

## Stockton Celebrates New Graduates and University as 'Family' at December Commencement

***For Immediate Release; with photos on [flickr](#)***

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**Galloway, N.J.** - Stockton University is a family - one that gives its members a lot of support and expects them to do their best. This theme was repeated throughout the Fall Baccalaureate Commencement today, as nearly 600 graduates celebrated their achievements along with families, friends, university officials, faculty and staff.

Sonia Gonsalves, director of Academic Assessment and professor of Psychology, gave the keynote address in the Sports Center in Galloway at what is expected to be the university's final December Commencement.

"We're living in a time of rapid, unprecedented and unpredictable change," said Gonsalves. "When I attended my first Stockton commencement 25 years ago, human beings didn't tweet and 'Google' wasn't a verb.

"But amid the breakneck pace of constant change there are a few consequential constants, like the buoyant confidence of a Stockton commencement," she said.

"One of those constant, timeless anchors is family," Gonsalves said, noting that in a team-building exercise earlier this year, "family" was the one word used by faculty and staff to best describe Stockton.

"Today, I am speaking with you as one of the matriarchs of your Stockton family," she continued.

"In this capacity, I want you to know that we are as proud of your achievements as we are of your hard work, your willingness to learn from your mistakes and of the ways in which you have helped one another throughout your time at Stockton. You have all contributed to the richness of Stockton. Thank you.

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“Now, here comes the advice,” she said.

- Stay in the family business: “Your Stockton family is in the learning business! .... Keep learning about things that interest you, that are important to you and most importantly about yourself. ... You will be so much more powerful if you know why you believe the things that you do, your strengths, areas where you need support and if you know your emotions. As you learn about you, learn to appreciate the perspectives of others who have had different experiences, backgrounds, and skills.
- Uphold our family values: “Excellence is our minimum standard! You are from a family with a reputation for excellence and the Stockton name obligates you to do your best work.”
- Don’t forget where you came from: “We want to know how you are doing, and we need the richness of your experiences to motivate your siblings who are still here.”
- Enough is enough: “In the areas of achievement, excellence, learning, and growing there should be no limits on your aspirations; always go all out for the best that you can do. However for balance, I will pass on my grandmother’s wish for me each semester that I left for school. She always said, ‘I wish you enough.’ Enough love to keep you feeling secure. Enough challenges to stimulate and motivate you. Enough failures to make you humble. Enough success to give you confidence.

Gonsalves quoted writer Alex Haley as saying, “in every conceivable manner, the family is a link to our past, a bridge to our future.’

“Today, that bridge is more important than ever before. It is the bridge of family that can be counted on to withstand waves of change buffeting your life, your nation and your planet. ... A wonderful future is ahead of you. And your family, as always, is behind you every step of the way,” she said. “Congratulations, graduates; you have made your Stockton family proud!”

President Harvey Kesselman offered graduates “a few choice nuggets of advice that I believe can best serve you on your new journey.”

“The first, from Ellen DeGeneres, is: ‘Follow your passion, stay true to yourself, and never follow someone else’s path. Unless you’re in the woods. And you’re lost. And you see a path. Then by all means you should follow that.’

“Second, ‘Lost time is never found again,’ coined by Benjamin Franklin. So choose to make the most of your moments.

“And last, but certainly not least, understand this critical life lesson, authored by John Maxwell, which says ... ‘Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make, makes you.’

“From the moment you decided to choose Stockton, you joined a group of people, a second family, if you will, who were and still are, committed to your success. At Stockton, we fully believe in these words, ‘plant yourself where you can grow,’ which to us is much more than a motto. It is a call to action. It is an expectation. But most important, it is a choice. It is a choice that landed you here today,” Kesselman said.

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“As you move toward the next phase of your life, whether it’s graduate school, pursuing volunteer service, establishing a career, and/or starting a family, you will face many life-altering choices.... When you are called to make those transformational choices, remember who you are and who you’ve become since your time here at Stockton University,” he continued.

“Let the spirit of Osprey pride help you to soar beyond the ordinary and to reach the heights of the extraordinary. Let it encourage and empower you to stake claim to your calling. Let all the knowledge, wisdom, civic mindfulness, and social consciousness that have been poured into you become the foundation that anchors your decisions.”

Kesselman talked about the importance of community service and helping others, in addition to pursuing financial success.

“Just remember, graduates: Making a dollar enriches you; making a difference enriches everyone,” he said.

Brian Tyrrell, president of the Faculty Senate and professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies, told the graduates: “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.”

