The University marked a historic Commencement weekend, with more than 2,000 degrees and certificates—a record for the 137-year-old institution—awarded on May 13-14.

University President Marc Johnson, in his Commencement address welcoming graduates, noted that the record graduation of 2,012 was just the tip of what had been a year of historic achievement for the University.

Johnson said that in addition to record graduation, the university had reached milestones in most students enrolled at 17,679, highest freshman retention rate (80 percent) and most National Merit Scholars enrolled (38).

“These are milestones that have been reached while our campus has absorbed record budget reductions,” Johnson said. “It is truly an amazing story, and illustrates so well the resilience and spirit of our faculty, staff and students … we are a university for all Nevada.”

Johnson encouraged the weekend’s graduates to follow their passion, quoting Thoreau that it is best to, “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.”

The graduates who attended the ceremony seemed jubilant to have “the last line written” for their college careers—though they were also expectant and excited for the future.

“It took a long time, and I’m pretty glad to be here right now,” Paul Kanow, a biology graduate, told the Reno Gazette-Journal. “It definitely was pretty difficult at some times, but it was well worth it now.”

Glick, and Federal Judge Edward Reed Jr. ‘49 (arts and science) were honored with Distinguished Nevadan awards. Former Regent Dorothy Gallagher ’48 (political science) and Nevada State Sen. William Raggio ’47 (premedical) were presented with honorary degrees.

—John Trent ’85/’87, ’00M.A.
Johnson named University interim president

The Nevada Board of Regents unanimously approved on May 6 Chancellor Dan Klaich’s recommendation of Marc Johnson to serve as interim president of the University of Nevada, Reno. Johnson has served as executive vice president and provost since 2008.

“It is a high honor to have been asked to serve in this capacity,” Johnson said. “This is a quality institution with a strong reputation for continuing in the great tradition of public, land-grant universities. In my three years with the University, I have been impressed by the extent to which faculty and staff embrace our teaching and research missions and by their strongly held commitment to statewide service and to Nevada’s future economic development and well-being.”

Board of Regents outgoing chair James Dean Leavitt said: “During our visits with the various campus constituents, it became clear to me, incoming chair Jason Geddes and Chancellor Dan Klaich, that Dr. Johnson was the best choice to assume the University of Nevada, Reno presidency. He has the experience, the knowledge and the vision to lead this University. He is the right person at the right time to continue to move the University forward.”

The appointment of interim president follows the sudden death of University President Milt Glick April 16. In a message to University faculty and staff, Johnson acknowledged the loss, as well as current budgetary challenges:

“Despite the budgetary challenges we face, our campus has shown a remarkable capacity of spirit. Going forward our University will continue President Glick’s legacy of student success, quality undergraduate and graduate academic and research offerings, and community engagement through outreach. We have a talented and cohesive team that will ensure that our roots for continuity and collaboration will remain strong.”

As provost, often described as a university's chief academic officer, the University’s academic units, including the colleges, schools and extended studies, reported to Johnson. He also led the development of the University’s Strategic Plan, which provides an operational blueprint through 2015 and incorporates input from individuals and divisions from across the University.

Johnson was raised and employed on his family’s fruit farm near Wichita, Kan., and began his career as a laboratory and instructional assistant at the Kansas State Teachers College.

Prior to coming to Nevada, Johnson was dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at Colorado State University. He also served as interim director of Colorado Cooperative Extension and interim state forester of Colorado State Forest Service, both hosted through CSU. From 1992 to 2003, Johnson was dean of the Kansas State University College of Agriculture and director of the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service. Prior to that he was a member of the faculty at Oklahoma State University and served in faculty and administrative roles at North Carolina State University.

Johnson received his bachelor’s in biology from Emporia State University in Kansas, which named him a Distinguished Alumnus in 1994. His advanced degrees include a master of technology in international development from North Carolina State University, a master of economics from Michigan State University and a doctorate of agriculture economics from Michigan State University. Johnson's research and teaching have been based in economics, with an emphasis on national and international food distribution systems.

