

Stockton's Largest Graduating Class to Date Receives Degrees in Baccalaureate Ceremonies

Patti McGill Peterson, Expert on Global Education, Tells Graduates:
'Dream the Big Dream'

For Immediate Release; with photos on flickr of [morning](#) and [afternoon](#) commencements; graduate list attached

Sunday, May 15, 2016

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Galloway, N.J. - Patti McGill Peterson, presidential advisor for Global Initiatives at the American Council on Education (ACE) and a former president of two universities, today urged Stockton University graduates to "dream the big dream" and always to seek the kind of education that "engages the brain and the heart."

Peterson said when serving as president of both Wells College and St. Lawrence University, she understood that one of her responsibilities was "to help our students succeed in the world of work." But that wasn't enough, she said.

"I held a deep belief that one of my jobs was to support bigger dreams that would sustain our graduates through all the jobs they would hold and all the vicissitudes they would experience, eventually taking them to a more expansive sense of who they are and what they could do. I wish the same for you," she explained.

"It was reaffirming several months ago to hear President Obama support this point of view. He said the purpose of higher education is not just to transmit job skills, it is also to widen your horizons, to make you a better citizen, to help you evaluate information, to make your way through the world and to be more creative," Peterson continued.

Peterson was the speaker for morning and afternoon Baccalaureate commencements today in the Sports Center on the main Galloway campus, addressing members of Stockton's largest class in history. About 1,500 graduates participated in three ceremonies this spring, including the Doctoral and Master's Commencement held on Thursday, May 12.

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Peterson invoked “the dream of Vera King Farris,” Stockton’s third president, and said: “She would have continued her work in science but she chose to think and dream more broadly about how to prepare graduates like you for the wider world. She understood that to be the CEO of Stockton was not just a job; it was a calling to something much larger. Like Dr. Farris, I want all of you to have a big dream and to feel the pull of a calling.”

“Education for the big dream is not narrow; it engages the brain and the heart. It provides perspective, it connects dots and it can deepen your convictions, but it also helps you to be a constructive skeptic by developing what my father would have called ‘a good crap detector’ (aka to engage the mind in critical thinking).”

Peterson talked about how the late Steve Jobs of Apple “often talked about the importance of following your dreams and of enlarging them as you move through life. His ultimate stated dream was to ‘put a ding in the universe.’”

She concluded by saying: “I wish you the power of a broad and deep education from Stockton University, the courage to follow your dreams and ideals, the willingness to look to far horizons and n’shallah, the chance to put a ding in the universe.”

Peterson oversees work on the internationalization and global engagement of higher education for ACE, the major coordinating association for higher education institutions in the United States.

She has also worked to increase access and success in postsecondary education while a senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) and served as executive director of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), which has administered the Fulbright Scholar Program since 1947.

Peterson was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, with trustee Raymond Ciccone, a 1979 alumnus, and trustee Ellen Bailey conferring it.

“Throughout our history, Stockton has remained committed to its mission of excellence in teaching, reinforced by support for scholarship and dedication to service,” President Harvey Kesselman, a member of Stockton’s inaugural class, told the gathering.

“Although our footprint has changed over the past 45 years, our guarantee to students has been steadfast. Stockton has always been a place where students can plant themselves and grow,” Kesselman continued. “Those familiar with Stockton’s history know this to be our first motto, an invitation to intellectual and personal growth, pointing to our rich, natural environment.

“Our transformation from a small state college nestled in the Pinelands National Reserve to a growing university signifies our deep dedication to providing a distinctive educational experience at the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral levels and reflects Stockton’s evolution into a premier institution of higher learning,” he said.

“Candidates, your Stockton education equips you to succeed in your workplaces, personal lives, further education, and in your communities,” Kesselman continued. “Through academic rigor and co-curricular engagement we have nurtured your ability to communicate, collaborate, and to be innovative, all critical skills in the 21st century.”

He concluded by telling the graduates: “We have asked a lot of you during your years at Stockton and you have risen to each level of challenge. I will make one more request of you –

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change your world! Do this by the way you build communities, raise families, support social justice and educate others, and by being kind and civil to one another. You are our best hope for a meaningful future in a world filled with innovation, imagination and optimism.”

Brian Tyrrell, president of the Faculty Senate and associate professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies, addressed the graduates, saying: “I ask that you consider every day of your life an opportunity to reflect on the past and anticipate the future. Your Stockton liberal arts education can enhance the whole of your life’s journey.

“Draw upon it during times of challenge. Celebrate it during times of joy. Always, carry this milestone with you, and remember it whenever you apply what you’ve learned while at Stockton.”

Heather Gale, a Sociology/Anthropology major from Dorchester in Cumberland County, N.J., addressed the graduates of the Schools of Health Sciences and Social and Behavioral Sciences during the afternoon ceremony. After graduation she plans to work in the field of refugee resettlement and advocacy.

“Stockton has been a special place for us,” Gale told her fellow graduates. “We have gained new appreciation for our academic specialties, learned about ourselves and each other. At Stockton University, we experienced an environment of mutual support, empathetic acceptance, and openness to others that are markedly different than ourselves, which I believe, has helped each of us to succeed. When students sat through presentations of fellow classmates, or held discussions with people of differing opinions, always present was this idea of openness, acceptance, and community.

“This was due in part to caring professors who educated us in our fields, exposed us to new ideas, and were invested in our personal success.,” she continued “They asked us to expand ourselves beyond what we thought we were capable of doing, knowing, or being and we have answered that challenge which is why we are here today.

