

Humanities Newsletter

May | 2018

In this issue: Distinguished Alumni & Scholars
Luncheon Recap; Humanities Convocation Recap; &
Graduation by the Numbers



Barry Weller, Stuart Culver, Robert T. Nilsen, & Kathleen Nilsen

Distinguished Alumni & Scholars Luncheon Recap

On May 3rd, the College of Humanities hosted our annual Distinguished Alumni & Scholars Luncheon for 150 students, donors, and friends of the College. Held at the Rice-Eccles Stadium Tower, the event featured a keynote address by our Distinguished Alumni, Robert T. Nilsen, as well as speeches from our top student scholars. In addition to these highlights, the Humanities Partnership Board presented Bryce Garner, Assistant Director of International and Area Studies, with their second annual Humanities Partnership Board Staff Excellence Award.

Robert T. Nilsen graduated with a German degree in 1983 and has spent the years since leading major restaurants on an international scale. During his acceptance speech, Nilsen reflected on the ways his humanities education and his German language skills have given him the “language of life” – the language to build bridges where barriers once stood.

After graduating from the U and then earning an MBA at Harvard Business School, Nilsen served in various positions of leadership for major corporations across the world, including PepsiCo Restaurants International and YUM Brands. His roles included Chief Operations Officer of Taco Bell, Managing Director of KFC International in Australia and New Zealand and numerous other leadership positions. He also served as the worldwide President of Burger King. In 2004, Nilsen co-led the purchase of Café Rio, where he served intermittently as Chairman or CEO before completing a sale of the company in 2017.

In his speech, he shared several life experiences that highlighted the “language of life” he learned at the U, which ranged from taking his German language skills to Germany to work for PepsiCo Restaurants International, to being able to speak with South Africans in their native tongue, Afrikaan, because of its close ties to German. Beginning in 2014, he served as a mission president for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Columbus, Ohio, and formed close bonds with the Amish people there because of his language skills. “The Amish’s first language is Pennsylvania Dutch and their second language is *Hochdeutsch*, or ‘high German,’” he explained. “Once again, my knowledge of German brought down barriers, and now those families have become like our own family.”

“Without my humanities classes, I wouldn’t have learned languages that allow me to communicate outside of my native tongue; I wouldn’t have learned critical thinking skills, history, cultural literacy, or writing,” he said. **“Your education in humanities provides you with the language to understand the world and the opportunity to learn and grow from it – it is truly the language of life.”**



Robert T. Nilsen



Claudio Holzner, Brisa Zavala & her parents



Bryce Garner



Nicolas Contreras

Convocation 2018 Recap

On the morning of May 4th at the College of Humanities Convocation, 899 students stepped forward to claim their Humanities degrees at the Jon M. Huntsman Center. With the cheers of proud family and friends ringing out, 788 undergraduate students, 54 master's students and 44 doctoral students claimed their degrees. The diverse and impressive group of graduates ranged in age from 20 to 68, with an average undergraduate GPA of 3.41 and 45 students graduating with Honors.

Co-Interim Dean and English Professor of nearly 40 years, Barry Weller, led the convocation and gave his farewell remarks. In his memorable speech, he said, "When I look at you, finally, I see the future. You will be asked a hundred times today: 'so what now? What are you doing next year?'" Some of you may have jobs already, others not. My advice, for today at least, is not to worry. Degrees that prepare you for just next year won't help when 5-10 years later that job no longer exists. The Humanities are about the long term: your degree represents a deep and profound investment in yourself. You've learned how to think, and rethink, and read, and speak, and write--skills in no danger of becoming obsolete. You've learned how to analyze complex problems, of which there is no shortage. You've learned how to identify patterns, how to make and manipulate meaning. You've been trained for the world we can't see yet, whose jobs don't have names yet, because you will create them."

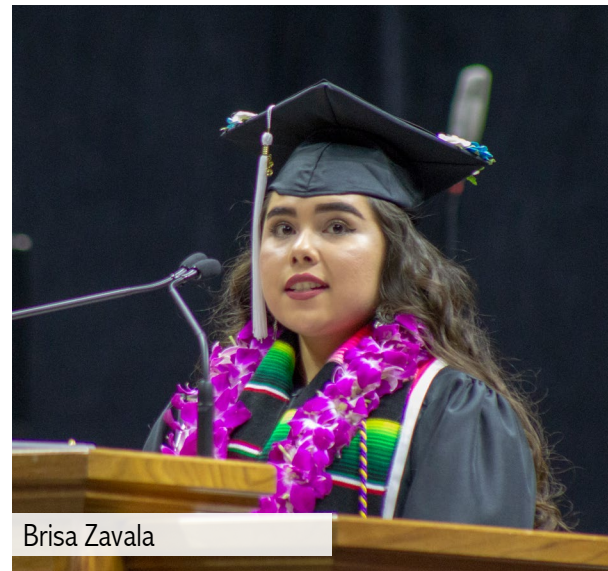
Brisa Zavala, Humanities Student Speaker, also addressed the audience with a moving speech. Brisa is graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in Latin American studies and a bachelor of science degree in chemistry. Having entered the university as a chemical engineering major, her path changed dramatically when she signed up for a first year Nahuatl class—an indigenous language spoken in Mexico.

