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Approximately 4,200 degrees conferred during Georgia Southern's 2021 Spring Commencement ceremonies

May 14, 2021



This week, approximately 4,200 undergraduate and graduate students from Georgia Southern University's Statesboro, Armstrong and Liberty campuses received associate, baccalaureate, masters, specialist and doctoral degrees in six Spring 2021 Commencement ceremonies.

Georgia Southern President Kyle Marrero welcomed the graduates and their guests to the ceremonies, held at the Savannah Convention Center in Savannah on May 8, and the Allen E. Paulson Stadium in Statesboro on May 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Following a rendition of the national anthem by vocal performance majors, Marrero extended his personal congratulations to the graduates on their academic achievements.

"I need to say how nice it is to see you all today — to be together, in person, and celebrate together as Eagle Nation," Marrero said. "I don't need to tell you that this year has been challenging for all of us, but I am very proud of how together, we have persevered allowing us to have a successful semester and today, our commencement ceremony. You, our graduates, deserve this recognition. This graduation is a momentous occasion for Georgia Southern University, as well as for all of you. Today, you are part of history at Georgia Southern."

Speakers, all of whom are Georgia Southern alumni, included:

- Dr. Annette Rainge ('83), president of the Georgia Dental Association (GDA)
- Rahman Anjorin ('09), sports professional, life skills coach, educator, author and speaker, who currently serves as player manager in the Player Affairs Department with the National Football League (NFL) Players Association
- Ben Freakley ('00,'03,'12), head of mental performance for the Toronto Blue Jays Major League Baseball team
- Lt. Col. Michael J. Gutierrez ('04), commander of the 330th Combat Training Squadron at Robins Air Force Base
- Jason C. Louder ('99), actor who has played "Frank 'Two-Bits' Tanner" on The CW Television Network's "Black Lightning" and "Cressy" on the Hulu original series, "Wu-Tang: An American Saga"
- Patrice Buckner Jackson, Ed.D., ('16), leader, teacher, coach and student advocate who currently serves as associate vice president for student affairs at Augusta University

Rainge applauded graduates for their accomplishments and recognized that they are part of a special group that withstood seemingly insurmountable challenges over the last year. Yet, from a difficult time, unique opportunities arose, she said.

Freakley congratulated the graduates from the commencement stage and shared advice he directs to professional athletes at the top of their game. He encouraged them to let three principles guide them to greatness: goals, gratitude and giving.

“We were put on this earth to reach upward,” he said. “Set ambitious goals and share them with people who care enough about you to hold you accountable to what you want to accomplish. Gratitude is the ability to shine a light on what’s right. Take time to be grateful for the people and experiences in your life, especially the tough ones that offer you a lesson you might not be able to appreciate in the moment. Finally, giving. Many people here today have given to me and I’m a better man for it. As you move forward do so with the hunger to set new goals, grateful for what and who you have in your life and ready to give fully of yourself in your work and in your relationships. I promise the best is yet to come.”

Gutierrez spoke to the crowd as the first in his family to go to college.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class of 2021, today is your day,” said Gutierrez. “Whether you come from a long, proud history of Georgia Southern alumni, or if you are like me, a first-generation college graduate, your accomplishments are nonetheless remarkable. You lived through both sides of a global pandemic and you have emerged stronger and more determined than when you arrived as freshmen.”

He then challenged them with a simple question.

“It was almost 10 years ago when I found myself in an auditorium surrounded by approximately 120 fellow Air Force officers, all top performers in their respective career fields,” he shared. “There was a man in the front of the room and he asked us all one simple question. Why? It’s how we all discovered the world. For the future entrepreneurs and leaders in the audience, it’s not what you do or how it’s accomplished. It’s the ‘why’ that matters. If you understand the root of why and you can communicate that vision to others you will inspire their actions. Surround yourself with the people that share your passion, that intrinsically understand why you get up in the morning and the labor you decide to invest in. Finally, seek out and do not shy away from critical feedback and opportunities to grow. I hope each of you are able to embark on a life filled with experiences you are passionate about with people that share your ‘why.’”

Using her experience as the daughter of a young mother without many resources who went on to earn a doctorate degree and work in higher education for more than two decades, Jackson encouraged graduates and guests to remember that “I can. I do. I must.”

“My mom told me that I could and would do anything,” said Jackson. “And she never allowed me to make excuses not to fit into anybody else’s mold, but to be the mold that I was created to be. As you cross the stage, I want you to hold your head high and your shoulders back. I want you to recognize the accomplishments and the hard work you have put in. I want you to get ready for your future. Congratulations and welcome to the ranks.”

As each of the ceremonies wrapped, Marrero invited students to move their tassels from right to left and stand for a rendition of the University’s alma mater as new graduates.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 140 different degree programs serving almost 27,000 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](https://www.GorgiaSouthern.edu).

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