



University of the Philippines Los Baños

# HORIZON



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51<sup>ST</sup> COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

## NEDA Secretary is UPLB commencement speaker

Dr. Arsenio M. Balisacan is the keynote speaker at the UPLB 51st Commencement Exercises on Aug. 5.

Dr. Balisacan is the director-general of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA). He graduated from UPLB in 1982 with a degree in MS Agricultural Economics.

As NEDA director-general, Dr. Balisacan also chairs the boards of the Development Academy of the Philippines, the Commission on Population and Development, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, the Philippine Center for Economic Development, and the Philippine Statistical Research and Training Institute, and serves as the vice-chair of the National Innovation Council.

He was also appointed as the first chairperson of the boards of the Philippine Statistics Authority and the Public-Private Partnership Center of the Philippines.

Before his current appointment as NEDA Secretary, he taught as a Professor of Economics at the School of Economics, UP Diliman, where he was also its dean from 2010 to 2012.

Dr. Balisacan was the director-chief executive of the Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) for six years, from 2003 to

2009. He was a SEARCA scholar when he took his master's degree at UPLB.

He is honored as an Academician by the National Academy of Science and Technology for his scholarly contributions to the field of development economics, leading to the improved understanding of poverty and inequality in the Philippines and the importance of agricultural and rural development in national welfare.

Dr. Balisacan is internationally recognized as an expert in economic development. He has authored and co-edited seven books and published over a hundred papers and book chapters on development.

Multiple national and international organizations have awarded him. In 2019, the UPLB College of Economics and Management recognized him with the Centennial Outstanding Alumnus Award.

In 2022, SEARCA and Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS)-Yusof Ishak Institute honored Dr. Balisacan by publishing a book of essays on the Philippine economy and the role of agriculture and economic policy.

He is scheduled to receive the 2023 Most Distinguished Alumnus Award from the UP Alumni Association on Aug. 19. (Jessa Jael S. Arana)



BALISACAN

Photo courtesy of NEDA

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# NYU professor to keynote UPLB GS hooding and recognition ceremonies



Dr. Michael Purugganan, a Filipino-American biologist and Silver Professor of Biology at New York University (NYU), is the keynote speaker at the UPLB Graduate School Hooding and Recognition Ceremonies on Aug. 4.

The Silver Professor title or The Julius Silver, Roslyn S. Silver, and Enid Silver Winslow Professorship is a hallmark of academic excellence, it being the most prestigious named professorship NYU offers.

He is also a former Dean of Science at NYU, an affiliated faculty member of NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) and the NYU Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, and since 2022, has been director of 19 Washington Square North, the academic space of NYUAD in New York City.

Dr. Purugganan has built an illustrious career in plant molecular evolution and genomics – becoming a renowned professor, establishing cutting-edge science programs and their necessary facilities, helping steer and advise postgraduate and research programs worldwide, and earning prestigious titles and awards in his wake.

In the Philippines, Dr. Purugganan serves as Scientist-in-Residence at the Asian Institute of Management in Makati and is a corresponding member of the National Academy of Science and Technology.

It was as a doctoral student that he began studying the effects of transposable elements, or DNA sequences that move from one location on the genome to another, on the evolution of gene structures.

Since then, he has not stopped pushing the frontiers of discovery in and knowledge of evolutionary and ecological genomics, particularly in identifying the molecular basis for evolutionary adaptations that occur in nature.

In his article “The practicality of science” published in PhilStar Global in 2011, he discussed how an understanding of species evolution can help breeders in devising more effective gene mapping approaches for creating novel and enhanced varieties.

Dr. Purugganan occasionally writes for The Huffington Post, the Philippine Star, GMA News Online, and Rappler.

This is not a belated foray into journalism. He was a student journalist at UP Diliman, a news stringer at known news outlets, and a contributor writing on politics and economics for news magazines in the Philippines in the 1980s. *(Josephine M. Bo with information from PhilStar Global, Illustrado magazine, and NAST website)*

## UPLB advances transformative academic practices in international conference



UPLB is working to future-proof not only itself but also its partner higher education institutions (HEIs).

Through the Transformative Academic Practice for Higher Education in the Philippines (TAPHEP), UPLB is pursuing its goal of providing agile leadership in higher education for local and state universities and colleges.

Toward this end, it held the first International Conference on Academic Practice in Higher Education (ICAPHE) on June 30 at the Acacia Hotel in Muntinlupa City.

ICAPHE gathered over 130 participants from 51 public and private Philippine HEIs to “mobilize advocates eager to confront the challenges of ensuring efficient and enriching higher education delivery through

better teaching and learning modes and methods.”

In his welcome remarks during the conference, UPLB Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr. emphasized the need for academic practice to adapt amidst the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world of today.

The event’s highlight was a signing ceremony symbolizing the commitment of participants to support a Community of Practice (CoP) for transformative academic practice for higher education. The CoP will drive improvement in HE teaching and learning by encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing among its members.

ICAPHE’s theme was “Championing Better Academic Practice.” TAPHEP is funded by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and headed by UPLB in collaboration with the United Kingdom’s University of Liverpool, UP Open University, and 18 other private and public HEIs in the country. *(Albert Geoffred B. Peralta)*





# Jenel M. Justo, BS Computer Science, tops UPLB Class of 2023

Jenel was not even sure that he would graduate this school year, which is why graduating with the highest distinction simply felt surreal for him.