The appointment of Johnson as interim president follows a series of campus meetings conducted by Klaich, Leavitt and Geddes to hear input from faculty, staff and students. Leavitt announced at the May 6 regents’ meeting that the board will initiate a national search next fall for the University president position.

—Jane Tors ’82

Liberal Arts dean, Heather Hardy, named provost

Heather Hardy has been named provost of the University.

Hardy has served as dean of the College of Liberal Arts since joining the University in 2005. Previously, she served as dean of liberal arts at Colorado State University.

“Dr. Hardy has eight years of experience as dean of a large liberal arts college at two institutions,” said Marc Johnson, University president. “She has the experience and strong academic values which will encourage continued forward movement at the University along the path of the mission, vision and strategic plan adopted by the Nevada Board of Regents in December 2009.”

“I am grateful for the opportunity to work with President Johnson to advance the mission of this excellent university,” Hardy said. “It is an honor to be part of the strong leadership team that he and the late President Milt Glick assembled. My experience as dean of the College of Liberal Arts and collaboration with the other deans has been very rewarding, and I look forward to working with faculty, staff and students across the campus in this new role.”

A professor of English and noted linguist, Hardy’s research has focused on American Indian languages. Hardy holds a bachelor’s in linguistics and English from Rice University and a doctorate in linguistics from UCLA.

Prior to joining Colorado State, she served as chair of the department of English at Northern Illinois University from 1998-2003, where she had taught since 1993. She was promoted to professor in 1995.

As provost, Hardy will be responsible for academic and outreach programs and related support services such as faculty development and tenure, academic budgeting and curricular planning. The University’s academic units, including the colleges, schools and extended studies, will report to Hardy. Her appointment as provost is effective June 1.

The role of provost was previously held by Johnson, who was named University president on May 6 and assigned full responsibility for the University’s operations until a permanent president is identified.

—Jane Tors ’82
SADEEA QURESHI ABBASI, from Reno, earned her bachelor’s degree in professional chemistry from Nevada in 2004. In May 2011, she earned both her M.D. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Nevada School of Medicine. Abbasi has been involved in the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, the Food Bank of Northern Nevada, Student Outreach Clinics, and she founded the outreach branch of the American Geriatric Society for Students and the Medical Research Student Interest Group.

CHRIS BARRY, from Tacoma, Wash., enjoys his graduate coursework in athletic administration and student success. The campus director of 925 Athletic Ministries played football at the University and earned a bachelor’s degree in secondary education in 2004. The father of two is pursuing a master’s in higher education administration. As a graduate assistant at the University’s Center for Student Cultural Diversity, Barry produced a documentary, “Nevada’s First-Generation,” highlighting the experiences of University students who will be the first in their families to earn a college degree. Barry plans to earn a doctorate in educational leadership.

University’s mini-robot vehicle wins MicroMouse event

The University’s mini-robot vehicle scooted its way around a maze to beat out 10 other teams from around the west during an April 23 event on the Nevada campus. The MicroMouse competition featured small robotic vehicles designed, built and programmed by undergraduate electrical engineering students.

The University’s team of Alexander Bajenov and Eric Chalko spent months designing and building their palm-sized mouse, “Nevada Blue.” Their hard work paid off by completing the fastest run of the day—22 seconds—just two seconds ahead of second-place winner, University of Hawaii, Manoa. California State University, Chico was third with a time of 49 seconds.

The vehicles are built with sensors, tiny motors for a drive system and a programmable computer chip for decision making to guide it as it moves through the twists and turns of the maze. The goal is to get the mouse from one corner of the maze to the center square in the fastest possible time.

“The final path was very short,” said Mehdi Etezadi, chair of the electrical and biomedical engineering department. “It was a lot of complex twist and turns, which Nevada Blue handled well, but it wasn’t able to use its high speed to really gain a good time gap. The students have done a fantastic job in winning the first place award for all categories of the competition.”