"Nahuatl opened a window into a different way of seeing the world," Brisa said. "As a Xicana, I was seeking an identity and trying to find how my indigenous roots fit into that identity. I realized that Nahuatl communities are not just a sub-culture of Mexico with residuals of the 'Great Aztec Empire;' they are their own culture that has influenced modern day Mexican culture."

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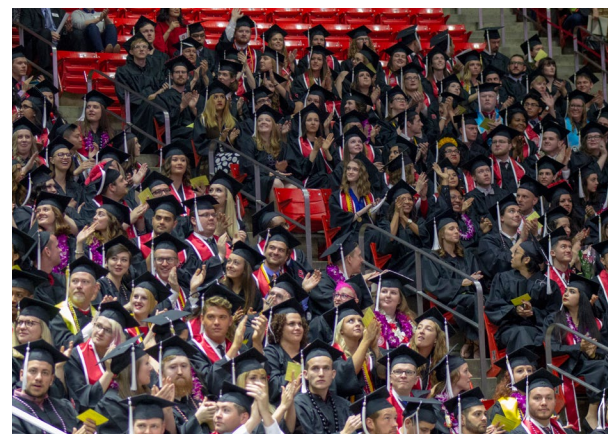
Nicolas Contreras & Professor Christie Toth



Brisa Zavala



Barry Weller





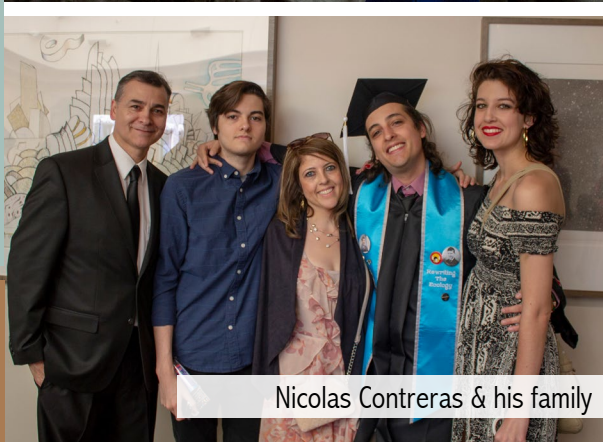
Robert T. Nilsen & Barry Weller



Brisa Zavala & Nicolas Contreras



Barry Weller & Stuart Culver



Nicolas Contreras & his family

Brisa traveled frequently to La Huasteca, Mexico, where she immersed herself in Nahuatl speaking communities. It was through this immersion that she learned people in Nahua communities understand illness and medicine differently. This awareness compelled Brisa to undertake a research project investigating the cultural meaning of *nemauhtilli*—an illness prevalent in Nahua communities. Putting her dual majors in Nahuatl and chemistry to work, Brisa conducted interviews with native Nahuatl speakers in Mexico, identifying similarities between the active compounds in plants used to treat *nemauhtilli* and those found in drugs used to treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

In addition to her research and studies, Brisa founded the U's Nahuatl Club, recruited students into Nahuatl classes, and traveled to conferences representing the Center for Latin American Studies. She has also worked in the classroom with Nahuatl students, volunteered her time in the development of the Summer Intensive Nahuatl program, and organized annual Indigenous Languages events at the university and in the community. Brisa's talents have been recognized with numerous scholarships and awards, including the Foreign Language and Area Studies scholarship, the McNair Scholarship, and a University Research Opportunities Program award.

After graduation, she plans to pursue an advanced degree in cultural anthropology, continuing to work towards preserving knowledge and use of plants to treat illnesses in indigenous communities.

