

## Scholar and Author Dr. Arnold Rampersad Tells Stockton Graduates: Universities Embody Ideals

But Plan to Face Adversity, He Says at Two Baccalaureate Ceremonies

***For Immediate Release; photos on [flickr](#); graduate list attached; click for link to [video](#)***

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**Galloway Township, NJ** - Dr. Arnold Rampersad, a nationally known scholar, author and editor, told graduates today at Stockton University's two Baccalaureate Commencement ceremonies, "You may forget some of the facts you've had to learn in courses, but almost certainly you will never forget the ideal vision of society and of life itself that the university embodies in its most precious essence."

Dr. Rampersad, the Sara Hart Kimball Professor Emeritus in the Humanities at Stanford University, was the keynote speaker at the 10 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. graduations in the Sports Center on the main Galloway campus. He co-edited the most recent of his many publications, "The Collected Letters of Langton Hughes," with Dr. David Roessel, professor of Greek Language and Literature at Stockton and Christa Fratantoro, a Stockton Literature graduate.

Dr. Rampersad, who has written about Herman Melville, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, Jackie Robinson, Arthur Ashe and Hughes, drew on their lives to talk about how even these "successful" people were sometimes "haunted by unhappiness, frustration and even a sense of failure."

Melville "sank into oblivion in his own lifetime," despite having authored books that included *Moby-Dick*, "a true masterpiece of American fiction," Dr. Rampersad said. Du Bois encountered such racism that he equated it with "barbarism" when he went south in 1885 to attend college in Tennessee. But despite that, Du Bois found Fisk University to be "what a college should be - 'a microcosm of the world and a civilization in potentiality,'" Dr. Rampersad noted.

Melville, Du Bois, Ellison, Hughes, as well as Ashe and Jackie Robinson, two famous athletes beset by racism and serious illnesses, all "lived with adversity, but also understood what I might  
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call the permanent place of adversity in life,” Dr. Rampersad said, “but also the very privilege of adversity.

“Perhaps you don’t quite understand, much less approve of, the phrase ‘the privilege of adversity,’ Dr. Rampersad continued. “How could something be wrong and also right? The fact is that adversity, struggle, is as innate a part of the human condition as breathing or blood.... Wisdom begins, I think, with recognizing this fact and then weaving it into the fabric of our lives even as we set out, as you do today, with a justified sense of personal success.”

Dr. Rampersad noted, “Jackie Robinson took as his motto the idea that ‘a life is important only in its impact on other lives.’”

He concluded his speech by telling the graduates: “Stockton University will be to you what Fisk was for Du Bois in 1885 - ‘a microcosm of the world and a civilization in its potentiality.’ I know you will do your utmost to realize that potentiality. To do so, you will draw year after year, as life pulls you out into its peculiar infinity, on the many ways your alma mater has given you keys to understanding the complex and often dangerous, but always alluring, inviting, exciting world in which we live.”

A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in biography and for the National Book Award in non-fiction prose, Dr. Rampersad has won fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the J.S. Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He received the National Humanities Medal from President Obama in 2011.

Dr. Rampersad was presented with an honorary degree, the Doctor of Humane Letters, by Mady Deininger, Chair of the Stockton Board of Trustees, and Trustee Raymond Ciccone, in recognition of Dr. Rampersad’s record of excellence in the humanities and scholarship.

Dr. Harvey Kesselman, Stockton’s Acting President, presided over both Saturday Commencements, as well as the Master’s and Doctoral Commencement held Thursday. About 1,400 graduates received degrees this spring, including 1,271 undergraduates and 119 master’s and doctoral graduates.

“I am delighted to be here among these fine candidates for baccalaureate degrees, their families and friends,” said Acting President Kesselman. “As a graduate of Stockton myself, I am extremely proud to announce that you will be the first to receive a degree from ‘Stockton University.’

“Since our founding in 1969, Stockton’s mission has remained unchanged: excellence in teaching, commitment to scholarship, and dedication to service,” Acting President Kesselman continued. “Our new name and designation signifies Stockton’s continuing development as a distinguished institution of higher learning and reflects our growing academic programs of excellence – at the baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral levels.