Jenel chose BS Computer Science (BSCS) as his course in college after conducting a Google search. He was then undecided about which course to take, so he looked up the "top 10 most promising occupations" via Google. At the top of the list were fields related to computing, so, he wrote BSCS as his first choice in his UPCAT application. Despite starting off on a whim, he gradually grew fond of studying computer science, and slowly began to share the passion that his professors had when delivering lectures in innovative ways. The next thing he knew, he was invested in it.

Jenel considers being an "Isko" as both a privilege and a reminder. "It is our privilege to be called students at the University of the Philippines and to be molded by professors with the brightest minds. The title "Isko" also serves as a reminder of the very reason why we decided to pursue education in UP; it is a call to serve the people," Jenel said.

Surviving the challenges in UP, in general, was difficult for Jenel, but he strived to do his best in his academics amid the struggles in coping with the pandemic. The transition to remote learning was difficult because it made him feel isolated and disconnected from the moments that used to make academics fun.

He missed having someone waiting for him outside the classroom after an exam to ask about his answers to the questions or urging him to volunteer to answer questions in class. There were no more seatmates to turn to for clarifications. He felt isolated from the community that once made education engaging and enjoyable. Despite this, he embraced the situation and learned to better manage his time, explored various ways to stay connected with his friends, and prioritized safety above all else.

After all these challenges he experienced, he is proud to say: I survived. I am finally graduating!

In an interview, Jenel shared that he feels overwhelmed and humbled to be named as the valedictorian of Class 2023. He feels that it is almost like a dream to be recognized for all his efforts. To be rewarded with such a distinction filled him with immense pride and gratitude for the people who accompanied him throughout his journey.

Here is Jenel's advice to those continuing their journey in pursuing their degrees: take your time and enjoy it well. Remember, mistakes and failures are part of the journey so fret not. You are doing enough. In fact, you are doing great. You got this! *(Juan Paolo A. Aquino)*



## UPLB to house UP-KOICA genomics research center

UPLB will soon host the Agricultural Genomics Research Center (AGRC), a state-of-the-art facility dedicated to genome-based research and development for agriculture.

The forthcoming facility is a result of a collaborative project involving the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the University of the Philippines, and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI). Entitled "Capacity-Building for Higher Education and the Establishment of Agricultural Genomics Research Center at the University of the Philippines Los Baños," the project aims to strengthen



science and technology adaptation in the agricultural sector, establish the UPLB-AGRC, enhance genome-based research and development capabilities, and foster stronger bilateral relations between Korea and the Philippines. It will run until 2026.

The Korean government has pledged grant aid totaling USD 14,950,000 to support the project implementation,

with the Philippine government committing to secure funding that will ensure the project's sustainability.

During the project's signing ceremony on July 14, 2023 at UP Diliman, UPLB Chancellor Jose V. Camacho, Jr. gave his thanks to KOICA and the UP System for choosing UPLB as the project site.

He also noted that the project "complements UPLB's AGORA research and extension agenda" and would "significantly contribute to UPLB's capability to support and empower the Philippine agricultural sector through science and technology." *(Albert Geoffred B. Peralta)*



## Hooding & Recognition Ceremonies

# Over 300 students to receive graduate degrees from UPLB

More than 300 students will receive their graduate degrees at the 51st Commencement Exercises of UPLB on Aug. 5.

Eighty will be receiving their doctoral degree while 221 will be receiving their master's degree.

As part of the graduation season tradition, the UPLB Graduate School Hooding and Recognition Ceremonies will be held in their honor the day before, or on Aug. 4.

Two recipients of academic excellence awards will be recognized this year.

Earning this year's academic excellence award under the MS program is Nadine B. Coronado. Coronado, a candidate of MS Plant Genetic Resources Conservation and Management, studied the "Phenotypic and Genotypic Profiling of Selected Turmeric (*Curcuma longa* L.) Morphotypes from the Philippines" for her thesis.

Meanwhile, the following MS students will receive academic achievement awards: John Carlo L. Navasero, MS Agricultural Engineering; Rommel C. Nolos, MS Environmental Science; Jennifer P. Arcebucho, MS Development Communication; and Allen Jethro I. Alonte, MS Zoology.

Karen S. Bautista is this year's top doctoral graduate. Bautista, a candidate for PhD in Agronomy,

did her dissertation on "Spatial Variations in Soil Properties, Soil Productivity, and Crop Yield in Selected Corn Producing Provinces in Cagayan Valley Region, Philippines."

Following the top PhD graduate are four recipients of academic achievement awards, namely: Jennifer P. Fronteras, PhD in Biochemistry; Rachel S. Rodulfo, PhD in Food Science; Andres M. Tuates, Jr., PhD in Agricultural Engineering; and Felino J. Gutierrez, Jr., PhD in Community Development.

The UPLB Graduate School Hooding and Recognition Ceremonies is a special annual event that recognizes both masteral and doctoral graduates as well as those among them who will be given special awards.

The hooding ceremony is especially done to honor doctoral graduates. During the ceremony, the faculty adviser will place the doctoral hood on the shoulders of the graduates to signify success in completing their doctorate.

Following the Hooding and Recognition Ceremonies will be the UPLB Commencement Exercises. The graduate students will march with over 1500 undergraduate students from UPLB who will be officially receiving their degrees. (Kristine E. Araguas)



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