Contestants are not permitted to know the layout of the maze prior to the beginning of the competition. The vehicle uses its multiple sensors and controllers, and the computer chip, to find and remember its way to the center of the 12-foot-by-12-foot system of walls and gaps. The mouse may go through the maze multiple times within its allotted 10 minutes and the mouse’s fastest time from start to finish counts.

“It’s a highly complex, autonomous robot,” Etezadi said. “There is no remote control. Besides the sophisticated construction, it takes creative programming and control system skill so it can learn as it goes to find its way to the center of the maze. Our student team has developed a super-smart mouse.”

In addition to aiming for the fastest time through the maze, contestants were judged in a separate MicroMouse packaging competition. They were judged on audible noise, size and weight (smaller was better), thermal dissipation, power consumption, electromagnetic compatibility, reliability and product appearance and design. The University’s team took first in this contest too.

The technologically advanced MicroMouse race was hosted by the University’s electrical and biomedical engineering department as part of the spring conference for Region 6, Central Area of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

“We’re very excited to have hosted this event,” Etezadi said. “It was a great and fun opportunity for the community to see how students can put their skills into practice.”

—Mike Wolterbeek ’02
Qizhen Li receives prestigious National Science Foundation CAREER award

Qizhen Li, an assistant professor of chemical and materials engineering, has been awarded a highly competitive National Science Foundation five-year CAREER Award.

The $569,120 award will allow her to develop, study and experiment with magnesium-based nanoporous materials. Nanoporous materials are a subset of nanomaterials, which are used in the burgeoning field of nanotechnology—the building of small and large structures beginning at the molecular or atomic level.

“The success of this research will allow full advantage to be taken of nanoporous magnesium for a variety of potential applications, such as in energy storage, biomedical joint replacements, and structural parts such as auto body parts.” Li said.

Nanoporous materials, as the term suggests, are highly porous, which provides channels for other substances to flow through.

The prestigious NSF Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Program Award is given to faculty members at the beginning of their academic careers and is one of NSF’s most competitive awards, placing focus on high-quality research and education activities.

As part of the project, Li will bring graduate and undergraduate students into the project to train them for the workforce. She will also conduct outreach to the community to stimulate the interest and participation of high school students and underrepresented student groups in science and engineering.

“With this, we can give young students access to work in a research lab, to expose them to this environment with hands-on experience and attract them to the field of materials engineering,” she said.

Said Manos Maragakis, dean of the College of Engineering: “This nationally recognized standard of excellence is a major accomplishment for Qizhen. We all congratulate her for this significant step.

“An award like this speaks well for the excellence of the faculty and the research programs in our college,” he added. “The college and the University are committed to providing our young faculty the best support possible for them to succeed, and accomplishments like Qizhen’s make all of us particularly proud.”

—Mike Wolterbeek ’02

Qizhen Li

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University students and professors bring poetry to local family shelter

University honor students partnered with the English department and Volunteers of America Reno Family Shelter on Record Street to organize and implement an eight-week project, “Expressions of Homelessness: Representations through the Arts.”

On Thursdays in February and March, English professors volunteered to teach poetry workshops at the shelter, teaching groups of five to 10 shelter residents a new style of poetry each week. All participants received a free journal, which they used to write their own poems.

Alex Ellison, an AmeriCorps VISTA member placed by Nevada Volunteers in the University’s Honors Program, said, “We have two goals. The first is to raise awareness of the growing issue of homelessness in our area—to reveal the person behind the stereotype. The second is to empower the residents of the shelter.”

Ellison and faculty members selected poetry written by the residents to show in an exhibit in the DeLaMare Library on campus in April. Ellison hopes to display the exhibit in other locations in the community, as well as publish a book with portraits of the poets and copies of their poems.

