CALEXICO — Two hundred eighty-five students packed into the San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus library, some before their almost-final walk as an undergraduate, in atmosphere of happy, bittersweet nervousness.

“(I feel) very, very excited,” Imperial resident Kimberly Humes said with a colorful, open book on the back of her black, mortar board hat. “It’s nerve-wracking.”

Shortly afterward, the graduates earned their degrees in the 51st San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus commencement here Thursday evening, marking the first college or high school graduation ceremony in the Valley this season.

“It’s a bittersweet moment,” Humes’ fellow English major, Alegra Granados, said before the ceremony.

“It’s like ‘Oh my God, I’m graduating,’ but it’s not like junior high or high school where you still have school left,” she said.

Each graduate had a different story as to their journey in education that led them to commencement.

“IT took me a long time, but I’m finally here,” Christina Cervantes, of Heber, said.

Cervantes said it took her six years to finish her degree for various reasons including having her (now) 3-month-old child.

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For English major Justin Duron, surviving a pre-college battle with bone cancer and a severe case of meningitis while in cancer-recovery just before entering SDSU-IV seems like a long time ago.
"I had to relearn a lot of things," he said. "I was a real top student (before I had to relearn everything). I got a lot of
help here at SDSU."

Now Duron, along with his classmates and friends, have a lot to look forward to.

"I want to apply to grad school somewhere in San Diego," Duron said.

"I'm working on my Master's at Northern Arizona University," Humes said, adding that she wants to become a college
professor.

Granados said she'll continue her studies at SDSU-IV in order to become a high school English teacher.

"I'm going be taking on those teenagers," she smiled.

Amidst the picture taking, smiles and occasional student cheers and jeers of excitement, students — and their families
outside — welled up with pride while caught in the moment.

"I feel accomplished," Cervantes said.

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