



125th
Commencement

APRIL 24, 2026

MERCY COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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Our **MISSION**

Mercy College of Health Sciences prepares graduates for service and leadership in the healthcare community by integrating its Core Values with a professional and liberal arts and sciences education.

Our **VISION**

Mercy College of Health Sciences will be a locally and regionally recognized leader, transforming students into healthcare professionals who live out and extend our ministry of healing.

Our **VALUES**

Mercy College of Health Sciences is a Catholic institution of higher education, rooted in the heritage of the Sisters of Mercy, and guided by our Core Values of knowledge, reverence, integrity, compassion, and excellence.

Our **HISTORY**

In 1899, Mercy College of Health Sciences was founded as a Catholic institution of higher education by the Sisters of Mercy. Established initially to educate nurses, Mercy College has evolved into a robust campus community with 16 unique certificate, associate, bachelor's, and master's degree pathways. Guided by a continued call to serve others, Mercy College remains dedicated to empowering students through compassionate teaching. As a leader in health sciences education, Mercy College actively works to meet the growing demands of healthcare professionals. Mercy College continues to uphold the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, developing servant leaders rooted in the Core Values of knowledge, reverence, integrity, compassion, and excellence.



DR. ADREAIN M. HENRY, OD, EdD, MBA, MA

President, Mercy College of Health Sciences



Dear Graduates of the Class of 2026,

On behalf of the Board of Directors, faculty, and staff, congratulations on completing your studies at Mercy College of Health Sciences.

Today, we gather with pride and gratitude to celebrate this meaningful milestone as you step into your calling as healthcare professionals. Your late nights of study, rigorous exams, and unwavering commitment have led you to this well-earned achievement.

During your time at Mercy College, you have been formed by our Catholic heritage and the enduring legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, who founded our College in 1899. These values have prepared you to enter the healthcare workforce with both skill and compassion. As lifelong Guardians, you are called to care for and protect the dignity of every patient you serve, a responsibility needed now more than ever.

As Mercy College looks toward a bold future grounded in our mission and responsive to the evolving needs of the healthcare workforce, you remain an essential part of our community. While your time as a student comes to a close, you will always be a Mercy College Guardian. I encourage you to stay connected as an alum and return to campus as we continue to grow and serve.

We are proud of you and confident in the difference you will make as servant-leaders in our community.

Go Guardians!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Henry'.

Adreain M. Henry, OD, EdD, MBA, MA

ORDER OF EXERCISES

ACADEMIC PROCESSIONAL

Matthew Soeghay

CALL TO ORDER

Timothy Laurent, EdD
Provost; Vice President, Academic Affairs

NATIONAL ANTHEM

Matthew Soeghay

INVOCATION

The Most Reverend William M. Joensen, PhD
Bishop, Diocese of Des Moines; Member, Board of Directors

BLESSING OF THE HANDS

Sr. Maurita Soukup, RSM, PhD, RN, MSN
Health Trustee and Nurse Consultant Researcher,
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Member, Board of Directors
Matthew Halbach, PhD
Vice President, Mission and Campus Culture

STUDENT ADDRESS

Mariah Burkett
Associate of Science in Diagnostic Medical Sonography Candidate, Class of 2026

INTRODUCTION TO COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS SPEAKER

Adreain Henry, OD, EdD, MBA, MA
President, Mercy College of Health Sciences

ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATES

Jennie Baranczyk, MS
Head Coach, Women's Basketball, University of Oklahoma

RECOGNITION OF STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Lyneene Richardson, MEd
Dean, Student Affairs

RECOGNITION OF NURSING PIN & DAISY AWARD RECIPIENTS

Vincent Salyers, EdD
Dean, Nursing

PRESENTATION AND CONFERRAL OF HONORARY DEGREES

Adreain Henry, OD, EdD, MBA, MA
President, Mercy College of Health Sciences

PRESENTATION OF DEGREE CANDIDATES

Timothy Laurent, EdD
Provost; Vice President, Academic Affairs

CONFERRING OF DEGREES

Adreain Henry, OD, EdD, MBA, MA
President, Mercy College of Health Sciences

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION WELCOME

Melanie Campbell, MBA
Vice President, Institutional Advancement & Community Engagement

