

Mercy University Celebrates Class of 2025 with Four Commencement Ceremonies

Mercy University will honor the achievements of over 2,400 graduates on May 20 and 21 at the Westchester County Center.

DOBBS FERRY, NY, UNITED STATES, May 13, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Mercy University will honor the achievements of over 2,400 graduates during its 2025 Commencement, held over four ceremonies on May 20 and 21 at the Westchester County Center in White Plains, N.Y. In recognition of their outstanding leadership and contributions to their fields, six distinguished individuals will be awarded honorary degrees and serve as commencement speakers for the University's six schools.



The ceremonies will be held in person and live streamed to ensure family members, friends, and guests can celebrate alongside the graduates regardless of location.

"This is a moment of incredible pride for our entire Mercy University community," said Susan L. Parish, Ph.D., M.S.W., president of Mercy University. "As we celebrate the Class of 2025—an extraordinary group of resilient, compassionate, and ambitious individuals—we are equally inspired by the six leaders joining us as honorary degree recipients. Their stories reflect the values we instill in our graduates: service, innovation and a deep commitment to making a difference."

The 2025 Mercy University honorary degree recipients and commencement speakers are:

School of Business

Judith M. Watson, RN, B.S.N., M.P.H.

Honorary Doctor of Commercial Science

From Jamaican immigrant to U.S. Army sergeant to trailblazing healthcare executive, Judith M. Watson's remarkable journey is a testament to resilience, service, and visionary leadership. She credits her disciplined nature, strong work ethic, and deep-rooted desire to help others to her years of service in the United States Army—experiences that inspired her calling to nursing and community health.

Her nursing career began in 1994 at the Greenburgh Health Center (now Westchester Community Health Center). Over the course of more than 30 years, she has held multiple leadership roles, including executive director and chief operating officer, ultimately ascending to her current role as CEO. Under her guidance, the health center has expanded its mission of providing quality care to underserved populations throughout Westchester County.

Watson's leadership is grounded in advocacy, accessibility, and a profound belief that health care is a human right. She will address graduates of the School of Business at Commencement 2025, where she will receive an Honorary Doctor of Commercial Science degree in recognition of her impact.

School of Education

Mary C. Fox-Alter '78, M.S., CNR GS '03

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

A proud Mercy and CNR alumna and an accomplished New York State school district leader, Mary C. Fox-Alter brings four decades of dedicated service in education, leadership, and policy advocacy.

Throughout her distinguished career, she has served as Superintendent of Schools in both the Pleasantville District and the Ossining Union Free School District, where she currently serves. She has implemented transformative initiatives in curriculum development, teacher mentorship, student support services and inclusive education. Her exceptional contributions have earned her numerous accolades, including the New York State Senate Award for Service in Education, New York State Board of Regents Service Recognition Award and the Westchester County Board of Legislature Service and Leadership Award.

A tireless advocate for educational equity and a mentor to countless educators and administrators, Fox-Alter continues to shape the future of public education. She will address graduates of the School of Education and receive an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

School of Health and Natural Sciences

Sherlita Amler, M.D., M.S., Ed.S., RN, FAAP, CEM

Honorary Doctor of Science

Dr. Sherlita Amler has devoted nearly four decades to protecting public health and saving lives, having served in diverse roles—including pediatrician, physician, ER nurse, and microbiologist—across local, state, and federal agencies.

As the Commissioner of Health for Westchester County and the longest-serving health commissioner in New York State, Dr. Amler's leadership has been vital in times of crisis. She has led major public health responses, including the anthrax attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic, where she directed Westchester's aggressive and effective public health response. She has championed initiatives in disease prevention, emergency preparedness, opioid overdose rescue training, and school and community safety. Her influence also extends to education as an adjunct professor and co-founder of the Center for Disaster Medicine at New York Medical College.

Her extraordinary leadership during times of crisis has made her a trusted figure in New York public health. In 2024, the State Senate proclaimed September 26 as "Dr. Sherlita Amler Day," recognizing her extraordinary contributions to public health and service. She will address graduates of the School of Health and Natural Sciences and receive an Honorary Doctor of Science degree.

School of Liberal Arts
Julian Schlossberg
Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts

Julian Schlossberg is an acclaimed film, television and theater producer whose five-decade career has had a profound impact on American arts and culture. A native New Yorker, he began his career at ABC before rising through the entertainment industry to become a major force in film distribution and production.

He is the founder of Castle Hill Productions, one of the world's largest independent film distribution companies, which brought timeless works by Elia Kazan, Orson Welles, John Cassavetes, and Federico Fellini to new audiences around the globe. Beyond film, Schlossberg hosted the influential radio and television series *Movie Talk*, where he interviewed major Hollywood figures, including Jack Nicholson and Dustin Hoffman, and he co-founded Gold Castle Records, representing legendary artists like Joan Baez and Judy Collins.

He is a passionate mentor, educator and cultural steward—championing emerging talent and preserving the art of storytelling for future generations. Schlossberg will serve as the Commencement Speaker for the School of Liberal Arts and receive an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts.

School of Nursing
Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez, M.S., M.P.H.

Honorary Doctor of Science

Paloma Izquierdo-Hernandez is a nationally recognized healthcare leader and equity advocate. As CEO of Urban Health Plan, she has transformed a single Bronx clinic into a federally qualified health center network that serves over 89,000 patients annually across New York.

Her holistic approach to health care centers on addressing the social drivers of health—such as housing, food insecurity, and employment. She has launched a range of community-based services and partnerships that promote wellness, educational opportunity, and economic development. In 2010, she helped found the Dr. Richard Izquierdo Health and Science Charter School, dedicated to the legacy of her late father, to build a local pipeline of health professionals, and in 2015, she led the incorporation of The Greater Hunts Point Economic Development Corporation into Urban Health Plan to further support workforce development and sustainability.

A tireless advocate for underserved populations, Izquierdo-Hernandez is a leader on health policy and workforce development. She will speak to graduates of the School of Nursing and receive an Honorary Doctor of Science degree.

School of Social and Behavioral Sciences

DaMia Harris-Madden, M.S. '07, M.B.A. '22, Ed.D.

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters

Dr. DaMia Harris-Madden is a double Mercy alumna and a leading voice in youth and family services. Recently appointed by Governor Kathy Hochul as Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Harris-Madden now leads a multi-billion-dollar agency dedicated to protecting New York's most vulnerable children and families.

She brings more than two decades of experience in child welfare, juvenile justice, and human services to this vital statewide leadership role, most recently serving as executive director of the Westchester County Youth Bureau. There, she pioneered mental health services in after-school programs and developed cross-sector partnerships that expanded youth opportunities in health, tech, and prevention. Earlier in her career, she spent 14 years with the City of Mount Vernon, including as executive director of the Mount Vernon Youth Bureau, where her work significantly expanded services for young people.

Harris-Madden has led transformative programs across New York, helping thousands of children and families access the resources they need to thrive. She will deliver the commencement address to graduates from the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences and receive an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.

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-2025>.

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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. Mercy was founded in 1950 by the Sisters of Mercy whose mission of transformative education remains strong. For more information, visit www.mercy.edu.

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Mercy University

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