

# Mercy University Honors 2024 Graduates at Commencement

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DOBBS FERRY, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, May 16, 2024

/EINPresswire.com/ -- On May 21 and 22, Mercy University will celebrate the Class of 2024 at four commencement ceremonies to be held at the Westchester County Center. More than 2,400 graduates make up the Class of 2024, the first to graduate since officially becoming Mercy University last summer. Honorary degrees will be bestowed on six commencement speakers for their outstanding contributions and exceptional leadership in the fields of business, education, health and natural sciences, liberal arts, nursing and social sciences. In addition to the in-person ceremonies, all commencement addresses and awarding of diplomas will be live-streamed for families, friends and guests of the graduating students.

“Commencement marks a significant milestone in our students' lives, symbolizing their preparedness to make meaningful contributions to society,” said Susan L. Parish, Ph.D., M.S.W., president of Mercy University. “Our graduates will head out into the world to serve their communities in health care, education, business, social sciences, the arts, and more. As we celebrate our graduates and honorary



Graduates in cap and gown at Commencement



Official seal for Mercy University

degree recipients, we recognize how education empowers individuals to embrace challenges, seize opportunities, and emerge as leaders.”

The Mercy University 2024 honorary degree recipients are as follows:

School of Business: Cheryl Lynn Brannan, M.S. '02 is a dynamic leader who has excelled in the civic, political, corporate, academic, and international arenas for over 30 years. Over two decades at Xerox Corporation, Brannan rose from a sales representative to senior management, earning accolades for her prowess in sales, marketing, operations, and human resources, while also pioneering diversity initiatives. While at Xerox, Brannan founded Sister to Sister International, a non-profit organization that supports the health, education, and empowerment of Black and Brown women and girls in Westchester County, New York, and beyond. As the founder she spearheaded the creation of the first Science Technology Engineering Arts and Math summer camp and academy and forums, for Black and girls of color in the Lower Hudson Valley, supporting the trajectory of hundreds of students who have become professionals in these underrepresented fields. After leaving the private sector, Brannan founded Brannan Solutions Group, a consulting firm that specializes in helping organizations achieve their goals through strategic planning, leadership development, and diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Brannan holds a bachelor's degree in health education and business from SUNY at Cortland, and a master's degree in organizational leadership from Mercy University, where she also taught as a faculty member in the School of Business. Brannan will receive a Doctor of Commercial Science.

School of Education: Dr. Raymond Sanchez is the Superintendent of the Public Schools of the Tarrytowns. He started as a classroom teacher then progressed through building, curriculum, and district leadership roles before being appointed as superintendent of the Ossining Union Free School District in 2013, a position he held for over 10 years. Over the course of his career, Sanchez has built bridges between the school and the community while developing a strong educational setting for both teachers and students. He has maintained a solid focus on the instructional core and made data-driven decisions to upgrade curriculum, set instructional direction, and strengthen overall services. Sanchez led a district of more than 5,000 students during a period of tremendous growth in student population, successfully conveying both internal and external messages to inform, educate, and garner support for initiatives. By fostering community connections, he created a framework for student achievement and positioned Ossining as a leader in the educational equity movement.

Sanchez received his doctorate in Educational Leadership from Manhattanville College, earning the Doctoral Outstanding Leadership Award in 2019. He also holds advanced education degrees and certificates from Fordham University, Columbia University and Long Island University. He earned his undergraduate degree from the State University of New York at Geneseo. Sanchez will receive a Doctor of Humane Letters.

School of Health and Natural Sciences: Traci Furbert Gardner, MD is Chief Medical Officer/

Medical Director for The Children's Village Organization in Dobbs Ferry NY. She is also Chief Medical Officer/Medical Director for the Greenburgh Eleven School District and the former CMO for the Valhalla Union Free School district in Valhalla NY. She also holds the positions of Director of Anti-Bias and Anti- Racism and Director of Health Inequities at New York Medical College. In her prior role as the Director of Community Engagement at New York Medical College she partnered with the NAACP as well as other community organizations on topics that impact health disparities in the African American Community. She has written curriculums for New York Medical College School of Medicine on patient centered collaborative care focused on case coordination, population health and cultural competency/Implicit Bias.