RECITATION OF THE SUSCIPE OF CATHERINE MCAULEY

Sr. Maurita Soukup, RSM, PhD, RN, MSN
Health Trustee and Nurse Consultant Researcher
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas; Member, Board of Directors

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.
Teach me to cast myself entirely
into the arms of your loving Providence
with a lively, unlimited confidence in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
that whatever you ordain or permit may be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
let nothing sadden me but sin,
nothing delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of You,
my God and my all, in your everlasting kingdom.

BENEDICTION

The Most Reverend William M. Joensen, PhD
Bishop, Diocese of Des Moines; Member, Board of Directors

ACADEMIC RECESSIONAL

Matthew Soeghay

Family members are invited to come forward to take pictures of their graduate during the Presentation of Degree Candidates.

GUEST SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

MARIAH BURKETT

Diagnostic Medical Sonography Candidate, Class of 2026



Mariah Burkett is graduating this spring with an Associate of Science in Diagnostic Medical Sonography. She will begin her career as a cardiac sonographer at MercyOne Iowa Heart Center, where she looks forward to growing both clinically and professionally while making a meaningful impact in patients' lives. Within the next year, Mariah plans to pursue her pediatric sonography boards, further expanding her expertise and commitment to the field.

Mariah is especially passionate about supporting future sonography students and is committed to strengthening the preceptor program for those who follow.

She resides in Waukee, Iowa, with her husband, Bill, and their four children, Forrest, Franny, Freddy, and Franklin. Outside of her career, Mariah enjoys spending time with her family, cheering on her children in their sports and dance activities, and making memories through boating and camping.

JENNIE BARANCZYK, MS

Head Coach, Women's Basketball, University of Oklahoma



Jennie Baranczyk serves as head coach of the University of Oklahoma women's basketball team, where she has quickly established one of the nation's most competitive and respected programs. A three-time National Coach of the Year finalist and the 2024 Big 12 Coach of the Year, she has led Oklahoma to five consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances, including Sweet 16 runs in 2025 and 2026.

A native of Iowa and a graduate of Dowling Catholic High School, Baranczyk was a standout student-athlete at the University of Iowa before beginning her coaching career. She spent nine seasons at Drake University, where she built a championship-caliber program and earned multiple Missouri Valley Conference Coach of the Year honors. Known for her energy, leadership, and commitment to developing student-athletes both on and off the court, she has earned national recognition for her impact on the game.

Baranczyk's connection to Mercy College is both personal and meaningful, as she is the daughter of Joyce and Terry Lillis, whose transformational gift established the Joyce E. Lillis School of Nursing.

DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS

JOYCE E. LILLIS, MSN AND TERRANCE J. LILLIS, MS



Joyce E. and Terrance (Terry) J. Lillis are distinguished philanthropists whose lives and careers reflect a deep commitment to advancing education, faith, and healthcare. Joyce built an extraordinary career in nursing spanning more than four decades, beginning as a staff nurse at Kossuth County Hospital and later serving as a public health administrator for the Iowa County Public Health Agency. After relocating to Des Moines, she joined MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center while earning her Master of Science in Nursing from Drake University,

ultimately serving in a variety of leadership roles across MercyOne. In 1999, she was named director of Mercy Home Care, where she led and supported more than 100 healthcare professionals, ensuring the delivery of high-quality, compassionate care.

Throughout her career, Joyce was widely recognized for excellence in nursing leadership, including being named one of Iowa's 100 Great Nurses. Even in retirement, she remains actively engaged in advancing healthcare through volunteer service and ongoing advocacy for nursing education.

Terry began his career as an educator, coach, and veteran, demonstrating an early commitment to mentorship and leadership that has continued through his philanthropic and community engagement efforts alongside Joyce. He joined Principal Financial Group in 1982, holding various leadership roles before being named Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Retirement and Investment Services. After a distinguished 35-year career, he retired from Principal Financial Group in 2017.

