**For immediate release**

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**Media contact:**

**Kirstin Olmstead, 907-786-1435, 907-748-1682 (cell), kbolmstead@alaska.edu**

**More than 1,300 graduate from UAA this spring**

*Commencement May 7 at 1 p.m. in Alaska Airlines Center*

The University of Alaska Anchorage will celebrate the spring class of 2017 graduates at 1 p.m., Sunday, May 7, in the Alaska Airlines Center. This ceremony honors the accomplishments of more than 1,300 undergraduate, graduate and professional school students from the Anchorage campus, more than 150 of whom will graduate with master’s or doctoral degrees.

“We are honored to celebrate this important milestone with our graduates,” said UAA Chancellor Tom Case. “We look forward to the impact they will have on our state, our nation and our world. At commencement, they will join an alumni community that is more than 50,000 strong.”

Nina Lee will speak on behalf of graduating students. Lee’s degree is in early childhood education. She has worked as a community-engaged student assistant, taking part in UAA Professor Kathryn Ohle’s research. Lee used a UAA Honors College grant to explore how teachers and Alaska Native parents use printed and electronic dual-language books to foster and encourage early literacy and language development in young children.

A first-generation American, Lee created hard and digital copies of dual-language children’s books, which were distributed to 16 classroom teachers in rural Alaska. She has been traveling to those classrooms to observe how teachers are implementing the books. She presented her work at the local Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children conference and the statewide Alaska Native Studies conference.

At commencement, UAA will award Francis Xavier “Dale” Tran of Anchorage a posthumous Master of Business Administration degree. Tran served as chief finance officer for Kaladi Brothers Coffee. His dedicated volunteering benefited his company, community and the university. Tran was close to completing his degree when he passed away unexpectedly in January.

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Ann Parrish of Anchorage will be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters for more than 30 years of work as a civic leader, serving on the University of Alaska Board of Regents and later on the UA Foundation Board of Trustees. An Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters will also be awarded to Alaska’s former first lady, Bella Hammond of Port Alsworth. A role model for all Alaskans, Hammond has opened dialogues and deepened the common understanding between rural and non-rural Alaskans.

Longtime Anchorage resident Gretchen Bersch will receive UAA’s Meritorious Service Award for her lifelong dedication to adult and continuing education. Anchorage journalist Mike Doogan will also receive a Meritorious Service Award for his commitment to the art and science of newswriting, serving the people of Anchorage over several decades as a reporter, editor and columnist.

During commencement, retiring faculty will also receive awards: Jerry Kudenov, professor emeritus of biological sciences; Charles “Sean” Licka, professor emeritus of art; Elizabeth Predeger, professor emerita of nursing; and Elizabeth Sirles, professor emerita of social work.

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UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE  
*The University of Alaska Anchorage is Alaska’s largest university, educating more than 18,000 students annually and offering programs in more than 150 areas of study. UAA’s mission is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. Learn more at uaa.alaska.edu.*