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## Steps of Achievement

### Student overcomes crippling ailment

[K.C. HOWARD](#)  
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UNLV and Nevada State students stand as they enter the Thomas & Mack Center for the 2005 December graduation ceremony Monday. About 1,815 UNLV students received undergraduate and graduate degrees this semester with 58

Unlike most graduates Monday, Kathleen Wilde didn't descend the 50 or so steps from the Cox Pavilion to the ground floor outside the Thomas & Mack Center.

She took an elevator.

But she

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### NUMBER OF NEVADA STATE GRADUATES RISE

Nevada State College saw a huge increase in winter graduates this December.

About 58 students received a diploma, compared with six last December.

This year, Nevada State, which opened in 2002, shared its ceremony with UNLV's graduating class.

"We have determined that we don't have the numbers in terms of students and staff resources to hold two commencement ceremonies a year," Nevada State President Fred Maryanski said.

Harter offered to let their students walk just before UNLV's, he said.

"I think it's an excellent demonstration of the partnerships that exist in Nevada education," Maryanski said.

Nevada State psychology graduate Martha Reyes, 30, said to have a double ceremony felt "weird" .

"It's nice they allow us to

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undergraduates from Nevada State College. Photo by [John Gurzinski](#).



UNLV student Kathleen Wilde, 18, enters the Thomas & Mack Center for the 2005 December graduation ceremony. She received her bachelor's degree in political science. Photo by [John Gurzinski](#).

underwent hip and knee replacement surgery and no longer needs the chair.

But Monday's pained steps across the stage weren't Wilde's only triumph.

She had managed to obtain her bachelor's degree in political science in two years and at the age of 18. At UNLV, the majority of graduates don't complete a degree within six years, and the average age of a student obtaining a bachelor's degree is 27.

"It was never that difficult for me in school, and so there is no reason to delay and do only 12 credits (a semester)," she said. "If you can do 19 credits, why not do so?"

With her studies, she works as a substitute teacher for the Clark County School District and is a volunteer forensic coach.

Wilde lives at home, but she said she doesn't feel like she missed out on

walked the rest of the way to get her diploma.

"Who's to complain once you come from being in a wheelchair?" said Wilde, one of about 1,815 University of Nevada, Las Vegas, students to obtain a degree this semester.

Two years earlier, crippling arthritis confined Wilde to a wheelchair. In May 2004, she

walk with them," she said as she went to line up with her fellow students. "At least we have a ceremony."

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the typical undergraduate experience that often includes partying and dorm life.

"College is about education, and you shouldn't be partying. You shouldn't be drinking. You are there for an education, and you should be maximizing those experiences," she said. "I'm really glad I wasn't doing all those kinds of things."

It would have been difficult to send his daughter, because she graduated high school at age 16, outside of Las Vegas to college, Bob Wilde said.

He encouraged her to try living in the UNLV dorms, but she wanted to stay home, where she feels more comfortable, he said.

"When she was about 14, she said she was going to graduate at the age of 18. She had her mind made up, and she did it," he said.

It was the same with the wheelchair, he said. She didn't want a motorized one that might make remaining dependent on the device easier.

She was determined to walk again.

Hoping to become an attorney, Kathleen Wilde said she plans to go to UNLV's law school next fall.

She wasn't the only one with high hopes Monday.

UNLV saw a 27 percent increase in the number of students graduating this December over the previous winter. President Carol Harter said that UNLV's total graduate rate has been steadily increasing and that those who come to UNLV have strong persistence rates, meaning they come back until they graduate.

According to the Nevada System of Higher Education, UNLV's graduation rates have increased 8 percentage points between 1998 and 2004.

"Given that trend, I think we're moving in the right direction," Harter said.

But she said it was difficult to tell immediately how many of Monday's degree recipients took six years or less to graduate.

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This semester, 527 students received a graduate degree, a 150 percent increase over the 211 students who received graduate degrees from UNLV last December. Among them was university system Regent Linda Howard, who earned a master's degree in public administration.

At the ceremony, Harter and other officials espoused the value of a higher education degree and the hard work needed to obtain one.

Over the past two years, Wilde said she has gained a lot during her undergraduate career.

She still moves with pain and has trouble with stairs, but she said she has gotten a blessing or two from her physical duress.

"I think I've learned my biggest asset is within myself," she said. "It's my own mind."

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