Together, the Lillis' have made an indelible impact on Mercy College of Health Sciences through their leadership and generosity. Their transformational gift established the Joyce E. Lillis School of Nursing, expanding opportunities for students and strengthening the College's ability to address critical workforce needs across Iowa. Their philanthropy also includes the creation of the Joyce E. Lillis Endowed Nursing Scholarship and longstanding service to the College, including Joyce's role as Mercy College Board Chair.

Joyce and Terry Lillis embody the mission and values of Mercy through their unwavering dedication to education, compassionate healthcare, and faith. In recognition of their profound contributions and enduring legacy, Mercy College of Health Sciences proudly confers upon them the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*.

NURSING RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS

PINNING

The tradition of graduates receiving a pin commemorates the completion of students' formal nursing coursework and the beginning of their professional careers as nurses. It is an important milestone in every nurse's journey and symbolizes the hard work and dedication shown as students in their classrooms and in their clinical experiences. The Mercy College Nursing Pin unites all graduating nurses with those who have come before them and serves as a reminder of their time at Mercy College of Health Sciences, as well as their lifelong commitment to serve their patients with the College's Core Values.

Spring 2026 nursing degree candidates will receive nursing pins as they cross the Commencement stage. Fall 2025 graduates received their pins prior to today's ceremony. Summer 2026 degree candidates will receive their pins upon completion of their degree requirements at a ceremony this summer.

DAISY AWARD

The DAISY (Diseases Attacking the Immune System) Foundation was established in memory of Patrick Barnes, who passed away in late 1999 following a long hospital stay. In Patrick's honor, the Foundation established The DAISY Award, which recognizes extraordinary nurses for their compassionate care toward their patients. In 2010, the Foundation also established the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nursing Faculty to honor the contributions faculty make to the future of the nursing profession.



TRADITIONS OF COMMENCEMENT EXERCISE

TRADITIONS OF ACADEMIA

Many of the traditions surrounding academic ceremonies—such as inaugurations and commencements—can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when universities were first formed. Gowns and regalia, for example, were common forms of dress for academics during the era. Today, participants wear colorful gowns, cords, and stoles to signify their alma maters and highest degrees received. The current traditions of academic garb and similar symbols reflect the continuity and strength of higher education in today's culture. Two symbols particularly important to Mercy College of Health Sciences are the Mace and Presidential Chain of Office, both of which are displayed in the Office of the President throughout the academic year.

TRADITIONS OF THE CHAIN OF OFFICE

The tradition of a chain of office goes back to the civic life of communities during the Middle Ages. Upon his investiture, the new mayor of a town was given a chain of medallions. Each medallion represented the individual guilds of the town, linked together and working for the welfare of the community. In medieval universities, the chief official—or rector magnificus—held authority similar to that of the mayor in civil society. Thus, he, too, was honored with a chain of office. Rather than the guild medallions, however, the academic chain of office consisted of the insignia of all of the colleges of the university.

Today, Mercy College of Health Sciences' Presidential Chain of Office represents a similar unity of departments and programs. The medallion at the end of the Chain of Office is the Mercy College Seal, the unifying emblem which embodies the history and foundation of the College. Open book medals spaced along the length of the Chain are engraved with the Core Values of the institution: knowledge, reverence, integrity, compassion, and excellence

TRADITIONS OF THE MACE

Maces were clubs used primarily by medieval military officers during times of war. In more peaceful times, the mace came to represent the power of leadership and the pride of nations. Colleges and universities have adopted this symbol for their own purposes, using the mace in important ceremonies and institutional installations. It is carried at academic processions not only to bring an authority to ceremonial occasions, but also to symbolize the unity of vision and pride of purpose in the institution.

COMMENCEMENT HONORS

Mercy College recognizes the achievements of its graduates by awarding the following commencement honors.

Gold Cords: Academic Honors - Given in recognition of outstanding academic achievements.

