

Harrison Ford tells ASU's Class of 2026: 'This is your time'

The actor and conservationist spoke to a record-setting class in Tempe alongside philanthropist Howard G. Buffett, with both earning honorary degrees

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
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The growl was familiar, and the message was empowering:

"Your generation has far more power than you may realize," Harrison Ford told Arizona State University's Class of 2026 on Monday night.

"And if you harness that power, if you find your leadership, your issues, your voice, the world will not be able to ignore you," the legendary actor and conservationist told the crowd at Mountain America Stadium.

Ford spoke to a full audience at an Undergraduate Commencement that recognized ASU's largest graduating class ever, with more than 14,000 undergraduates students earning more than 15,000 degrees.

Earlier in the day, more than 8,000 graduate and law students celebrated at Graduate Commencement, held at Desert Financial Arena.

Of the total class, more than 8,000 were ASU Online students. This includes more than 1,100 graduates who attended ASU as part of the Starbucks College Achievement Plan, in which eligible partners receive 100% upfront tuition coverage. Those grads hail from 49 of the 50 states.

During Undergraduate Commencement, Ford exhorted the graduates to protect the planet.

"Nature doesn't need people. People need nature to survive," he said. "A healthy, natural world provides free services to mankind that we cannot provide for ourselves."

Known for his rugged charm and dry humor, Ford has created some of the most enduring characters in film history, including Han Solo in the "Star Wars" movies. His career has spanned more than six decades and included the hit movies "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "Witness," "Patriot Games," "Blade Runner," "The Fugitive" and "Presumed Innocent." Most recently, he starred in the

TV Western “1923” and the comedy drama “Shrinking.”

Before his speech, Ford received an honorary Doctor of Arts and Humane Letters in recognition of his global cultural influence through film, his work for planetary health and his service through humanitarian aviation.

He started his speech by telling the graduates that by the time he was a junior in college, his grades were sliding. So, looking for an easy A, he took a drama course.

“My classmates were people I had previously discounted as geeks and misfits. But I soon realized I was a geek and misfit,” he said. “I had found my fit. These were my people.”

He began performing in plays and moved to California. But acting jobs weren’t enough to support his family, so he worked as a carpenter.

“This went on for about 15 years, during which I did a lot of carpentry and only four or five acting jobs, but they were more ambitious, good projects. And then it all added up, and I got ‘Star Wars,’” he said to screams from the crowd.

“The load lightened. I had freedom, opportunity. But something was still missing.

“Passion and purpose are not the same thing. Passion brings you joy. Purpose brings you meaning.

“Passion gets you out of bed in the morning, but purpose allows you to sleep at night. And I hadn’t found purpose higher than my job yet.”

In the late 1980s, he was living in Wyoming, where he met the founders of the newly created Conservation International.

“I didn’t want to be a poster boy for the cause. I wanted to be part of the work,” he said.

He joined the Conservation International Board of Directors in 1991 and has played an instrumental role in shaping the organization’s mission to protect nature for people. He said despite new science and new policies, nature is still being lost.

“We need cultural change. We need to extend social justice. We need to respect and elevate Indigenous people that are being marginalized,” he said.

He urged the graduates to find their places.

“Build something that didn’t exist yesterday. Stand up for someone who can’t stand up for themselves. Bring together people who weren’t talking before,” Ford said.

“That’s leadership. That’s what moves the needle. ... This is your time. Own it.”

(Video: {<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK5Y4YD0mOA&feature=youtu.be>})

Also receiving an honorary degree Monday night was businessman and philanthropist Howard Graham Buffett, chairman and CEO of the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, a private charitable foundation investing in global food security, conflict mitigation and efforts to counter human

trafficking. He received a Doctor of Humane Letters in recognition of his humanitarian, agricultural development and conservation work around the world.

Buffett had several pieces of advice for the graduates.

“When you get out of bed every morning and think about what to do that day, would you be proud if your neighbors and friends and family read about what you did in the newspaper?

“... And when you go to bed at night, think about something you did that made life better for somebody besides yourself.”

He told the graduates to never be afraid to change their minds.

“It’s OK to want something different when you learn about something new,” said Buffett, whose foundation has partnered with the [ASU Foundation for a New American University](#) on many projects, including several with the [Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication](#).

Earlier in the ceremony, ASU President Michael Crow told the graduates that he had a short history lesson for them: “Only 250 years ago this summer, imperfect people got together and wrote the Declaration of Independence. This is the preamble: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

“We fight every day — every day — for that to be the case. That these rights are immutable, indivisible, cannot be changed, cannot be taken away,” Crow said.

“Each of you come from every type of family, every background, every family income, everything that you can imagine.

“You’re going to make this thing work. You’re going to make this country better.

“We’re just getting started.”

