

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 10, 2011

Commencement Celebrates Student Success

College holds first commencement at Benaroya Hall.

Thursday, June 16, 2011
2:30 pm, Benayora Hall
200 University Street
Seattle, WA 98101

Graduation is a time to celebrate stories of success and the paths that students have taken to reach their goals. South Seattle Community College will celebrate the accomplishments of the Class of 2011 at the annual commencement ceremony taking place at Benaroya Hall, at 2:30 pm on Thursday, June 16. After more than 40 years, South has outgrown its on-campus events venue and looks forward to now being able to accommodate graduates, their families, and significant others at the world class performance complex.

This year, 853 students have earned degrees and certificates, including 410 in academic transfer, 336 in professional/technical studies and multi-occupational trades, and 27 students in the college's four-year Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) in Hospitality Management degree program. The graduating class also includes 42 new Registered Nurses and seven dual-graduate Running Start students, who are receiving a college AA degree and high school diploma concurrently.

Behind the numbers:

Danna Culhane – Among the Class of 2011 is the recipient of a prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship. Danna Culhane is one of just 60 Scholars selected nationwide, and the only Washington state representative to receive the award this year. The scholarship will cover up to \$30,000 per year of her educational expenses including tuition, living costs, books and required fees, for the final two to three years necessary to achieve a bachelor's degree.

The super-successful 26-year old was also named a Martin Achievement Scholar, 2011 Coca-Cola Community College Academic Team Gold Scholar, All-Washington Academic Team member, and a Trustee Association of Community and Technical Colleges (TACTC) scholarship recipient.

Born in Korea, Danna was raised in Minnesota by an adoptive family that self-destructed from the ravaging effects of alcoholism. Her refuge became a friend's home, where she found positive family and professional role models, as well as an emotional haven.

After graduating from high school in 2003, she landed briefly at three other community colleges before discovering that the challenging, yet supportive, environment at South was a true fit.

“I never thought I would go to college,” says the first-generation graduate. “It’s the right combination of resources and people on this campus that makes the difference.”

Service is an important aspect of Danna’s life. Through Alateen, she has worked with teens living with the disease of alcoholism in family or friends. On campus, as president and founder of South’s first Business Club, she has helped provide pre-Business students with access to university advisors, instructional seminars, and workshops on resume building, interviewing, and internships. The group now has over 60 active members, many of whom have vastly improved their performance on business school writing assessment tests.

“We all benefit when we share our strengths and motivate others to succeed,” she says. “All the effort that you put out fosters your enthusiasm and pushes you toward the next thing in your life.”

Danna has been accepted to the University of Washington’s highly-regarded Foster Business School, where she plans to pursue a business degree with an international focus. While looking forward to taking her next educational step, she admits that leaving South will be difficult.

“At South, everybody is working together to help students succeed and move on to the next point in life. I’ve been touched by how everybody on campus is dedicated to that goal.”

Nhat-Cuong Ly – Cuong is truly getting a Running Start on life. The 18-year old, who has been in the United State for just three years, will receive an associate of arts degree from South on June 16, followed by his high school diploma from Chief Sealth the next day. He has already earned more than 90 credits toward an electrical engineering degree at the UW, and credits his South experience with preparing him to adapt to the rigors of a four-year institution.

“The environment here is a lot different than high school,” he explains. “Everything is your responsibility, and nobody calls your home if you don’t come to class. Here, it’s up to you.”

Jorge Lyon-Mendez – Jorge describes himself as a “living miracle.” As a child in his native El Salvador, he attended school barefoot because he did not own shoes. At the age of 18, he suffered near-fatal wounds, almost becoming another statistic of the violence in his war-torn country. A true survivor, he made his way to the U.S. in 1994, and is now proudly receiving an associate of applied science degree in Diesel & Heavy Equipment Technology. Jorge has held down two jobs while attending school full-time and supporting his family, but has never complained. Instead, he remains grateful for the opportunities he has been presented and is joyful knowing he can provide a safe life, full of possibilities, for his three daughters. Jorge was recently named Employee of the First Quarter at Starline Transportation, where supervisors cited his wonderful work ethic and willingness to go the extra mile in everything he does.

Autasia “Sia” Sagiao – Sia is the first graduate of South’s new associate of arts degree with Asian Pacific Islander (API) Studies emphasis. The innovative program examines history and contemporary issues affecting Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders, and features a flexible curriculum drawing from literature, history, music, anthropology, art, religion, and humanities courses.

South’s motto – ***Start Here, Go Anywhere*** – is exemplified by our graduates, and the college congratulates them all on their achievements.

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Danna Culhane



Nhat-Cuong Ly



Jorge Lyon-Mendez