“We’re building a bridge between the campus and the community,” Ellison said. “It started as an idea to just teach poetry classes, but it’s become a really dynamic project and just keeps growing and growing. The professors enjoyed getting out and volunteering at the shelter. The residents were reluctant to share their work for the exhibit at first, but then they became more confident and empowered, realizing they were good writers.”

The workshops ran for about an hour each week, and included time to discuss a model poem and to write poems based upon the style of the model. The professors taught styles of poets such as Woody Guthrie, Kenneth Koch, Dr. Seuss and Richard Hugo.

Susan Palwick, associate professor of English, centered her workshop on Christopher Smart’s “For I Will Consider My Cat Jeoffry,” an excerpt from a longer poem, “Jubilate Agno.”

“Writing poetry reminds both teachers and students—and, I hope, the wider community—what we have in common,” Palwick said. “We all hunger, thirst, fear, love and hope. We all need shelter. We all yearn for safety. Those experiences are universal; the ways in which we express them are unique.”

Other departments of the University also became involved in the project. The Black Rock Press helped format and design the pieces for display. University senior Arielle Murphy and sophomore Jennice Rodriguez worked with Peter Goin, foundation professor of art in photography and videography, to take photos for the project.

“Our job is to document the workshops,” said Rodriguez. “We’ve been taking photos of the homeless, the teachers and the volunteers, adding a visual and artistic element to the project.”

—Natalie Savidge ‘04

School of Medicine ranked second in U.S. News & World Report’s ‘most popular medical schools’ list

The national news magazine U.S. News & World Report recently named the University of Nevada School of Medicine the second most popular medical school in the United States, based on percentage of admitted students who decide to enroll.

“The School of Medicine’s high retention rate of admitted applicants reflects the medical school’s energetic and collegial learning environment,” said Peggy Dupey, associate dean of admissions and student affairs. “The staff of the Office of Admissions and Student Affairs is proud to contribute to the positive perceptions of our applicants.”

For the 2010 admissions cycle (Class of 2014 entering in the fall of 2010), the School of Medicine received 1,348 applications from prospective students and interviewed 225 for admission. The School of Medicine had 62 students, or 46.6 percent of the 76 accepted, enrolled for the 2010-2011 academic year, according to the magazine.

The School of Medicine admits 62 students each year for a total current enrollment of 248 medical students.

Looking beyond enrollment figures, it is commonly held that many new physicians remain and practice medicine in the community in which they complete their residency. This certainly has been the case in Nevada. At 58.5 percent, Nevada has the nation’s fifth highest percentage of physicians who chose to remain and practice in the state after completing their residency program. At 81 percent, Nevada has the nation’s second highest percentage of physicians who chose to remain and practice in the state after completing both medical school and a residency program in Nevada.

—Anne McMillin, APR
Nevada student awarded prestigious Truman scholarship

During Judie Henderson’s honor’s thesis class in April, a big surprise came in the form of a white cake and late University President Milt Glick delivering the thrilling message. “We are excited to tell you that you have been selected a Truman Scholar,” Glick said.

The anthropology major, originally from Burnet, Texas, silently stood in shock as she was notified of the $30,000 Harry S. Truman Scholarship, the first awarded to a University of Nevada student since 1985.

The Truman Scholarship is a highly competitive federal scholarship granted to U.S. college juniors for demonstrated leadership potential and a commitment to public service. Among 602 candidates nominated this year, 60 scholars were selected from 54 colleges and universities nationwide. The scholarships are directed toward graduate education. Henderson plans to pursue a master’s degree in public policy specializing in health care policy, and then a doctorate in public policy.

Tamara Valentine, director of the University’s Honors Program and Henderson’s Truman faculty representative, said Henderson performed well at every stage of the process.

“Judie is truly committed to community service,” Valentine said. “Her history of volunteerism and civic engagement has led her to advocating on issues related to disabilities and to acting as a voice for persons with disabilities.”

Henderson, mother of a 21-year-old son and 11-year-old daughter, said her life’s mission is to give a voice to those afraid to speak out against oppression.

