident that our graduates are knowledgeable in their academics and skills. They are ready to enter the workforce or transfer into a four-year postsecondary institution.



Our virtual commencement will be available for viewing starting on **May 28, 2021, at 10 a.m.** Visit www.collegeofthedesert.edu/2021commencement.



CLASS OF 2021



In Her Own Words:

Student Trustee Larissa Chavez-Chaidez

In keeping with the philosophy of the College, the responsibility for student government is placed with the students. One student from campus is elected each year to serve as the Student Trustee on the Board of Trustees. Students are also elected to the Associated Students of the College of the Desert (ASCOD) Student Senate, and others are appointed as Club Representatives to the ASCOD Inter-Club Council or to the President's Student Ambassadors.

Student Story: Larissa Chavez-Chaidez

College of the Desert gave me the opportunity to learn about being a leader and an advocate for students.

When I started at College of the Desert, I knew I wanted to be involved so I became President of Ballet Folklorico "Sabor a mi Tierra." Soon after I joined student government as an independent senator, where I discovered the great programs that College of the Desert offers to students. Afterwards, I served as vice president to become more connected with other clubs, explore events and fundraisers around campus, and learn more about the students and their interests. During my last year attending College of the Desert, I have proudly served as Student Trustee. I have enjoyed attending Board of Trustees meetings and representing students on different committees. These positions allowed me to learn more about leadership and create life-long friendships.

I was born in Stockton, California, raised in Sinaloa, Mexico, and came to the Coachella Valley at the age of 17. I visited my brother who worked at College of the Desert and walked through the Indio campus, and I remember instantly saying, "I want to come to College of the Desert." In less than a week, I was attending La Quinta High School, allowing me to graduate and attend College of the Desert.

The College became my second home. They were a great support system during my transition from high school to college and guided me through every step during the Summer EDGE Program. I will always remember the sense of community that the College offers.

I will continue my education at Cal State San Bernardino-Palm Desert Campus studying Relational and Organizational Communication. I hope to continue serving in the community and giving back to College of the Desert for the many opportunities they gave me. I will always be grateful to College of the Desert and proud to be a Roadrunner.



Larissa Chavez-Chaidez
Communication Studies

Veterans

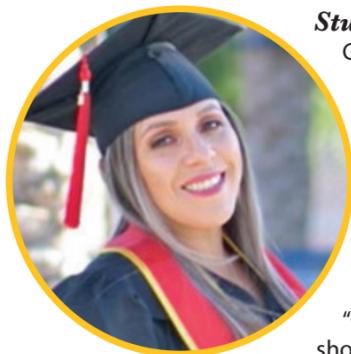
College of the Desert's Veterans Resource Center and TRIO Veterans provide services and support for our veterans and military-affiliated personnel and their dependents. This year, the College is proud to celebrate 29 veterans, reservists and National Guard students from the Class of 2021.

Student Spotlight: Alejandra Rodriguez

Graduate Alejandra Rodriguez served in the U.S. Army doing two tours of duty in Iraq and one tour in Afghanistan before returning to the Coachella Valley to start a family. Now a single mother with three children ages 13, 10 and 3, Alejandra draws strength and motivation from her children, who she says are the reason she returned to school.

After Alejandra's oldest son Raul was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism, she was left frustrated by the lack of resources and parent support. Determined to make a difference, she reached out to the College's Veterans Resource Center and is now graduating with an associate degree in Early Childhood Education. She will continue her studies in an online bachelor's degree program offered through Cal State East Bay.

"COD gave me the support I needed and showed me that I could go back to school and get my degree, and now I can show my kids that they can do it too," said Alejandra.



Diversity at College of the Desert

College of the Desert is an open-door institution that embraces diversity in all forms and recognizes the right of all people to have access to quality higher education. The College is committed to continuing its rich tradition of valuing all students and helping them attain their educational goals. We work every day to close the equity gaps that exist for our students. Our international and foreign-born graduates represent 28 countries:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Brazil | Georgia | Italy | Peru |
| Canada | Germany | Jamaica | Philippines |
| China | Guam | Japan | Switzerland |
| Colombia | Guatemala | Kenya | Syria |
| Democratic Republic of Congo | Indonesia | Mexico | Taiwan |
| Egypt | Iran | New Zealand | U.S. Virgin Islands |
| Finland | Israel | Nicaragua | West Africa |

Faculty of the Year

Oceana Collins Assistant Professor, History



Oceana Collins joined College of the Desert in 2010 as a history adjunct and became a full-time member of the faculty in 2014. Since then, Professor Collins has served as the faculty advisor for the History Club, where she has organized countless field trips to historical sites throughout California.

A self-described “wild child,” Professor Collins started her higher education journey in the California Community College system. She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in History from UC Santa Cruz and a master’s degree from Cal State San Bernardino. Professor Collins’ experience has allowed her to connect with her students and inspire them to reach for their dreams.

“At many points I wanted to give up, but I didn’t. After a journey that took over 20 years, I have a career that I love,” said Professor Collins. “No matter who you are, and what you choose to do, you can make a difference. History is full of people, many of them unknown, who have made a difference and sometimes the smallest things can make a huge difference to the people who need it the most.”

“At many points I wanted to give up, but I didn’t. After a journey that took over 20 years, I have a career that I love.”

Professor Collins

Virtual Commencement Speakers

We encourage you to watch our Faculty and Student Commencement Speakers and hear their inspiring testimonials by visiting www.collegeofthedesert.edu/2021commencement.

