

Graduation 2011

This year marks the 69th anniversary of the GED program. As written in the GED statistical report the GED tests serve only one purpose-to certify a high school level of academic knowledge and skills.

The GED Tests certify these competencies, no matter where or in what manner the individual learned them. Every US state and Canadian jurisdiction recognizes that passing the GED tests demonstrates the knowledge and skills of a high school graduate.

The GED tests are demanding. To earn a credential, a candidate must complete a battery of 5 tests covering math, science, reading, writing and social studies. The five tests which last 7 ½ hours also measure skills in communication, information processing, problem solving, and critical thinking. Many people think that the GED is an easy test, however, they are wrong. If I were to go to any high school today and give the test to high school seniors, 40% would not pass.

The GED program has served over 17 million people, helping them to further their education, for employment opportunities, or serve in the military.

For Casper College this is the 49th year that we have been involved with the GED program. Since a year ago this time 154 individuals have successfully completed their GED's at Casper College. The youngest to complete was 16 years of age and the oldest was 58 years young.

The average score that one needs to pass their GED is a standard score of 450. At Casper College we have always had a higher passing score than the national average. This year our average score was a 565.

There are two reasons that I believe this has happened, one is because of all of you sitting in front of me; you are bright individuals that have not given up on furthering your education. The second is because of the individuals that are sitting behind me. I have never worked with a more caring and giving group of individuals that want to make sure you are successful. Because of their efforts we have a pass rate of 85%.

Please join me in applauding their efforts for what they do every day in helping to get many of you where you are, and also a special thanks to Kelsee for organizing the graduation ceremony.

Of the 154 graduates we had 39 individuals that scored 600 or above. These individuals are estimated to be at the top 10% nationally in class rank. Just like they do at the local high schools we would like to recognize those individuals that are here with us today. When I call your names could you please come to the front of the stage and remain standing until we have the full group.

Niklaus Conrad (SS)

Michael Encino (R)

Thomas Lopez Jr

Alyssa Nation (R)

Christopher Paden

Bradley Powell (R)

Christian Sabo

Brook Dunn

Leann Jump

Kearney Sears

Santanna Brown (R SC)

Kimberly Enders

Victor Frias

Sean McKinney

Rachel Moon

Ronald Mcmillan

Ladies and Gentlemen your top 10% of the 2011 graduating class.

Each year I am honored that I get to present the awards for this year's graduating class. I can't imagine how hard it is each year to pick out just one recipient as we meet so many unique and wonderful people that are deserving of the awards.

The first award, however, there can only be one recipient as it is for the person that scored the highest at our center. This individual could not be with us today as he was unable to get off work. **Andy Kulikowski** was our high score for the center with an average of 734. He is currently enrolled at Casper College as a general studies major maintaining a 4.0 GPA.

Our next award is the student achievement award which goes to an individual that has not always had an easy time in life and has had to persevere in obtaining their GED.

This individual left school in the 10th grade, not necessarily because of poor grades, but the economy was good and jobs were easy to come by and making money became a high priority. Off and on this person would enroll in the ABE program with intentions of getting their GED, but the serious effort was not really there yet. This individual became an electricians apprentice and was making pretty good money. However, one day he was asked to get his GED, and ended up losing his job when he chose not to come and get it. He went into the field of construction; a GED was not needed there. But the work was seasonal, and in the winter months money was very tight. He had a wife and two children to support so decided he needed to start studying for his GED and go back to the field he really enjoyed, which came very naturally to him. He actually started his GED 6 years ago at another center and had passed all but the math portion of his test. He returned back to Casper registered with our adult education program several times before finally getting serious about taking the test again. Last month he took reading, science, social studies and writing tests again and passed all pretty easily. He waited on the math; I'm

sure out of fear of failing it again. But a few weeks ago he took the math and passed with extra points to spare. This young man was a delight to get to know, he has a great laid back personality, he is charming and I am sure an inspiration to his two children. Last week when I interviewed him, I told him it was for an article for the star tribune, little did he know I was gathering information for this award, I asked him what it felt like to be finally through with his GED: he said it was an awesome feeling, he never thought he was smart enough, but knew that dedication would get the job done. We all had faith in him and knew he was going to pass. It is because of his dedication and perseverance that we are awarding **Narciso Lopez** the achievement award for 2011.

Our last award is for student of the year. The student of the year award goes out to an individual who stood out to all of the instructors as a person everyone would like to know; someone who was very special and that we really wanted to recognize for their achievements.

This individual has been an inspiration to all of the instructors as well as his fellow students because of his positive attitude, his persistence, and his good humor.

He kindly encouraged his classmates to go ahead and solve problems on the board, even if they were not sure of themselves. He was always ready to volunteer to answer or show his answers for the others to see. He paid attention and kept trying if he was, by chance wrong, but broke into a huge, contagious grin if he was right, which was most often the case!

His class attendance was exemplary. At the beginning of the In 2 Win classes, he set his goal to pass the GED test at the end of the class. Doing all his homework, asking questions and using many resources, he scored very high on his GED and made the biggest gain in tests in class. Now he is on his way to entering the McMurry Training Center CDL program.

For all of the above reasons, **John Haase** is most deserving of the Student of the Year award. Congratulations, John, and please come forward.

For my last comments I would like to go back to May 3rd. Mary is out sick, Jamie is in the testing room and I am watching through the window in Mary's office, just there to provide back-up if needed. I notice everyone in the testing room is concentrating so hard on the Science and Social Studies portion of the test. I am wishing that I could be so diligent in thinking about what I am going to say today. I am drawing a blank. Then I think of a man by the name of George Dawson. I have never met him personally but I have read about him. George and Richard Glaubman together wrote the book *Life is So Good*. The book is about George. George was born in 1898. He was the son and great grandson of African slaves. George was never afforded the opportunity to get an education. He always wanted to go to school but he had to start working at the age of 11 to help his family survive. When he reached the age of 16 all hopes of going to school to learn to read or write were diminished. Once George turned 21 he left his family in

Texas and traveled throughout the US, Canada and Mexico always willing to take work others thought too difficult. He was taken advantage of because he could not read or write. The book describes George's life; the struggles and hardships he had, but one also learns of his strength and will to survive and persevere. No matter what happened in his life he saw it as a learning experience whether it was good or bad, he always looked for the positive things in life. George married and had 7 children and every day he helped them with their homework despite his inability to read or write. He would ask his children to read to him their papers and assignments, and would tell them by doing this it was helping them to remember better. George finally retired from working at the age of 79. Fishing and watching baseball were some of his great joys and he now had more time to enjoy those things.

It was not until George was in his 90's that a man happened to knock on his front door and told him about an adult basic education center not too far from his house. After learning that they might be able to teach him to read that was all George needed to hear. Every day he would be at the center working with a tutor learning to read. He became quite the motivator for all students attending the program, most of them studying to get their GED's. At the age of 98 he accomplished his goal of learning to read. From there he began to study for his GED. Unfortunately George did pass away before he was able to earn his GED, he was 103 years old.

Throughout the book there are conversations between Richard and George. One of my favorite passages was about Richard and George sitting down at George's kitchen table having hot chocolate. Richard looks at George's cup and asks him, "George do you see that cup as half full or half empty?" George replies, "I see it as being enough. So it is just fine."

Now if I were to be giving you a motivational talk I would probably encourage you all to see your glass half full. But I think George had a point. Be happy with what you do have, but like George always strive to learn, fill your life with what brings you happiness, and always enjoy the learning that living life will bring you.

Good Luck to all of you.