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Veteran students recognized at special ceremony

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August 1, 2019 at 11:55am



(https://www.addtoany.com/share#url=https%3A%2F%2Fnews.fiu.edu%2F2019%2F08%2Fveteran-students-receive-well-deserved-recognition-awards&title=Veteran%20students%20recognized%20at%20special%20ceremony%20Florida%20International%20University)

Graduation takes hard work, courage and determination—traits synonymous with approximately 1,800 FIU student veterans.

The [Office of Veteran and Military Affairs](#) recently held its Graduating Veterans Recognition Ceremony to celebrate these outstanding veteran students’ scholarly achievements and their commitment to serve the United States.

“It is especially important to recognize our student veterans because it is important to acknowledge that their path to FIU has come through service to our country – and, as veterans, they bring a level of professionalism, leadership and commitment to excellence that benefits our FIU reputation, which should be commended and celebrated,” said Amanda Niguidula, interim director of Veteran and Military Affairs.

Congratulations to the veteran students who were honored with the following esteemed awards:

Anais Boza received the Don A. Balfour Scholarship.



Within the Division of Academic and Student Affairs, the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs (VMA) is the campus advocate for Veterans, Active Duty, Reservists, eligible dependents and spouses enrolled at FIU.

The department is committed to students’ successful transition from the military environment, to campus life and ultimately to a civilian career. The VMA provides opportunities for peer-to-peer support, mentoring and social networking. For additional information on

resources available to student veterans, and their dependents, visit the **Office of Veteran and Military Affairs**

(<https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/veteran-and-military-affairs/index.php>), or contact (305) 348-2838.



Named after the first recipient of the G.I. Bill and generously sponsored by Global City Development, the \$1,000 scholarship is bestowed on a veteran with a bachelor's degree who has received admission to an FIU graduate school program for the upcoming semester.

Chief Select in the Navy, Boza knows the value of hard work from a young age. Emigrating from Cuba at the age of 14, she quickly immersed herself in her studies while working to help her single mother. Boza enlisted in the Navy Reserves after high school graduation as a Seabee. After completing her associate's degree, she was deployed to Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Boza discovered a passion for helping veterans going through the transition process. She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and was accepted into graduate school for the Master of Science in Counselor Education Rehabilitation Program. After graduation, Boza plans to assume her promotion of Chief Petty Officer, for which she was recently selected. Additionally, she will continue her graduate studies to further assist the veteran population.

Keishla Santiago Ortiz was awarded the Veteran & Military Affairs (VMA) Pinnacle Award.



The VMA Pinnacle Award recognizes an individual who has gone above and beyond to impact student veteran success at FIU. The award celebrates the superlative efforts of student veterans, military-connected students and supporters to collaborate with the Office of Veteran and Military Affairs in order to engage FIU's veteran population.

A Corporal in the Marines, Ortiz is a graduate of FIU with a bachelor's degrees in psychology, interdisciplinary studies and women's and gender studies, as well as a certificate in queer studies. She received the distinguished Ambassador Award in last fall's Veteran Graduation Recognition Ceremony for her dedication to academic success.

She is currently pursuing a master's degree in social work at FIU and is a fellow of Purdue University's 2018 Focus Forward Fellowship Cohort. Most recently, Ortiz has provided leadership and oversaw the Student Veterans of America club. She worked collaboratively with the office of Veteran and Military Affairs to ensure student veteran success and served as the inaugural student speaker at the FIU Veteran Community Breakfast. In addition, Ortiz has worked closely with VMA to create a satisfaction survey targeting FIU student veterans to improve FIU departmental processes and interactions with veterans. During her transition to graduate studies, Ortiz has continually dedicated her time and talents to bettering the student veteran experience at FIU.

Richard Gonzalez, a sergeant in the Army, graduated this semester with a bachelor's degree in communication. Gonzalez received the Ernest McFarland Award, named after an individual who understood the sacrifices of transitioning service members and was a champion of the G.I. Bill. The award is bestowed upon the veteran with the highest cumulative grade point average above a 3.5.

Ralph Villanueva graduated this semester with a master's degree in engineering. Villanueva received the Warren Atherton Award, named after National Commander of the American Legion and designer of the G.I. Bill. The award recognizes the military dependent with the highest cumulative grade point average above a 3.5.

Tanay King, a specialist in the Army, graduated this semester with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. King received of the Edith N. Rogers Award, named after an American social welfare volunteer and politician who became the first woman elected to congress in Massachusetts. The award is bestowed upon a veteran who identifies as a woman and has demonstrated academic excellence and involvement in honor societies, while completing multiple degrees or certificate programs.

Joselindo Ocampo, a staff sergeant in the Air Force, graduated this semester with a bachelor's degree in Health Services Administration. Ocampo received the Harry W. Colmery Award, which commemorates one of the authors of the G.I. Bill, Harry W. Colmery, who was instrumental in the enactment of legislation to provide benefits to veterans returning after their service. The award is bestowed upon a veteran who identifies as a man and has demonstrated academic excellence and involvement in honor societies, while completing multiple degrees or certificate programs.

Jessica Kane, a sergeant in the Army, graduated this semester with a bachelor's degree in Health Services Administration. Kane received the private Cathay Williams Award, which celebrates the first African-American woman to enlist and the only documented woman to serve in the United States Army while disguised as a man. The award is bestowed upon a veteran who identifies as a woman and has demonstrated leadership and support for women's and/or veterans' issues.

Michelle Dingee, a technical sergeant in the Air Force, graduated this semester with a bachelor's degree from the Veteran Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. Dingee was bestowed the Leadership Award given to a veteran who has served in a leadership role in a university club, nonprofit or military organization, or initiated a service project or event.

Miguel Almenara, an airman first class in the Air Force, graduated this semester with a bachelor's in information technology. Almenara received the Ambassador Award given to a veteran who has volunteered or interned with a government agency, international

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