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

Summa Cum Laude: Cumulative GPA of 3.8 or above.

Magna Cum Laude: Cumulative GPA between 3.650 to 3.799.

Cum Laude: Cumulative GPA between 3.500 to 3.649.

ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE

Highest Honors: Cumulative GPA of 3.8 or above.

High Honors: Cumulative GPA between 3.650 to 3.799.

Honors: Cumulative GPA between 3.500 to 3.649.

CERTIFICATE & DIPLOMA

Highest Honors: Cumulative GPA of 3.8 or above.

High Honors: Cumulative GPA between 3.650 to 3.799.

Honors: Cumulative GPA between 3.500 to 3.649.

Purple Cords: Student Leadership – Given in recognition of student leadership contributions to Mercy College student organizations.

Red, White, and Blue Cords: Military – Given in recognition of military service to the United States of America.

Silver Cords: Service Learning – Given in recognition of students who have demonstrated outstanding contributions to their communities and exceptional concern and service toward those who are underserved and disadvantaged.

Other Cords: Student Organizations – Individuals may adorn cords to symbolize membership in recognized Mercy College student organizations including the Diversity Club, Mercy College Association of Nursing Students (MCANS), Science Club, and Student Senate.

Commencement honors are determined based on most recent semester cumulative grade point average. Final honors will be determined by final cumulative grade point average. The names listed in this program represent fall graduates along with spring and summer candidates for graduation. Degrees will be conferred upon completion of all requirements.

COMMENCEMENT AWARDS

Peer Mentor Award – Recognizes students who have demonstrated compassion by providing academic and emotional support to another student.

Service Learning Award – Recognizes students who have demonstrated concern for those who are underserved and disadvantaged by providing exemplary service to those individuals.

Clinical Award – Recognizes students who have consistently served as role models of excellence, compassion, concern, and respect in all clinical interactions, going beyond the Mercy College expectations of consistency and quality of performance.

Outstanding Student Award – Recognizes students who have served as role models for peers and have demonstrated overall excellence in their academic, clinical, servant, and collegiate lives.

Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology (JRCERT) Certificate of Excellence – Recognizes a student graduating from an accredited radiologic technology program for achieving excellence in the radiologic sciences. The Joint Review Committee on Education in Radiologic Technology recognizes a single Mercy College student based upon the recommendation of clinical preceptors and faculty.

Alpha Eta National Allied Health Honor Society – Recognizes Allied Health baccalaureate, associate, and post-degree certificate graduates who have maintained a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or higher. No more than 20% of the graduating class of a specified program is invited to membership. It is the intent of the Society to recognize potential and actual professional attainments. Demonstrated academic, scholarly, and clinical excellence are part of the criteria for membership.

Sigma Theta Tau International – Zeta Chi-at-Large – Recognizes outstanding nursing students in pursuit of a Bachelor of Science in Nursing who have remained in the top 30% of their class and maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher. Students must also embody the Mercy College Core Values and represent themselves as compassionate and knowledgeable members of the nursing profession. Upon their admittance to the honor society, students become members of a worldwide community of nurses who hold themselves and their nursing profession to the high standard of excellence incumbent upon Sigma Theta Tau members.

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate
Listings Here

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate

Listings Here

ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate

Listings Here

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate

Listings Here

CERTIFICATE

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate
Listings Here

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate

Listings Here

DIPLOMA

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate
Listings Here

DEGREE

Tassel will Place Graduate

Listings Here

COLLEGE FACULTY

Jodi Aldrich, MSN, Assistant Professor

Jennifer Austin, MS, Assistant Professor

Victor Babich, PhD, Associate Professor

Donna Bakken, MSN, Assistant Professor

Ashley Barnard, MEd, Medical Assisting, Program Chair; Instructor

Amy Barry, PhD, Assistant Professor

Mylissa Belieu, DNP, Assistant Professor

John Bieber, MS, Assistant Professor

Allyson Crist, MSN, Assistant Professor

Ela Cuturic, MS, Assistant Professor

Katie Dean, MSN, Assistant Professor

Jane DeGooyer, EdD, Nursing, Program Chair; Assistant Professor

Kyla Dippold, MS, Medical Laboratory Science, Program Chair; Assistant Professor

Jolynn Ernst, DNP, Assistant Professor

David Filipp, EdD, Emergency Medical Services, Program Chair; Associate Professor

