In-person commencement a time to celebrate for print journalist

Peggy Reisser enjoyed a successful journalism career that included many years covering the news for the Nashville Banner and then the Memphis Commercial Appeal. The Ole Miss graduate added another credential to her impressive resume when she received her Master of Arts in Strategic Communication on Nov. 21 from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Reisser joined 326 spring, summer and fall 2020 participants who celebrated commencement at the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center. The in-person commencement exercises were held at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. to allow for social distancing. Students choosing not to participate in person could watch via Facebook and YouTube.

UT Martin held an all-virtual spring commencement in May because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fall ceremony was timed in advance of online final exams, which begin Dec. 1. Students will not return to campus following the Thanksgiving holiday.

Reisser, born and raised in Memphis, began her journalism career fresh out of college at the now-closed Nashville Banner afternoon newspaper where she covered the legislature and state government. She returned to Memphis after five years in the state capital and worked at the Commercial Appeal until 2012 when layoffs claimed her management position. Following a year as a freelance writer, Reisser joined the UT Health Science Center Office of Communications and Marketing as a communications specialist and now communications manager.

“I have loved my career in journalism,” Reisser said. “I was made for that, but I have loved working for UTHSC because it combines the best of my skills, challenged my skills and given me an opportunity to grow my skills while I can promote all the wonderful things the university is doing.”

Thanks to the university’s support for employees to improve their skills, she began to consider graduate-school options. “I have spent a life as a storyteller, but in terms of business knowledge and organizational knowledge, all I had was what I had learned on the job in decades in newspapers,” she said. “That is a very different kind of operation, and so I wanted to learn those skills and started looking around and heard about this program. ...

“It wasn’t a journalism program, which some other places had. I felt like I could teach the journalism program, but it (UT Martin’s program) taught skills like leadership, and organizational communication, and theory and all the things that make me a better communicator.”

As a non-traditional student, Reisser appreciated her faculty members’ responsiveness within the structure of an online program that required her to visit campus only once. “I have never felt isolated or not a part of the university,” she said. “I have learned so much.”

That being said, returning to college wasn’t always easy. From Zoom classes to statistics, she had to adjust to new learning methods and challenging course material. “But the program is built so that you have a decent amount of time to get things in as long as you stay organized and don’t save everything until the last minute.”

Reisser participated in the 2 p.m. ceremony, which included those scheduled to receive master’s degrees when the semester ends. Like other graduating students, she was concerned that an in-person commencement might not happen because of the pandemic.

Read the full story at utm.edu/news.
Dr. Stuart Currie, associate professor of pedagogy, partnered with Discovery Park of America to create free virtual lessons for students grades six through nine. In his lesson, Currie discussed the difference in physical education and physical activity and the importance of exercising safely during the pandemic. Click Currie’s headshot to watch his lesson.

**In Memory**

Anthony Stewart, head men’s basketball coach, died Sunday, Nov. 15, at the age of 50. Stewart had served as the head men’s basketball coach since 2014 and was about to begin his fifth season with the Skyhawks. A private memorial service was held for Stewart’s family Sunday, Nov. 22, and was livestreamed on the UT Martin Athletics Facebook account for public viewing.

Will Dickerson, longtime director of the Physical Plant, died Wednesday, Nov. 11, at the age of 93. Dickerson served as the director of the Physical Plant for 28 years before retiring in 1989. Dickerson attended the UT Martin Branch and earned a degree in mechanical engineering from UT Knoxville.

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING, SKYHAWKS!**

TOWN HALL - UT President Randy Boyd joined the weekly faculty and staff town hall Nov. 18, and discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across the UT System, including the wellness of the UT community and funding. Boyd also addressed the performance funding UT Martin received from THEC, as well as the funding proposal for the Innovation and Product Realization Facility.
Courtney Price, of Memphis, and Jonathan Kirkland, of Martin, were recognized as the recipients of the Paul and Martha Meek Leadership Award during the UT Martin fall 2020 commencement Saturday, Nov. 21. The Paul and Martha Meek Leadership Award is presented to two graduating students who demonstrate outstanding campus and community service during their time at UT Martin.

