



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**WLAC'S 50<sup>TH</sup> COMMENCEMENT  
HAD LARGEST CA COMMUNITY COLLEGE BACCALAUREATE CLASS  
Senator Mitchell Told Grads "You Owe Us"**



From Top:  
**Senator Holly J. Mitchell** congratulates graduate.

**Kalen Kocker** used his academic refresh to earn a spot at UCLA.

Adult school grad **Victoria Sanders** used TRIO services to help her advance to Cal State LA.

“You owe us all a debt, public dollars finance community colleges,” said Senator Holly J. Mitchell at the milestone 50<sup>th</sup> Commencement Ceremony at West Los Angeles College. “You know what we want? We want you to be the best you can possibly be. We’re asking you to step up, step out, be the change makers, be excellent in your field of study. California is the fifth largest economy in the world and it’s counting on you to be the innovators to take us into the future.”

This year’s commencement not only marked the official start of a 12-month celebration of the College’s golden anniversary, but was a historical first. West was one of only 15 California Community Colleges which conferred Bachelor’s degrees. The 29 Dental Hygiene graduates made up the largest Baccalaureate class from a community college in the entire State, according to the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office.

Other speakers helping to mark this momentous day included Assemblymember Sydney Kamlager-Dove; **Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) Chancellor Dr. Francisco C. Rodriguez and LACCD Board Member Dr. Gabriel Buelna.**

Buelna thanked West for the role the college played in his education. While still in high school, he earned units at West which allowed him to graduate early from California State University Northridge. Furthermore, it was at West that Buelna’s mother improved her English proficiency by attending night classes. This made it possible for her to secure a hospital job, a position which “allowed her to pay the tuition for my brother and myself to go to UC Santa Barbara and Cal State Northridge,” he said. “Thank you West LA.”

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## WLAC'S 50<sup>TH</sup> COMMENCEMENT...continued

Kamlager-Dove told the graduates, "I hope that you'll be purposeful in what you do... This is your life, it is the only one you get, so own it. It is my true joy to believe in you and what is next for you."

"Next" for these new West alumni will vary widely as they use their career certificates to gain satisfying employment, transfer to universities as juniors, or use their dental hygiene Bachelor's degrees to enter a field that pays nearly \$100,000 per year on average in California, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

**1 YEAR TO HOLLYWOOD:** West, located in Culver City dubbed "The Heart of Screenland," helped Alex Ingram find his calling and break into film and TV production crafts. During the unique one-year hands-on training program where students prepare for entry-level positions as grips, set-dressers, camera loaders and more, he worked behind the scenes for major events at the Los Angeles Convention Center and at Sony Picture Studios preparing for the Coachella Festival. Ingram is looking forward to securing membership in the professional trade union International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and continuing to work as a grip in the entertainment industry.

**2 YEARS TO A UNIVERSITY:** STEM Scholar Kalen Kocker is transferring to UCLA to continue his Physics studies and eventually become a thermonuclear fusion engineer. For this Hamilton High School alumnus, West offered a fresh academic start and pushed him to excel. At West, he became a peer tutor and was accepted into the Alpha Gamma Sigma honor society. "The faculty and my new friends pushed me to be the best version of myself," said Kalen.

Victoria Sanders attended Culver City Adult School before enrolling at West. As an older student, she had to balance school, work and family. With a little help from the college TRIO program which provides academic and career guidance as well as university transfer assistance, Sanders completed her Associate degree and will advance to California State University Los Angeles with the goal of becoming a family therapist.

**4-YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE:** U.S. Veteran Guadalupe Flint was part of West's first Dental Hygiene Baccalaureate class. While quality was an important factor in Flint selecting West, program cost was also critical. At West she was able to receive comparable training in state-of-the-art facilities for approximately \$20,000 as compared to USC where the cost is over \$122,000.

The WLAC Dental Hygiene program, established in 1973, has had a consistent record of 100 percent of its graduates passing the professional exam. The program was recently awarded a Strong Workforce Gold Star by the State Chancellor's Office in recognition of recent graduates realizing a 303 percent increase in earnings; 78 percent attaining at least a regional living wage; and 100 percent employed in a job similar to their field of study.

Members of the class of 2018 have many starting points and have many paths to choose from here at West, explained Aracely Aguiar, the college Vice President of Academic Affairs. "Our job is to make sure they all realize the college motto – "Go West. Go Far."

*West Los Angeles College is located at 9000 Overland Avenue, Culver City, CA 90230. The college is a ACCJC-accredited community college providing full-time, part-time and online paths to university transfer and career preparation.*