Justin Helbing, MA, Instructor

Ashley Hoff, DNP, Nursing, Associate Dean; Assistant Professor

Teresa Housley, MSN, Associate Professor

Archana Indira, MD, Assistant Professor

Megan Jenkins, BSN, Instructor

Molly Jennings, MSN, Instructor

Sierra Jones, DNP, Assistant Professor

Ondrea Kearns, MS, Clinical Instructor

Nataliya Khalandovskaya, MSN, Instructor

Gretchen Kilworth, MS, Radiology, Program Chair; Assistant Professor

Ashley Klingaman, BA, Instructor

Christa Knoll-Drobny, MSN, Assistant Professor

Kelly Kraska, MEd, Diagnostic Medical Sonography, Program Chair; Instructor

Katherine Lester, MSN, Assistant Professor

Robin Lindsay, MSN, Assistant Professor

Rachel Logan, MSN, Assistant Professor

Amy MacKrell, PhD, Professor

Ryan Marr, PhD, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Dean; Associate Professor

Lisa Martin, MSN, Associate Professor

Jeannine Matz, PhD, Health Science, Healthcare Administration, and Public Health, Program Chair; Professor

Alex McManus, DNP, Nursing, Program Chair; Assistant Professor

Rachel McMichael, MSN, Instructor

Audra Meyer, EdD, Associate Professor

Joseph Moravec, DMin, Professor

Beth Moss, MSN, Assistant Professor

Allison Nicholson, BSN, Instructor

Jadyn North, AS, Instructor

Truc Nguyen, PhD, Professor

Casey Orth-Nebitt, MS, Assistant Professor

Tim Pearson, DC, Continuing Education, Senior Director; Assistant Professor

Darrin Rasberry, PhD, Assistant Professor

Ashley Reynolds, AS, Instructor

Felicia Rodriguez, DNP, Assistant Professor

Emily Ruehle, MSN, Assistant Professor

Vincent Salyers, EdD, Nursing, Dean

Connor Schmitt, DPT, Physical Therapist Assistant, Program Chair; Assistant Professor

Tonya Shehata, MSN, Assistant Professor

Kendall Sinclair, AS, Instructor

Theresa Smith, PhD, Associate Professor

Rebecca Steidl, PhD, Associate Professor

Lacey Stielow, MS, Assistant Professor

Jody Swensen, MSN, Assistant Professor

Afshin Tabibi, AS, Instructor

Lisa Thuerauf, MSN, Assistant Professor

Janet Whitney, MEd, Assistant Professor

Jennifer Wieland, DNP, Nursing, Program Chair; Associate Professor

Jennifer Wing, DNP, Assistant Professor

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Retired Director,
Mercy Home Care

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Board Secretary
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CDS Global

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ex officio
Chief Legal Officer
MercyOne

Adrain Henry, OD, EdD, MBA*

ex officio
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HSM – Munich RE

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McGough

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Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice

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Casey's General Stores, Inc.

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CEO
Dallas County Hospital

Sr Maurita Soukup, RSM, PhD, RN, MSN

Health Trustee and Nurse Consultant Researcher
Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

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Matthew Willkom, MTS, BA, AAS

Director, Programming and Network Development
Iowa Catholic Radio Network

**Denotes Executive Committee Member*

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Matthew Halbach, PhD

Vice President, Mission and Campus Culture

Timothy Laurent, EdD

Provost; Vice President, Academic Affairs

Thomas Leahy, JD

Vice President, Business and Regulatory Affairs

Matt Romkey, EdD

Vice President, Admissions, Financial Aid, and Marketing



WELCOME TO THE
MERCY COLLEGE
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION!

MCHS.edu/Alumni