“We are recognized in New Jersey -- and continue to grow regionally and nationally -- as a high-value, high-quality institution.”

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Acting President Kesselman concluded his welcoming remarks by telling the graduates, “The Stockton spirit of education and values will carry you a long way. When you leave this graduation today, do not forget the lessons learned at Stockton in building communities, and in joining hands. You are our hope and our best future.”

Lauren Duffy, a speech pathology and audiology major from Bloomingdale, in Passaic County, addressed the graduates of the Schools of Arts and Humanities, Business, Education, General Studies and Health Sciences during the morning baccalaureate ceremony. Duffy’s parents are also Stockton graduates.

“The thought of life after college might be an unsettling one, but I am telling you we are ready,” Duffy told her fellow graduates. “We have been given the necessary tools for success. Stockton has provided us with a unique education. One that has included an intimate and nurturing learning environment and faculty that we have come to respect and to count upon to guide us along the way. We have the skills to go out there in the ‘real world,’ take big risks, and leap into the next part of life’s journey.”

Heidi Shelley, the mother of four and a biochemistry and molecular biology major, spoke to the graduates of the Schools of Natural Sciences and Mathematics and Social and Behavioral Sciences during the afternoon.

Shelley, a resident of Mays Landing, thanked her children and her fiancé, Don Cooper, for believing in her dreams, and her parents for encouraging as a child. She credited Cooper, a chiropractor, with inspiring her to want to go to medical school and thanked her fellow student, Tyler Golato, who also encouraged her to apply. She said she is the first in her family to achieve a college degree and she now plans to enter the School of Osteopathic Medicine at Rowan University to pursue a career in family medicine.

“Tyler showed me that physicians are not merely walking medical dictionaries and that my gifts of communication and understanding are what patients desire most,” Shelley said. “If it wasn’t for him, I would have settled for something less. And if it wasn’t for all my incredible professors, I wouldn’t have been prepared.”

She urged her classmates to reactivate their childish sense of wonder and desire to explore.

“There is always more to know, more to strive for... more to discover,” she said “As we continue our journeys, just remember that there is only the NOW and it is only temporary, a fleeting moment in the overall continuity of space and time. So, my advice to all of you is: Don’t get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life.”

Stockton has joined a growing trend in moving away from identifying valedictorians and salutatorians for commencement ceremonies. The student speakers were selected through an application process initiated by the Provost’s Office and supported by the Faculty Senate.

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Dr. Rodger Jackson, President of the Senate Faculty and Professor of Philosophy, told the graduates: "You have earned this day."

He went on say, "Ninety-three percent of the world's population does NOT have what you are about to receive," a college degree "Literally billions of people will not have the opportunity to do what you have done.

"People will increasingly look to you to make decisions and take actions," Dr. Jackson continued. "You will occupy a space in your community of authority and power."

Speaking for the faculty, Dr. Jackson concluded: "We want you to know that we are confident that you will achieve honor as you leave us."

Among the many stories at the ceremonies was that of Kelli Heitzman of Manahawkin, one of three in her family to attend Stockton after being raised by a single parent. She was cheered on by her brother, Russell, a 2013 graduate who is now is a NJ State Trooper, her brother Shawn, a current student and her mother, Lisa, as she received her B.S. in Hospitality and Tourism Management Studies.

"Graduating from Stockton is proof to myself that I can do what I set my mind to," Heitzman said. "I have been blessed with the most supportive family and the most influential professors on my side throughout my entire journey at Stockton."

Sgt. Jonathan Stretch, the fiancé of Elyse Grant of Egg Harbor Township, flew in from Texas where he is serving in the Army, to see her receive her degree in B.A. in Literature with a creative writing track.

"After graduation I plan on moving to Texas and applying for positions in the editing and publishing field," said Grant, who also sees travel and graduate school in her future.

"Stockton has helped me to grow as a person as well as a student," Grant added. "Before attending Stockton, I was at a community college and did not know half of the opportunities that I could do in my major. All of the professors I had at Stockton helped me become more confident in my writing and myself. Stockton changed my outlook on what the college experience is, making it the most rewarding experience I have had."