“My life could have turned out differently based on my upbringing,” Henderson said. “Instead, I have chosen to break the cycle of abuse and addiction in my family and have now surrounded myself with amazing people.”

Henderson is the chairperson for the City of Sparks Advisory Committee for the Disabled, a committee appointed by the mayor and city council. She is also a member of the National Association of Social Workers, the Undergraduate Student Social Work Association and Phi Alpha National Honor Society- Lambda Beta Chapter at Nevada. After her graduation next May, Henderson plans to attend the Summer Institute in Washington, D.C. provided by the Truman Foundation and hopes to intern at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

—Natalie Savidge ’04

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Food will be available for purchase. For more information visit www.summersession.unr.edu.

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Concerts are presented by Summer Session in partnership with the College of Business Alumni Association, Honors Program Alumni Chapter, Native American Alumni Chapter and the Young Alumni Chapter.

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Engineering students defend concrete canoe title at national competition

The University’s concrete canoe team placed fifth in the American Society of Civil Engineers 2011 National Concrete Canoe Competition in Evansville, Ind., in June. The Nevada team placed first in the technical design paper category and in the top 10 of all other categories and paddling competitions. The team earned a spot in the national competition after defending their regional champion title and winning the Mid-Pacific regional competition in April.

Team members began designing and building this year’s canoe, “Black Diamond,” in September. It is 20 feet long, half an inch thick and 31.25 inches at its widest part.

The national competition involved 23 teams from 18 regions, and it challenged the students’ knowledge, creativity and stamina, while showcasing the versatility and durability of concrete as a building material.

This year marked the team’s sixth consecutive appearance in the national competition, including its national title win in 2008.

“The sustained success of our program in this competition speaks highly for the excellence of our students and brings national recognition to the University and the College of Engineering,” said Manos Maragakis, dean of the College of Engineering.

The University was recently selected to host the concrete canoe competition, June 14-16, 2012.

—Staff reports

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New degrees reflect regional workforce needs

To meet the diverse demands of the marketplace, the University is offering two new degree programs this fall: Computer Science and Engineering, and an Executive Online MBA Program.

By integrating the disciplines of computer science and computer engineering, this major attracts students interested in learning about computer software and hardware, in addition to learning how to solve problems with computer technology. Already a popular choice, 78 graduates and 273 undergraduates have enrolled.

“This will make our students more marketable, more well-rounded and more likely to quickly become productive in their new work environments,” said Yaakov Varol, chair of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

Across the country, other colleges and universities have taken a similar approach. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California, Davis and University of California, Berkeley are just a few of the schools that have integrated computer engineering and computer science in recent years.

Varol said companies including General Electric in Minden, Bally’s in Reno and Sierra Nevada Corporation in Sparks, interested in hiring University graduates, had asked for more “well-rounded” students who would be comfortable with both disciplines. In making the decision, University officials consulted students, alumni and the Computer Science and Engineering Industry Advisory Board, receiving strong support for the new programs.

The Executive Online MBA Program, beginning this fall, is designed to accommodate working professionals who want to excel in their profession. The online program builds on the strength of the part-time MBA program in the College of Business, which is ranked 21st in the nation by Bloomberg Businessweek. The online program allows mid-career executives to earn an MBA without leaving the workforce or relocating.

The 36-credit program will be taught by the same faculty who teach the University’s part-time MBA program. The program will be self-supporting, with a fee of $2,000 per course, or $24,000 for the program.

Greg Mosier, dean of the College of Business, said that although the primary purpose of the program is to serve Nevada executives, he expects executives from other states will enroll. Interested applicants will be required to have a bachelor’s degree and significant professional work experience.

“We expect this program to be in high demand because of the quality of our faculty and reputation of our established MBA program,” Mosier said. “It is priced very competitively, and since it is an online program, it will serve the needs of mid-career executives and experienced professionals throughout the state, not just those in northern Nevada.”