Maryam Sarhan, president of the Student Senate and a senior from Somers Point, N.J., gave the student address. Sarhan, who served as a student member of the Board of Trustees in 2015-16, is a Political Science major.

“Graduates, do not let fear, self-doubt, or the pursuit of wealth make you believe you cannot fully and passionately pursue what you truly love,” Sarhan said. “I hope that when you leave here, what has become a second home to so many of us, you spend each day immersing yourself in your passions, hobbies and interests that give you a sense of fulfillment and purpose.

“Most important of all, don’t forget what being a Stockton Osprey has taught you,” she said. “Loyalty, commitment, positivity, resiliency, and last, but not least, continually striving for excellence. Along the way, thank those who have unconditionally supported you. Good luck with all that you do as you pursue your dreams, and never forget where you came from.”

Rabbi Aaron Krauss, who was instrumental in Stockton’s founding, received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree, presented by Kesselman and Trustee Ellen Bailey. Krauss worked with founder Elizabeth Alton in the late 1960s to convince political leaders that a four-year college was needed in the region, leading to the creation of Stockton State College. He is also a former trustee and adjunct faculty member in Jewish Studies.

“Rabbi Krauss is recognized as a scholar in Jewish history and a religious and civic leader held in the highest regard,” said Kesselman, in presenting him with the diploma. Krauss has served as rabbi of Beth El Synagogue in Margate since 1983, having begun his rabbinical service in Atlantic City in 1962. As a community leader, he was founder and first chairman of the Greater Atlantic City Human Relations Forum, the founding president of Atlantic Human Resources, and founder of the local Inter-Faith Council of Clergy.

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Kesselman and Trustee Bailey also presented Gonsalves with a Distinguished Service Award, “in recognition of her outstanding leadership as professor of Psychology and director of Academic Assessment as well as for her role as educator, scholar and academic mentor, and her many professional contributions to Stockton University and to the State of New Jersey.”

Gonsalves, a leader in diversity and assessment work, was the recipient of the 2012 Professor of the Year award for Social and Behavioral Sciences and this fall was presented with a special tribute award for outstanding service by the Council of Black Faculty and Staff. She is the chair of the college-wide assessment committee and has presented her scholarly work on assessment and faculty development at regional, national and international conferences.

Margaret Lewis, professor of Biology, was the faculty grand marshal. Lewis, a paleontologist, is an international expert on pre-historic carnivores.

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Lori Vermeulen presented the candidates for degrees. She also introduced First Lady Lynne Kesselman, an alumna of the classes of 1982 and 2005 whose high school teaching career included being named an American Star of Teaching, a national award from the U.S. Department of Education.

Mackenzie Cornaglia and Brian Burke, members of Vocal Jazz Ensemble directed by Beverly Vaughn, professor of Music, led the singing of the alma mater, “Ospreys on Parade,” and the national anthem.

Kesselman asked the 19 graduates who are veterans or on active duty to stand and be recognized, and thanked them for their service. Nearly 700 undergraduate and graduate candidates received degrees this month but not all participated in today’s event. Master’s and doctoral graduates will take part in a May 10 commencement ceremony in Galloway.

After the ceremony, graduates gathered at a reception with family and friends. Natalia Fine, who received her B.S. in Accounting, came to Stockton from Russia, where as a linguistics student, she was advised to study language in another country.

“I liked it so much here I don’t want to go back,” she said, as she celebrated with her friends, Love Palzer and Julia Donohue. They all came from Russia and now live in Egg Harbor Township, N.J.

Gavin Fong, of South Brunswick, N.J., earned his Bachelor of Fine Arts and said he was impressed by the “great faculty, including Hannah Ueno,” professor of Art.

With him was Jordan Johnson, of Jersey City, who got a B.A. in Literature, and Johnson’s girlfriend, Angela Mazzara, of Somers Point, N.J. “The best thing I got from Stockton was four years with these guys - my family,” Johnson said, pointing to his mortarboard decorated with photos of the friends he made here.

Biochemistry graduate Kyle Hubble also praised the “great faculty” and said the Stockton experience “helped me decide what I want to do. I plan to get into a Ph.D. program in Biochemistry and become a research scientist.” His mother, Valerie Crossland, of Vineland, N.J., proudly showed off a photo of him as a little boy.

Spring Commencement for undergraduates will be held May 12 at Atlantic City Boardwalk Hall, highlighting Stockton’s commitment to Atlantic City, where a new campus is being built.

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