Sandra Villa Liberal Arts



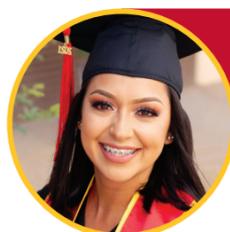
Liberal Arts major Sandra Villa proves that nothing is impossible with hard work and determination.

Sandra moved to the United States when she was just 17. Within six months, she learned to read and write English and was able to graduate from high school after being in the United States for less than a year and a half. Because of her age when she entered the United States, Sandra didn’t qualify for the Dream Act or any form of federal financial aid when she first arrived at College of the Desert.

Financial challenges forced Sandra to drop out at one point but she never let go of her dream to finish school. In 2019, she heard a news story about new legislation in California that would allow more Dreamers to attend College. Determined to prove to herself and her family that education was within her reach, she re-enrolled at College of the Desert and is now graduating with her associate degree.

“For a Dreamer like me, nothing can be taken for granted. Whenever I leave my house, I don’t know if I will see my family again, I can only hope. Hope is what we all have to get us through. I was the first one in my family to graduate from high school. Now, I am the first to graduate from college. And, if God permits, I’ll be the first immigration attorney in my family.”

Monserrat Salazar Early Childhood Education



Just as many of this year’s graduates could not have imaged how the COVID-19 pandemic would change the way they attended school this past year, Monserrat Salazar never dreamed that she would be graduating college at the age of 32.

In March 2019, six months pregnant with her fifth child, Monserrat unexpectedly lost her husband of 10 years. Despite her grief, Monserrat knew that she needed to go back to school and earn her degree. According to Monserrat, College of the Desert and the demands of homework, essays and finals helped her get through some of her darkest days.

“It takes a lot of initiative, self-trust, confidence and perseverance to achieve and complete every single goal we set our minds to. It’s a matter of making the right decisions to help yourself achieve these goals and set new ones. And even though life can be full of obstacles and changes, know that you can, and will, get through it.”

EDGE/pLEDGE

We are proud that this year represents the third graduating class of the pLEDGE program. The pLEDGE program offers two years of free tuition to local high school graduates and provides a kickstart to higher education that many students would not otherwise have.

These pLEDGE students were among the first of more than 5,700 students who have benefited from the program.

Graduate Spotlight: Devin Sifuentes

Devin Sifuentes will be using his psychology degree from College of the Desert to pursue a career in law enforcement. With dreams of someday becoming a detective, Devin came to College of the Desert from Shadow Hills High School in Indio. The youngest of two, he participated in the College’s EDGE/pLEDGE program, which taught him valuable skills and provided much-needed support. Devin, who is on the autism spectrum, has persevered through his studies, acknowledging that he learned time management skills from day one at the College.

Leading up to his first semester, he participated in the EDGE summer readiness program and credits English staff for helping him understand what was going to be expected of him as a college student. The pLEDGE program provided him with free tuition and fees, which removed the financial burden from his family and allowed Devin to focus on his studies.

Another program near and dear to Devin is the TRiO-Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSPS) Program, which provides comprehensive counseling and assists students in meeting the challenges of graduating from college and transferring to a four-year university. Devin says the program gave him the encouragement and resources he needed to complete his studies with confidence.

“I want to encourage all students, but especially those like me, to never give up. No matter how hard it is, you can always persevere,” said Devin.



Career and Technical Education: Nursing Students on Track for Graduation

Following the onset of the COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020, College of the Desert nursing students were unable to gain hands-on experience in many of the clinical sites located throughout the Valley. The College worked with the Board of Registered Nursing to allow more hours in the simulation lab to replace in-person clinical experience. In the Spring of 2021, the College started offering hybrid course options that allowed students to attend theory/lecture portions of their classes online with lab and clinical work being offered face-to-face. Because of these efforts, the College will graduate nearly 40 students from the Registered Nursing Program this spring.

Graduate Spotlight: Kimberly Gutierrez

Kimberly Gutierrez was born to serve others. A first-generation college student, Kimberly was working in an assisted living facility in 2017 when she realized she wanted to do more. Determined not to let a global pandemic keep her from achieving her dreams of working in an intensive care unit or oncology ward, Kimberly is graduating with her Registered Nursing degree.



According to Kimberly, College of the Desert’s nursing faculty have been supportive and helped guide her in the right direction when she needed help. “When I was a child, my mom had problems with diabetes and many times we were forced to rush her to the hospital. Seeing the nurses working and helping my mother made me realize that someday I wanted to give back and help others like my mom. I want to help the vulnerable in our community and be the nurse that others turn to for assistance.”



WELCOME COLLEGE OF THE DESERT ALUMNI

Proud Roadrunner Alumni

Integral to the College's success is the potential held by its more than 125,000 alumni to open doors, generate ideas, support students and elevate College of the Desert with their time and talents.

Visit www.collegeofthedesert.edu/alumni to join our alumni engagement mailing list and receive updates and information about College initiatives and events.

Step Up For COD

College of the Desert alumni, faculty, students, donors and friends have many incredible stories of success.

Visit www.StepUpForCOD.com to add your story and read about other notable alumni.

Congratulations from the Faculty, Staff and Leadership at College of the Desert!



Special thanks

to the College of the Desert Foundation for its unwavering support of our graduates.

Congratulations, Class of 2021!

You have overcome unimaginable obstacles this past year and you have met those challenges head-on. You and your families have much to be proud of, and I applaud the dedication and determination each and every one of you has shown as you pursued your dreams of a better tomorrow.



Jeff Baker
Interim Superintendent/President

and

COLLEGE OF THE DESERT'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Student Trustee



*Remember,
once a
Roadrunner,
always a
Roadrunner.*

#Roadrunner2021