MAY 2018 GRADUATING CLASS

899
GRADUATES

3.41
AVERAGE UNDERGRADUATE GPA

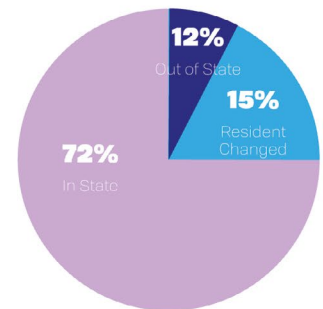
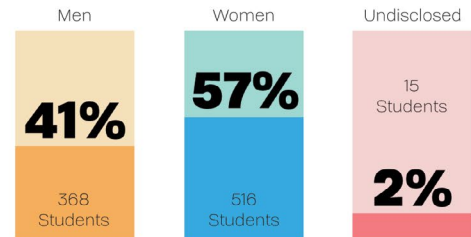
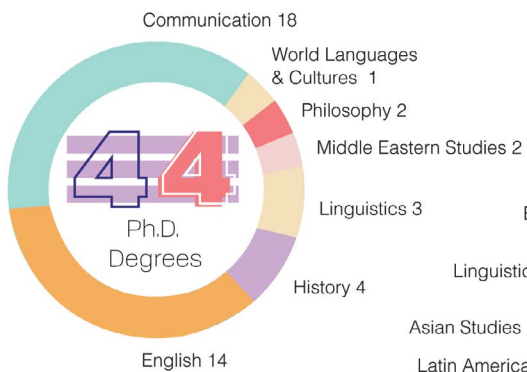
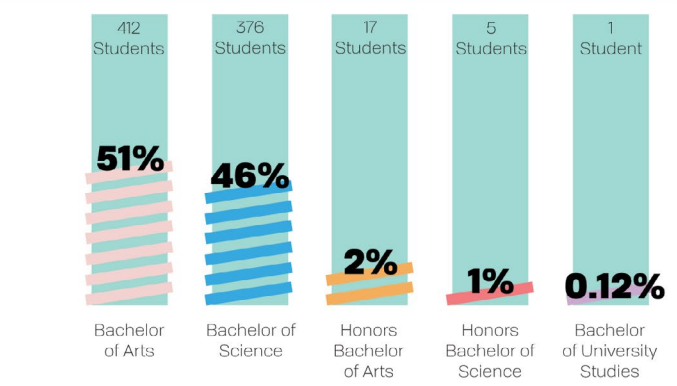
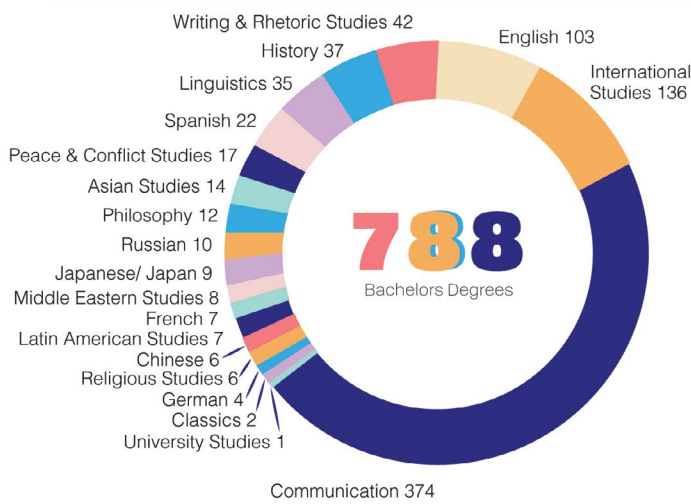
1,000
DEGREES AWARDED

43

GRADUATES ACCEPTED TO GRAD SCHOOL

245
MINORS AWARDED

19 YOUNGEST GRADUATE
70 OLDEST GRADUATE
AGE RANGE



40
International Students

22
Honors Students

45
Students Graduating with Honors

13
Graduates from University Asia Campus

5
Humanities House Graduates

Give to the Humanities

Your contributions provide scholarships for students, help develop new programs, and fund innovative research that keeps this college on the cutting edge.

humanities.utah.edu/giving.php

Our theme for the year reflects a powerful truth: **Humanities Gives You the Edge**. Alumni of Humanities not only lead lives of extraordinary fulfillment, but they also excel at whatever they do. Our thousands of alumni unanimously tell us that **Humanities gave them the edge** that helped them succeed as excellent communicators; multi-lingual and culturally sophisticated global citizens; critical, ethical, and logical thinkers; and outstanding creative partners. And research backs this up! Studies show that Humanities students find careers that provide financial security and job satisfaction that matches those of students in nearly every other major. Employers increasingly seek employees who have strong skills learned in Humanities (writing, problem solving, listening, speaking, critical thinking, etc.). Humanities gives people the edge they need to thrive today. How does Humanities give YOU the edge?