Read more graduation coverage

[Student spotlight: A look at some of the exceptional graduates for spring 2026](#)

[First convocation in Los Angeles marks graduation milestone for ASU](#)

[From second chance to graduation: 220-plus students build momentum through ASU’s Earned Admission](#)

[Personalized Admissions Project sees success with first graduates](#)

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Actor and conservationist Harrison Ford delivers Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement address on Monday, May 11, at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe. Ford also received an honorary Doctor of Arts and Humane Letters from the university. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



Renée Cheng (left), dean of the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, and Miki Kittilson (right), dean of the Rob Walton College of Global Futures, place a hood on actor and conservationist Harrison Ford as he is presented with an honorary Doctor of Arts and Humane Letters during Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement on May 11 at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe. Photo by Deanna Dent/Arizona State University



Businessman and philanthropist Howard Graham Buffett speaks during Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement after being awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters on May 11 at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe. Photo by Samantha Chow/Arizona State University

Gallery



From left: Juris Doctor of Law graduates Cameron Douglas (left), Jocelyn Chu Vose and August Butler are all smiles during Arizona State University's Graduate Commencement at Desert Financial Arena in Tempe on May 11.



President Michael Crow addresses the crowd during Arizona State University's Graduate Commencement at Desert Financial Arena in Tempe on May 11.



A group of graduates from the College of Health Solutions gets a selfie with Sparky during Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena. More than 3,000 doctoral and master's degree graduates attended the ceremony alongside around 15,000 friends and family members.



Grand Marshal Elisa Kawam, ASU Senate president and chair of the University Academic Council, places the university mace to officially start Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Outstanding Graduates carry their schools' gonfalons during the processional at Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena. Read about some of spring 2026's exceptional grads.



From left: Emily Robbins, Emma Eckert and Leela Udupa — the first graduates of the new the School of Technology for Public Health — stand to be recognized during Graduate Commencement on Monday.



Dom Saiz, who earned a PhD in molecular and cellular biology, puts on his cap during Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Graduates stand for the national anthem during ASU's spring 2026 Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Mary Lou Fulton College for Teaching and Learning Innovation Outstanding Graduate Mohammed Ibrahim is honored at Graduate Commencement. Ibrahim earned a doctoral degree in educational policy and evaluation.



Master's degree graduates Claudia Syson (left) and Melanie Malone, from the College of Health Solutions, hood each other during Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation Instructor Kara Mangold (left) and Associate Clinical Professor Jackie Medland take photos of their doctoral students during Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Melanie Malone, who earned a master's degree in exercise science, waves to family members following her hooding at Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena. Malone is a member of the Navajo Nation.



Assistant Professor Nina Sharp from The Design School hoods new PhD graduate Mohammed Alrahyani at Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.



Sara Crance, an Outstanding Graduate from the Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation, has her picture taken in front of sparklers following Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena. [Read more about Crance's story.](#)



Selena Evans, a new PhD graduate in human systems engineering, plays with her 4-year-old daughter, Maya, after the Graduate Commencement on Monday, May 11, at Desert Financial Arena.

Gallery



Golden graduate Jean Brady (Peeling) walks into Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement alongside her daughter, Susan, and other members of the Class of 1976 on Monday evening at Mountain America Stadium in Tempe. Jean, who is 101 years old, graduated in '76 along with her daughter, and they were both teachers.



Actor and conservationist Harrison Ford meets with graduates before ASU's Undergraduate Commencement on May 11 in Tempe.



Melanie Jones (right) and Alli Brustman hug before the start of Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement at Mountain America Stadium on Monday evening.



Communications graduate Colin Fisher (center) cheers before the start of the ceremony Monday evening at Mountain America Stadium.



From left: Arizona State University President Michael Crow, actor and conservationist Harrison Ford and businessman Howard Graham Buffett sit on the platform during ASU's Undergraduate Commencement on Monday at Mountain America Stadium.



Starbucks College Achievement Plan graduates Margaux Quintong (left) and Kallie Gardner stand for the national anthem Monday. More than 1,100 SCAP participants graduated this May, including students from 49 states.



Graduates celebrate during Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement.



ASU President Michael Crow (left) and Cronkite School Dean Battinto Batts Jr. (right) present businessman and philanthropist Howard Graham Buffett with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters during Monday's undergraduate ceremony.



Veteran and urban planning graduate Teri Heil celebrates during Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement.



Graduates' creativity was on display during Undergraduate Commencement on Monday evening.



Finance graduate Brandon Ngo cheers along with other Sun Devils during Undergraduate Commencement.



A full crowd watches as undergraduates celebrate after moving their tassels to the left near the end of Monday's ceremony at Mountain America Stadium.



From left: Construction management and first-generation graduate Cory Yeager; aerospace engineering graduate Dylan Brandt; and management and marketing graduate Audrey Hutson celebrate at the close of Undergraduate Commencement.



Veterans Jasmine Kegler (left), a biological sciences graduate, and Emily Stanley, a sports business graduate, celebrate together after Arizona State University's Undergraduate Commencement on May 11.