Penny Becica-Kraus of Lower Township was surrounded by three of her five married children and several grandchildren as she received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

"I'm proud to be a part of the co-hort from Cape Regional Medical Center - we're all graduating together today," said Becica-Kraus, on whose mortarboard was written: "Never 2 Old." She said she was one of five from the medical center in Cape May Court House, NJ, all married with children, who completed the B.S.N. program at Stockton this semester.

Three members of the Stockton community were presented with Distinguished Service Awards by Trustees Deininger and Ciccone: ***-more-***

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- Dr. Harvey Kesselman, Acting President, “for his outstanding leadership, extraordinary record of commitment, engagement, and service over the last 35 years, and his other many significant contributions to Stockton University, the community, and the State of New Jersey.”
- Muhammad Ayub, “for his outstanding leadership and service on behalf of the City of Atlantic City, as a founding member of the Islamic Academy of South Jersey, his instrumental role since 2011 as a member of Stockton’s 2020 Strategic Planning - Global Perspectives Committee, and his other significant contributions to Stockton University, the community, and State of New Jersey.”
- Ralph E. Hunter, “for his outstanding vision and leadership as the founder and president of The African American Heritage Museum of Southern New Jersey, his commitment to preserving and educating those on the history and contributions of African Americans in Atlantic City and Southern New Jersey, and his other significant contributions to Stockton University, the community, and State of New Jersey.”

Emeritus status was awarded to retiring faculty, by nomination of their program’s faculty in recognition of their teaching, scholarship and many contributions to the Stockton community:

- Linda Aaronson, Associate Professor of Nursing;
- Alan Arcuri, Professor of Political Science;
- Rogers Barlatt, Professor of Chemistry;
- Jack Connor, Professor of Writing;
- Alfonso Corpus, Associate Professor of Art;
- William Daly, Distinguished Professor of Political Science;
- Nancy Davis, Professor of Pathology;
- Penelope Dugan, Professor of Writing;
- Richard Hager, Associate Professor of Marine Science;
- Elaine Ingulli, Professor of Business Studies, Law;
- Lucinda Jassel, Professor of Political Science;
- William Jaynes, Professor of Social Work and African American Studies;
- Elinor Lerner, Associate Professor of Sociology;
- David Lester, Distinguished Professor of Psychology;
- Saralyn Mathis, Associate Professor of Computer Science and Information Systems;
- Lance Olsen, Professor of Music;
- Whiton Paine, Associate Professor of Business Studies, Marketing;
- Ralph Werner, Associate Professor of Biology.

The grand marshal for both baccalaureate ceremonies was Dr. Deborah Figart, Professor of Education and Economics. Dr. Susan Davenport, Interim Provost, presented the candidates to Dr. Kesselman, who conferred their degrees.

Singing of the alma mater, “Our Stockton,” was led by graduating senior Joseph Sramaty in the morning and students Marissa Phifer and Breanna Pettus in the afternoon, as the graduates

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and audience members joined hands and raised them above their heads in a symbol of unity.

The alma mater's lyrics are by Dr. Stephen Dunn, Stockton Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Creative Writing and winner of the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. The music is by Ellen Grolman, a cellist, educator and music reviewer.

The national anthem was sung by Stockton a Capella in the morning and the vocal group Highest Praise in the afternoon.

Musical selections also were performed by the Stockton Chamber Orchestra and by Dr. Beverly Vaughn, professor of Music, on piano.

David Tilton, president and chief executive officer of AtlantiCare and a nationally recognized health care executive, was the keynote speaker at Stockton's fourth spring Master's and Doctoral Commencement on May 7 in the Sports Center.

Stockton conferred degrees to graduates of 14 master's and doctoral programs this spring. Dr. Kristin Jacobson, Associate Professor of Literature, was the grand marshal at Thursday's ceremony.

Joseph M. Johnson of Galloway was the student speaker Thursday, when he received his M.S. in Computational Science. Johnson, who has served as a Residential Assistant at Stockton, is currently working on a model to predict retention in housing for the benefit of the Stockton community. He will be pursuing a doctoral degree in Biomedical Engineering in the fall at the University of Rochester.

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