Student to graduates: Say no to mediocrity

RIVERSIDE—A 53-year-old woman from San Bernardino earned her bachelor of arts degree in liberal studies. A 21-year-old woman from Dos Palos challenged her fellow graduates to avoid mediocrity.

And a married couple who met on campus graduated the same day.

Cal Baptist University’s professors celebrated with 645 people during commencement ceremonies Saturday. That group, plus the 181 the school honored Friday night in its master’s degree ceremony, marked a graduation class larger than the entire student population of 808 when President Ron Ellis took over in 1994.

Sure, the university is growing — but Ellis and others said Cal Baptist keeps holding to its intimate teaching style. The size is personable, said Associate Provost Gayne Anacker, who will be dean of the college of arts and sciences next year.

Hundreds visited the campus to cheer. Boyfriends brought bouquets. Sisters snapped photos. Proud parents smiled. Some graduates blew bubbles and a beach ball ricocheted from row to row.

Nearing the end of the two-hour-plus ceremony, John Robinson Harris tried to find the perfect angle to take a photograph of his older sister as she received her diploma. He stood under the shade of a tree near the main stage. He joked that climbing the tree might get him a better photo.

It’s been a long road for Earlene Robinson Horton, who plans to teach disabled children, Harris said. A pregnancy during high school cut short her education and goals.

“She’s been this person with unfulfilled dreams,” Harris said. “This is a milestone.”

Cal Baptist represents the institution where Chad Richard earned his degree, but it’s also where he met the woman he married. On Saturday he and the former Emily George received diplomas together.

“The sadness of graduation is that separation afterward,” said Richard, an English major. “We don’t have to go through that. We get to look back at the memories together.”

Proud grandfather Jose I. Rodriguez, 83, enjoyed a cinnamon roll — one of 800 that were gobbled up Saturday morning — during a brief break from his duties as family videographer for granddaughter Monica Rodriguez’s big day. The 35-year-old graduated with a degree in psychology.

“I’m giving her a good hug and a congratulations,” the Glen Avon man said, “because not too many people graduate in this life.”

Next up for Mary Elizabeth Pryfogle, 21, of Dos Palos, is a stop at Cal State Stanislaus to get her teaching credential. Then perhaps law school where she hopes to specialize in international and family law.

“I’ll be honest, I’m nervous,” said Pryfogle, reading from a prepared speech. “But regardless, I am unwilling to accept mediocrity as the alternative. Wherever you go, know that our world is tired of mediocrity and is crying out for excellence.”

Reach John Welsh at (951) 366-9474 or jwelsh@pe.com