“One of the passions I have been fortunate to be able to share, is a sincere interest and desire to advocate for the rights of refugees,” Gale said. “Attending an advocacy art presentation here on campus inspired me to create this quilted wall hanging in honor of Alan Shenu, also known as Aylan Kurdi, the little 3-year-old boy who died crossing the Mediterranean with his family in the fall of 2015, one of the many refugees that have been forced to flee their homes because of persecution, war or conflict. Later, I was able to expand this idea and be part of Refugee Crisis Awareness Day at Stockton.

“As we graduate, diplomas in hand and move on to the next phase of our lives, let us choose to continue this openness, the idea of harnessing our passions, and sharing our skills with the communities we live in. We can accomplish great things when everyone is given space to express and utilize their special abilities in the community,” Gale concluded.

Dylan Martello, a Sustainability major with a concentration in Energy from Egg Harbor Township, N.J., addressed the graduates of the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Business, Education, General Studies and Natural Sciences and Mathematics during the morning Baccalaureate ceremony. He will be moving to Norwalk, Conn. to begin his career as a building systems analyst, incorporating sustainability design principles in commercial and residential buildings.

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“Today is a day not only to reflect on the accomplishments of each and every one of us, but also to prepare for what will be in store as we set out to make our dreams a reality,” Martello said.

“While we will all follow unique paths after today, one thing can be made certain about the lives of each and every one of us. Adversity will constantly present itself at every step of the way...and feelings of self-doubt will ultimately see to find its way into our minds.”

“Let us go on and promise to tell ourselves each and every single day: ‘Today is the first day I pledge to always take the initiative. Today is the first day I say that all of my goals are attainable. Today is the first day I say that my vote speaks volumes. Today is the first day I say that I am good enough to do anything I set my mind to.’

“This mindset is crucial. True belief in oneself is impossible without first having the courage to tell ourselves that ‘I am capable of accomplishing my goals.’ Let today’s commencement ceremony cultivate these seeds of self-confidence within each and every one of us,” he said.

The university awarded a posthumous degree to the family of Nikita Cross of Galloway, who was killed tragically in April before she could receive her Bachelor of Science degree in Social Work.

“Nikita, was highly regarded by students and fellow graduates,” said Kesselman. “In the words of one of our Social Work faculty members, Nikita was a compassionate and caring person with a thirst for knowledge. Nikita was a blossoming social worker, who was empathetic---an advocate for people who were vulnerable or oppressed....Her field instructor described Nikita as ‘determined and successful---a person who worked so hard to get to graduation day... She was also humble, honest and so much fun.....’ If she were here today, her smile would be beaming and her genuine congratulations would be extended to her classmates.”

Her daughter, Ibirah Butts, and her son, 10-year-old Sherwood Butts Jr., accepted the diploma in their mother’s honor, followed by a moment of silence in memory of Cross.

Interim Provost and Executive Vice President Susan Davenport presented the candidates to the president for conferral of their degrees. She also introduced Stockton’s first lady, Lynne Kesselman, a nationally recognized educator and Stockton alumna, to the gathering.

A Stockton family dynasty of sorts was among those celebrating at the afternoon ceremony. Shawn Heitzman, who earned his B.S. in Public Health, follows his brother, Russell, a 2013 graduate and a N.J. state trooper, and sister Kelli ’15, a manager at the Hand & Stone spa in Manahawkin, as the third Heitzman to graduate. Shawn is “hoping to get into management at the Vitamin Shoppe in Manahawkin where he works,” said their mother, Lisa.

After the morning ceremony, Sandipkumar Patel, 46, looked back on the long road to earning his B.S. in Chemistry from Stockton. Patel came to the United States from India in 2001, but his Chemistry degree from an Indian university was not accepted here. So the Galloway resident started a career in the casino industry, but in the summer of 2014, his supervisor told him the Showboat would be closing soon.

“I got in my car and drove to Stockton, where I entered the Unified Science Center,” he said. Although it was summer, he encountered Louise Sowers, associate professor of Chemistry,

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working in the building. After he explained his story, Sowers offered moral support and then helped him connect with academic advisors so he was able to start classes in September 2014.

Today he was cheered on by his wife, Uma, their twin 6-year-old sons, Luv and Kush, his father, Remesh, mother, Premillaben, and his friend, Hitesh Patel, who drove up from Florida to help celebrate. The two of them had started their pursuit of higher education together in India more than two decades ago.

The commencement procession was led by Grand Marshal G.T. Lenard, associate professor of Development Writing. The graduating class presented a student lounge in the I-Wing gallery to the university as its parting gift.

Singing of the national anthem was led by Danielle Quinn, a Stockton University student at the afternoon ceremony and by the Vocal Jazz Ensemble in the morning, with piano accompaniment by Music Professor Beverly Vaughn. Quinn also led the singing of the alma mater, "Ospreys on Parade," in the afternoon, while it was sung by 2016 graduates Nicholas Castillo and Danielle Harbright in the morning. The alma mater was written by Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing and 2001 Pulitzer Prize winner for poetry Stephen Dunn. The music was composed by Bud Noble, an adjunct faculty member, and the lyrics were adapted by Noble and Joseph Sramaty, a 2015 alumnus who now works in the Office of Student Affairs.

Elaine Bukowski, professor of Physical Therapy and a retired director of Stockton's Physical Therapy program, was the keynote speaker at the Master's and Doctoral commencement on May 12 in the Sports Center. Bukowski had taught at Stockton for the past 29 years, and was a founding faculty member and director of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program, the university's first doctoral program. She was awarded Stockton's Distinguished Service Award and professor emerita status.

Stockton faculty members Shelby Broughton, associate professor of Chemistry; Michael Hozik, professor of Geology; Evonne Kruger, associate professor of Business Studies, Management; Carol Rittner, Distinguished Professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the Dr. Marsha Raticoff Grossman Professor of Holocaust Studies; and Francis C. Thomas, professor of Business Studies, Accounting, also were awarded emeritus status this spring.

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