

Astronaut to give university speech from space

May 1 2014, by Pat Eaton-Robb

University of Connecticut alumnus Rick Mastracchio would have liked to deliver this year's graduation address to the school of engineering in person. But he'll be out of town on May 10—orbiting the globe on the International Space Station.

So UConn has arranged for the 54-year-old astronaut give the [speech](#) from space.

His recorded address will be shown on the video boards at Gampel Pavilion to about 5,000 people, including more than 400 graduating seniors and their families, and several members of Mastracchio's family, including his wife, Candi.

"I remain a bit nervous," said Kazem Kazerounian, the dean of the engineering school, who helped set up the unusual graduation speech.

"We have never tried anything like this before, and I know that the world will be watching us. So, while I'm excited, I still have to have my fingers crossed."

Mastracchio, who earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering and computer engineering from UConn in 1982, will receive an honorary doctorate.

He is wrapping up his fourth trip into space, an eight-month stint aboard the [space station](#), and has spent more than 51 hours on space walks outside the orbiting laboratory.

He recorded the speech over the weekend and beamed it back to NASA, which was converting the file Thursday to send to UConn.

This won't be Mastracchio's first contact with a Connecticut audience from space.

Last month, he and colleague Steve Swanson did a live question-and-answer session from the space station with children at Sandy Hook Elementary School, which has a new building since the December 2012 shooting that killed 26 people.

This is at least the third astronaut to give a commencement speech from space, NASA spokesman Jay Bolden said. The first two both occurred at the University of North Dakota, including an address in August by astronaut Karen Nyberg. The other was a brief live "drop-in" by astronaut Mike Fincke in 2004 during a speech by NASA chief Dan Golden.

Kazerounian is scheduled to fly back to Earth aboard a Russian spacecraft on May 13.

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