Price, a health and human performance graduate, was an integral member of many organizations on campus dedicated to improving the minority experience at UT Martin. She has served as an executive committee member and president of the Black Student Association; a student member of the Civil Rights Conference planning committee; a member of the inaugural Multicultural Activities Council; a member of the Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration and Breakfast committee; as well as serving as a student employee in the Office of Student Life and Multicultural Affairs. Price was also an active participant in “Service Saturdays” and “Captain’s Courageous Conversations.”

“Courtney is one of those students who leaves a mark on those she encounters,” Anthony Prewitt, assistant director for multicultural affairs, said in Price’s nomination letter. “She has cemented her legacy as a student advocate, leader and worker.”

Kirkland, a communications graduate, has served in a wide variety of leadership roles in his time at UT Martin, including as a Summer Orientation and Registration (SOAR) leader; a student member of the UT Martin Five-Year Strategic Plan Student Experience and Success Implementation team; a Governor’s School for the Humanities counselor; a student member of the UT Martin Athletics Advisory Board; as well as a student assistant for the Division of Student Affairs. Kirkland also hosted the on-air program “UTM in Concert” for WUTM-FM 90.3 “The Hawk.”

“Jonathan Kirkland exemplifies an excellent UT Martin student,” said Debi Adcock, administrative assistant for the Division of Student Affairs. “He is a critical thinker, has the highest of integrity and is a staunch supporter of the university.”

Dr. Paul Meek served the UT Martin campus as executive officer, dean, UT vice president or chancellor from 1934 to 1967. This award was originally established and funded by the three Meek children to honor their parents. The Paul and Martha Meek Leadership Award is the only award given during commencement each semester.

For more information, contact the Office of University Relations at 731-881-7615.

COVID-19 TESTING - UT Martin will offer voluntary faculty and staff COVID-19 testing Dec. 8 at the Dunagan Alumni Center. This event is being co-sponsored by the offices of human resources and environment health and safety. All participants must register at least 24 hours in advance to receive a self-administered COVID-19 test. The tests were supplied by Tennessee Emergency Management Agency and the Tennessee Department of Health. For more information, contact human resources at 881-7845.
Congratulations, Skyhawks!

Fall 2020 Commencement

FALL COMMENCEMENT - UT Martin hosted fall commencement Saturday, Nov. 21, in the Kathleen and Tom Elam Center to recognize the accomplishments of the class of 2020. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the university hosted three ceremonies to safely honor graduates and their families. Spring, summer and fall 2020 graduates were invited to participate in the commencement ceremonies. Graduates not in attendance were also recognized after all in-person graduates were announced. Each ceremony was livestreamed via UT Martin’s Facebook and YouTube accounts. Additional photos from graduation, as well as other campus events, are available at utm.edu/photos.
**You Tell Me**

**Question** – What cleaning procedures will happen during winter break?

**Answer** – We will continue our cleaning routine as usual except for classrooms. We plan to deep clean/disinfect and then lock classrooms/labs during the winter break. Any additional cleaning of the classrooms/labs during this time will be at the request of the user. Before the beginning of spring semester, we will thoroughly deep clean and disinfect classrooms and labs, the same as for the beginning of fall semester.

Submit your questions anonymously to the Suggestion Box link at www.utm.edu/suggestionbox.

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**UT Board of Trustees approves Title IX changes**

The UT Board of Trustees met Friday morning to approve permanent rules revising the student codes of conduct for each campus in order to comply with federal Title IX regulations and to adopt a permanent student immunization rule.

Emergency rules on both topics were adopted by the board in August.

The most significant change in the student codes is the creation of a Title IX grievance procedure for resolving Title IX allegations involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating, and domestic violence and stalking against students. The new Title IX regulations require that universities hold hearings to determine whether an accused party is responsible for an allegation.