Gardner graduated from Mount Holyoke College with a bachelor's degree in Biological Sciences and New York Medical College with a Doctor of Medicine. She also a Fellow of The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, part of Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy secondary to completion of Supporting the Well-Being of LGBTQ Youth Certification Program. Prior to medical school she obtained a Certificate of Medical Sciences from Boston University School of Medicine and worked as a Research Assistant in the Department of Surgery at Yale University School of Medicine. Gardner will receive a Doctor of Science.

School of Liberal Arts: Sonia Manzano is an actress and writer. Her most recent accomplishment was creating a children's program, *Alma's Way*, for PBS KIDS. It has won two Imagen Awards for Best Youth Programing, a 2022 Emmy nomination for Outstanding Writing for a Preschool Animated Program and a 2023 NAACP nomination for an Image Award. But what Manzano is best known for is performing the role of "Maria" on Sesame Street for 44 seasons, where her work affected the lives of millions of parents and children and garnered her two Emmy Award nominations in addition to the National academy of Arts and Science's Lifetime Achievement Daytime Emmy in 2016. As a writer for the show, she took home 15 Emmys. Also, Manzano recently received the 2022 Beacon Award from PBS.

She is also a book author. Her most recent Scholastic novel, *Coming Up Cuban*, set in 1959, follows the lives of four children who represent different intersections of race and class during the Cuban Revolution. Manzano will receive a Doctor of Fine Arts.

School of Nursing: Sandra Lindsay, DHSc, MBA, MSN, RN. CCRN-K, NE-BC is Northwell Health's vice president of public health advocacy. She leads the health system in expanding knowledge of issues that affect community health and public policy, dispelling misinformation, and supporting medical research and global equity. With nearly 30 years of nursing experience, Lindsay previously served as director of patient care services in critical care at Northwell Health's Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

On December 14, 2020, she became a household name when she became the first person in the United States to receive the COVID-19 vaccine outside of a clinical trial. Because of her bravery and leading the national push for vaccination to end the pandemic, she has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, by President Joe Biden on July 7th, 2022—the highest civilian

honor. On August 6, 2022, His Excellency, The Governor General of Jamaica, conferred the honor of The Order of Distinction in The Rank of Commander on Lindsay for her contributions to public health. Lindsay will receive a Doctor of Science.

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences: Robert O. Carr, M.S is the founder of Give Something Back, Heartland Payment Systems, and Beyond. As a high school senior in a troubled family in rural Illinois, Robert O. Carr was surprised to be awarded a \$250 college scholarship in 1963 by the local Woman's Club. A high school senior, he had not applied for the award. In fact, he did not know it existed. But the honor made him so proud he vowed that if he ever had extra money, he would use it to provide scholarships to students who had also faced adversities.

After college, he briefly held jobs at a bank and as a teacher at a community college. He then went into business for himself as founder and CEO of two large companies, Heartland Payment Systems, and Beyond. In his fifties, Heartland Payment Systems struck it bigger than Carr had ever dreamed possible. In 2003, he founded Give Something Back, which provides college scholarships, as well as academic and social mentoring, to students who have endured adversity. He has invested \$85 million of his own money in Give Back, which in recent years has focused on students who have experienced foster care, homelessness or the incarceration of a parent. With the success of Give Back, government agencies in five states have hired the organization to work with students facing hardship. Carr will receive a Doctor of Humane Letters.

For complete details about each of Mercy University's Commencement ceremonies, including date, time and location, and to watch the live stream, please visit <https://www.mercy.edu/campus-life/commencement-2024> .

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#### About Mercy University

Mercy University is an independent, coeducational institution serving more than 9,000 students each year across campuses in Westchester, the Bronx, Manhattan, as well as online. It is a federally designated minority-serving institution and the largest private Hispanic Serving Institution in the state of New York. Mercy offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and certificate programs within six schools: Business, Education, Health and Natural Sciences, Liberal Arts, Nursing and Social and Behavioral Sciences. The institution also provides non-credit courses and certificates for adult learners looking to acquire new skills through CERTiFi by Mercy University. Mercy was founded in 1950 by the Sisters of Mercy whose mission of transformative education remains strong. For more information, visit [www.mercy.edu](http://www.mercy.edu).

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