To learn more about the Executive Online MBA Program, contact Kambiz Raffiee, associate dean of the College of Business, (775) 682-9142 or raffiee@unr.edu. To learn more about computer science and engineering degrees, contact Yaakov Varol, chair of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering, (775) 784-6974 or varol@cse.unr.edu.

—Mike Wolterbeek ’02 and Claudene Wharton ’86, ’99MA.

Special Collections exhibit celebrates 1950s bohemian artists

The Special Collections department is presenting the Post-war Bohemians of Northern Nevada art exhibit through Sept. 30. The exhibit showcases unique abstract art, while shedding light on a fascinating and influential arts community in northern Nevada during the 1950s.

Following World War II, a group of local artists gathered in Virginia City and experimented with art styles and lifestyles that were out of country’s mainstream. During an era of conformity, these bohemians proudly lived out their often controversial values, while producing surprising abstract art. Included in the exhibit are well-known local artists such as Craig Sheppard, Robert Caples and Robert Hartman, along with stunning works of the forgotten artists Adine Stix, Zoray Kraemer and others.

Photographs by Gus Bundy, along with papers and memorabilia from the artists, will also be on display in the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center Special Collections exhibit area (third floor). Admission is free. For more information, call (775) 682-5665, email specoll@unr.edu, or visit http://knowledgecenter.unr.edu/materials/specoll/.

—Angela Bakker

Reno’s Valerie Gallery November 1952
Ray named interim dean of University Libraries

Kathlin (Kathy) Ray was appointed interim dean of University Libraries and Teaching and Learning Technologies April 1, following the Nevada Board of Regents’ appointment of Steven Zink, former vice president of information technology and dean of libraries, as vice chancellor of information technology for the Nevada System of Higher Education.

Ray joined the University in August 2010 as senior director of libraries. She now oversees operations for the Mathewson-IGT Knowledge Center, DeLaMare, Basque and Savitt Medical libraries.

Before coming to Reno, Ray spent four years as university librarian for the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Ray also served as the associate dean of libraries at the University of the Pacific where she managed an extensive library renovation project including the building of a Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology, New Media lab and an Information Commons. As the chair of Pacific’s General Education Committee, Ray worked closely with faculty to integrate information literacy into the curriculum and taught in Pacific’s signature Mentor Seminar program.

She has been engaged in building academic libraries in the Middle East and recently completed an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation-funded grant to study student information-seeking behaviors at four American universities in the Middle East and Europe. Ray is a graduate of Brigham Young University, receiving a master of library and information science and a bachelor of science. Her research interests include student information-seeking behaviors, the role of technology in deepening student learning and creating organizational efficiencies.

—Angela Bakker

Former Seattle Times editor joins Reynolds School as visiting chair

Veteran news executive Michael Fancher will join the Donald W. Reynolds School of Journalism this fall as the Reynolds Visiting Chair in the Ethics of Entrepreneurial and Innovative Journalism.

Fancher, executive editor of The Seattle Times for 20 years, has deep experience in the development of new media and the study of ethics. He directed The Times’ new-media division for more than a decade and was heavily involved with the company’s content and business strategies. He is an investor in and informal adviser to Intersect, a Seattle-based social-media startup.

After retiring in 2008, following 30 years at The Times, Fancher served as a 2008-2009 fellow at the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri School of Journalism. Fancher served as chairman of the ethics committee of the American Society of News Editors in 2009-10. He was a writing consultant to the Knight Foundation Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy and the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society from 2009 to this year. He wrote the paper, “Local News: Re-imagining Journalism for a Networked World,” published by the Aspen Institute in June.

Fancher, who will serve for the 2011-12 school year, joins another longtime news executive in teaching ethics at Nevada. Caesar Andrews will return for the fall semester as the Paul A. Leonard Distinguished Visiting Chair in Ethics and Writing. Andrews has served as a top editor in newsrooms in Florida, Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Washington, D.C., and Michigan. He has also held visiting professorships at Grambling State University and Washington and Lee University.

—Staff reports
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