



Calendar

JUNE 19

Juneteenth, No Classes - Campus Closed

JULY 3

Independence Day (observed), No Classes
- Campus Closed



OCC Awarded More Than 6,000 Degrees, Certificates at 78th Commencement Ceremony

Orange Coast College conferred approximately 6,000 associate degrees and certificates of achievement to some 2,942 graduates at the 78th Commencement ceremony on May 22.

Graduating with five associate degrees, student speaker Cher Scarlett will share her journey with the graduating class. A former high school dropout, Scarlett is a self-taught software engineer, who decided to pursue a childhood passion after seeing the OCC Planetarium. She will transfer to Wellesley College this fall.

This year, OCC inducted Fire Chief Dan Stefano into the OCC Alumni Hall of Fame. With a career spanning more than three decades, from reserve firefighter to Fire Chief, he credits his start at community college with providing him with a solid foundation. He has earned distinction

as one of the most respected leaders in public safety in California.

Dr. Karissa Lovero, Faculty of the Year, also addressed the graduating class. Lovero, a Biological Sciences instructor, brings a deeply personal commitment to ensuring every student feels they belong. She revamped tutor training at the Science Engineering Tutoring Center, champions the Faculty Caring Campus initiative, and removes financial barriers by using free course materials.



OCC's Class of 2026 is diverse, spanning a wide age range, from our youngest graduate, 16, to our oldest, 81. Additionally, OCC has 23 states represented in the graduating class and 189 international student graduates from 35 countries.

OCC Named Five-Degree Graduate Cher Scarlett as 2026 Commencement Student Speaker

For Cher Scarlett, the path to Orange Coast College's 2026 Commencement stage was anything but ordinary. Through personal challenges and bold career pivots, she found a new purpose within OCC's classrooms.

Now, as she prepares to take the podium as the Commencement Student Speaker, Scarlett's journey serves as an inspiring example of resilience and hope. An honors student who overcame a year of homelessness and domestic trauma, she will deliver her address while celebrating

an extraordinary achievement: earning five associate degrees.

Scarlett's path to higher education is marked by academic resilience. A self-taught software engineer, she spent nearly two decades in the tech industry and rose to Principal Software Engineer at Apple. Yet despite her impressive credentials, she was ultimately shut out of the industry for lacking a formal college degree.

During this time, Scarlett's personal life entered a critical crisis due to an escalating, life-threatening domestic abuse situation. Fleeing her home in Washington State, she drove south to Orange County with no money and nowhere to live, seeking safety and a fresh start.

Though she originally enrolled in online computer science courses through the Coast Community College District to check an educational box for tech employers, Scarlett faced housing instability during her first ten months at OCC. During this period, the OCC Basic Needs Office provided



Scarlett with emergency food resources and connected her to vital campus support services.

Scarlett's educational trajectory shifted entirely during her first visit to OCC's physical campus. A navigation error led her past the OCC Planetarium, where the sight of the facility's distinctive blue dome reignited a childhood passion for physics and astronomy – a dream she had abandoned after dropping out of high school at age 17. After wandering into the building, Planetarium staff and students welcomed her, convincing her to join the Astronomy Club and change her major.

"That's when I became a Pirate," Scarlett said. "It made me feel like I belonged, and that I could do what I really wanted to do, instead of trying to force myself back into a career that had pushed me out."

Thriving within the OCC community, Scarlett went on to help plan the campus's inaugural Hackathon event, competed in the NASA Community College

Aerospace Scholars robotics competition, and worked as a public presenter at the Planetarium, teaching astronomy to local elementary school groups.

Through the OCC Honors Program, she blended her analytical skills with her love for the arts, completing advanced coursework that included writing creative poetry in Spanish.

Scarlett graduated with honors, holding five degrees: an Associate in Science (A.S.) in Astronomy, an Associate in Science for Transfer (A.S.-T.) in Physics, an A.S.-T. in Mathematics, an A.S. in Natural Sciences, and an Associate in Arts (A.A.) in Liberal Arts.

Following graduation, Scarlett plans to transfer to Wellesley College to major in astrophysics, dedicating her future to researching the universe's unanswered questions.

Celebrating the Next Generation of Healthcare Heroes

Orange Coast College hosted its annual School of Allied Health Pinning Ceremony at the Robert B. Moore Theatre on May 21. The pinning ceremony is a time-honored tradition that marks our students' transition from rigorous academic training

to entering the healthcare workforce as qualified professionals. OCC applauds these graduates for their resilience, commitment to excellence and dedication to serving our local communities.



OCC Celebrates Dedication of I Heart OCC Letters

The OCC campus community gathered to celebrate the official dedication of the “I Heart OCC” letters – an installation made possible by the generous support of the Associated Students of Orange Coast College and the Orange Coast College Foundation – on May 20. Students, faculty,



and staff showed off their Pirate pride, posing for photos in front of the vibrant letters alongside Pete the Pirate, OCC's mascot, and his lively companion, Peg the talking parrot.

OCC Students Help Replenish Southern California's White Seabass Population

Orange Coast College Aquarium Science students release juvenile white sea bass into Newport Harbor after months of raising, monitoring, measuring, and tagging the fish in partnership with the Hubbs-SeaWorld Research Institute. For more than 15 years, OCC students have helped restore Southern California's marine ecosystems by preparing white seabass for release into local waters, supporting efforts to replenish historically overfished populations while gaining hands-on experience in marine conservation and aquaculture.

