

Cambridge College Puerto Rico Regional Center Holds First Commencement

On Saturday, June 14th, the Cambridge College Puerto Rico Regional Center held its first Commencement ceremony. Over 100 graduates indulged in the inspirational theme of the afternoon, which focused on the power of education to create a change in Puerto Rico. “It has been said that if we can see at a distance it is because we are on the shoulders of a giant,” said Chancellor Brown, who delivered her welcome remarks in Spanish. ‘You must leave here and not only be a lifelong teacher, but a lifelong learner. You have to be the change you want to see in the world.’”

Maricarmen Andreu congratulated her fellow graduates in her reflection, but also warned them that this was not the end of the road in their learning. “Nothing has been written about cowards,” said Andreu. “That statement is what has given me courage and has motivated me in my life. We all have an inner fear that pushes us to our goals everyday. That is why we are celebrating today.” Andreu said that when she was accepted into the Cambridge College M.Ed. program, it gave her trust and courage in herself. “Cambridge College opened the door to opportunity and helped us achieve our dreams. But we need to see how far we can push ourselves. Don’t stop working. Nothing has been written about cowards,” she added.

Keynote speaker Dr. Jose Vargas Vidot, a medical doctor who traded in the white coat to work on the street, has spent the last 15 years working trying to improve the lives of others. He began his work trying to help those infected with HIV and is now the Executive Director of Iniciativa Comunitaria, an organization dedicated to similar work. “Social change will never come from those who promise it,” said Vargas Vidot. “You can come to Cambridge College and turn strategic desire into proactive behavior. I look out at you graduates and see those of you who have not lost the capability to dream,” he added.

Vargas Vidot explained that in the last year, the Puerto Rican economy has lost 50,000 jobs, has broken the suicide record twice over, and has lost many individuals to street violence. He shared that hundreds of violent incidents occur in schools and over half of the high school population will not graduate. “Graduation is a link to change, an invitation to a different stage in life. It is more than a photograph and much more than a diploma. It is an end point that takes you to a new beginning. This diploma gives you the challenge that there needs to be change,” added Vargas Vidot.

“Change will come from those who believe in their dreams, the people who come out of here,” Vargas Vidot said. “When you have achieved what you have today, there will be others asking you to take them with you, to lift them on your shoulders. Make sure that this degree gives you the strength to lift someone onto your shoulders so that they can touch the sky.”

Dr. Juanita Benjamin, a professor and seminar leader at the Puerto Rico Regional Center, also charged the graduates with the task of creating change. “Nothing that is worthwhile

is easy,” she said in her address to the graduates. “I challenge you to walk out of here as leaders with a mission in hand—to transform the education system, to improve the overall quality and create higher standards. You have to go above and beyond and teach others the same,” she added.

The emotionally charged ceremony was augmented by two musical selections performed by graduating students. Daniel Lloret (M.Ed. in Music Education) sang his version of “What a Wonderful World,” while Nelson Garcia (M.Ed. in Music Education) accompanied Music Education Professor and pianist Juan Vega on the trumpet after the graduates received their diplomas.

The ceremony was capped with the presentation of the Mission Accomplished Award, presented to Professor Rosalina Burgos. The award recognizes an alumnus or alumna who adds to his or her community and has followed the Cambridge College mission and has had a positive impact in the lives of others.