

WCU Unsung Hero: Eleanor Walton



El at the controls during Commencement.

On May 6, the Friday before Commencement ceremonies, Eleanor Walton, coordinator of the Digital Media Center, spent more than seven hours in a cold, driving rain, running cables throughout Farrell Stadium, doing audio checks, and setting up cameras. She arrived for Saturday's Commencement at 6:00 a.m. to oversee live streaming of the ceremony, only to face more rainy

weather. Sunday's Commencement was bright and sunny, however, there were wind gusts up to 35 mph. Walton had to make sure that everything was secured tight in the Digital Media's Command Tent. Monday morning, she woke up ready for round three – the Graduate Commencement ceremony, which was held indoors, in Hollinger Field House.

Walton, who is known around campus as “El,” left a job as a producer at QVC in 2006 to join the University as head of Digital Media. Ever since, she has been a steadfast presence at every winter and spring Commencement ceremony, ensuring top quality audio and visual services for the thousands who gather in Farrell Stadium or in Hollinger Field House. In 2008, she and her small team of employees and student workers started live-streaming the ceremonies. Since 2012, she has overseen an outside production company that does the live-streaming while also overseeing the Digital Media team as they film video for the stream and for a highlight video. Utilizing this outside vendor ensures that viewers from countries around the world can watch the ceremonies live.

“Every year, El Walton has been among the first to arrive at Commencement and one of the last to check in at the end of the day, to see if anything else needs to be done,” says Assistant Provost and Assistant Vice President for Strategic Enrollment Management Joe Santivaschi, who until last year led the Commencement organizing committee.

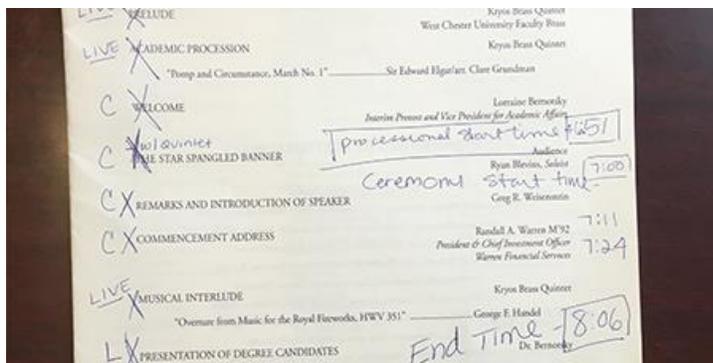


El and the Digital Media Team at the Command Tent

“El never ever says ‘that’s not my job.’ Rather, she is the one juggling her own duties while asking what she can do to assist you,” he says. “I’ve seen El jump in to help stack diploma covers on the stage. She is truly an unsung hero of Commencement.”

When asked what motivates her, Walton is quick to respond: “I want the experience for the person watching via live stream, from California or from Italy, from a hospital bed or from their work break room, to be as close as possible to the experience in the stadium or field house. And in terms of their view, I want it to be even better than what you would see from a seat in the stadium.”

The 2015 Undergraduate and Graduate Spring Commencement videos were viewed by visitors from 27 countries around the world, including Vietnam, France, Colombia, Liberia, Russia, South Africa, Brazil and Uganda.



Walton ensures that the live-stream view is unparalleled thanks to four cameras (in 2006, when she started, just one camera was used). She rattles off the name of equipment that has been added over the years – a TriCaster multi-camera switcher, a Sony PXW-FS7 XDCAM Super 35 camera – all in an effort to increase production values.

El's notes on the Commencement Agenda

This year, Walton’s team recorded two time-lapse videos, a video of Sunday’s Commencement and an additional video of the Graduate ceremony from the graduates’ perspective. Jared Montano, 22, who received degrees in communication studies and Spanish on May 7, sat with the graduates on Monday night to record a time-lapse from their view. He also worked behind the camera at Sunday’s Commencement. Montano has been an intern and work study student in the Digital Media Center since his first year at WCU.

All the hard work pays off when Walton sees a tweet like this from Saturday’s ceremony: “*Very sad I cannot watch @hwilliams30 graduate from @WCUofPA thanks to my FT job. Hope someone gets pics for me.*”

The University’s social media team immediately fired back a response: “*You can watch it live here: <http://phxmediagroup.com/wcupa/>*”

Minutes later, a tweet came back: “*watching it now. Looking for her.*”

Walton’s all-consuming zeal to make Commencement the best possible experience for everyone also extends to the student workers, like Montano, under her tutelage. Each academic year, 12 to 15 students join the small team of permanent employees to create event videography, sound recordings, studio productions, video editing and more.

If campus events were thought of in sports terms, Commencement is the Super Bowl.

“Working Commencement gives our Digital Media students an opportunity to perform in a fast-paced, intense and high stakes setting,” says Walton. “This is a very different experience than shooting video in the studio. It’s important for our students interested in the field of digital media to have a working knowledge of live events before going out and applying for jobs.”

Walton is an excellent teacher, so say her students and interns. “I have learned a lot from EI,” says Montano. “I want to get a job in TV and feel well prepared after four years working under her direction.”

And much like their parents back home, Walton is quick to watch out for her students’ well-being. That’s why she always packs a bag of granola bars, water bottles and fruit snacks for Commencement. “They often forget to eat before they arrive and it’s a long day,” she says. “This is the kind [of fruit snack] that my current students like,” she adds, displaying an overstuffed bag of snacks.

Walton also is ready with sunscreen in case student workers forget it. (They usually do.) And while she has never taken the shirt off her back, she has literally taken the cap off her head, to shade a student camera woman who was battling sun glare as she filmed.

If you didn’t make it to spring Commencement, check out Walton’s and her team’s handiwork at <http://www.wcupa.edu/videos/videos.aspx>. Currently, there are videos of each Commencement ceremony in its entirety. Soon you can view a two-minute highlight video there, too.