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Approximately 2,100 degrees conferred during Georgia Southern's 2022 Fall Commencement ceremonies

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This week, approximately 2,100 undergraduate and graduate students from Georgia Southern University's Statesboro, Armstrong and Liberty campuses received associate, baccalaureate, master's, specialist and doctoral degrees in two Fall 2022 Commencement ceremonies.

Georgia Southern President Kyle Marrero welcomed the graduates and their guests to the ceremonies, held at the Enmarket Arena in Savannah on Dec. 10 and the Allen E. Paulson Stadium in Statesboro on Dec. 13.

"Congratulations on your special day, where we recognize the importance of this occasion in your life," said Marrero at the opening ceremony. "I don't need to tell you about your unique college

journey, which has been challenging for all of us, but I'm very proud of how, together, we have persevered, allowing us to have a successful semester and today our commencement ceremony.

"You, our graduates, deserve great recognition. This is a momentous occasion for Georgia Southern University, as well for all of you. Today, you are part of history at Georgia Southern."

The president then welcomed Deborah Nelson ('90), a national trial lawyer and partner in the Seattle law firm of Nelson Boyd, PLLC, who addressed the crowd.

She acknowledged expectations set for her by her family, which included a straight line from high school to college and then marriage and family.

"I followed a curvy path instead of the linear path that was expected of me," shared Nelson. "There are chapters in your life, which means the circumstances in your life will change, just as your needs, your interests, your wants, your desires and the people around you will change.

"So today, I'm going to share with you six tips that I learned that I hope will help you as you figure out what comes next. Because although you're graduating today, you're not finished learning."

Nelson suggested that graduates should surround themselves with good people from various backgrounds.

“Make friends with people who are different from you, who look different than you, who grew up somewhere else, who have different experiences, backgrounds and orientations,” she said. “People who have different things to teach you.”

Be kind to people as you travel through all of the chapters of your life, and go the extra mile in your career, she shared. An enhanced career can equate to an enhanced life.

“Set an audacious goal,” Nelson encouraged. As a non-athlete new to Seattle, Nelson joined a team that trains runners.

“I ran three full marathons, 40 half marathons, 24 triathlons and raced in more bike centuries than I can count. I never dreamed I could do any of that.

“What can you do?” she posed.

“Finally, travel, get out of your daily routine, solve problems in a foreign language, and take care of your health and body.

“In conclusion, graduates, when you consider what comes next for you, do you travel a straight, linear path or do you pick the curvy path?” Nelson asked. “I will tell you—pick the curvy path. It’s more interesting and unexpected adventures await you.

“Be open. Say yes. Challenge yourself. Get out of your head. Seek the human connection and surround yourself with real people.”

In Statesboro, Liz Crisafi ('95), the global vice president of marketing for IHG Hotels and Resorts, spoke to the stadium crowd.

“Congratulations to the graduating Class of 2022!” she cheered. “I am a proud Eagle.”

Success, she noted, isn’t predetermined.

“You will determine it,” said Crisafi. “It’s not some magical place that you arrive at when you get to the top of the career ladder. It’s certainly not going to be defined by your job title, your social following, your celebrity or your bank account. And the one thing that I know now is that success will continue to change over time because you will change over time. Your life is going to change over time. So you need to be flexible with your view of it. And there isn’t just one way to be successful.”

Crisafi didn’t know what she wanted to do when she enrolled at Georgia Southern until she took a class with former communications arts professor Kent Murray, who changed her life.

“He pushed me not only to know what I was learning, but why I was learning it,” she recalled. “And I mean really listen and pay attention to what was happening. To trust my intuition and appreciate my creativity. I’d never worked harder, been more fulfilled or pushed out of my comfort zone than when I was here with Professor Murray’s class. Because of him and the rest of the faculty and staff here, I didn’t just earn a degree. I learned life skills.”

She cited failure as the key to success.

“I’ve taken a long and winding road, but when you look at what you have to face, failures are going to be critical to your success,” Crisafi stated. “Early on, we’re taught that failure is not something we discuss. Don’t fail a class. Don’t fail a quiz. Don’t fail at your job. Don’t fail at your dreams. But what we should teach our kids is that failures will be the greatest teachers in your life. It is through failure that you will learn how to succeed.

“You are the architect of your own destiny. Don’t lose enthusiasm and optimism despite your failures. Know you’re building your future and you’re growing into the person that you’re meant to be. And while that’s scary, it’s also very exciting. I got knocked down and I got up again because of the valuable skills that I learned here at Georgia Southern. On Eagle’s wings, you will soar and you will succeed on your terms and yours alone.”

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 140 different degree programs serving more than 25,500 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia with expert faculty, the University is focused on public impact research and engaging learning opportunities through knowledge and know-how that prepare our students to take ownership of their lives, careers and communities. Visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu.

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Graduating student had ‘wild’ time at Georgia Southern

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Carson Moore never wanted to go to college.

Moore, a graduating senior with a keen interest in animals, will receive a BS in biology from Georgia Southern at Paulson Stadium on Dec. 13.

Growing up, Moore worked in a horse barn for twelve years and volunteered for a mini-zoo in her hometown of Macon, Georgia. She did not want to leave her work with animals behind to go to college.

“But my mom asked me ‘why don’t you just tour Georgia Southern?’” said Moore. “So when I came to look, I fell in love with the campus and then I found out there was a Wildlife Center, and I was like, oh yeah, this is it.”

That “it” moment pointed her in the direction of a career path that includes her passion for animals.

“When I came on the Georgia Southern tour, I showed up at the Wildlife Center and met Steve Hein [executive director] and asked if he could give me a job. And he said ‘I don’t know, maybe.’ So I just kept emailing everybody at the Center constantly and eventually, to my luck, I was able to start at the Wildlife Center the very first week of my college career.”



Moore at the Center for Wildlife Education and the Lamar Q Ball Jr. Raptor Center

In addition to her heavy course load as a biology major, Moore continued as a student worker at the Center for Wildlife Education and the Lamar Q Ball Jr. Raptor Center. She’s done it all, from educational programs, to feeding the wild animals, to the messy job of cleaning up after them.

“I think being a STEM major is difficult. But any time I had questions with anything, my advisors, my professors, everyone was always so helpful and guiding. You know, I really didn’t want to go to college, but having all these people encourage me to keep going was just very, very impactful.”

Moore works with the public nearly every day at the Wildlife Center. Frequently, elementary, middle and high schools come on field trips for the educational programming at the Center.

“Working with the animals, presenting programs to the public and doing off-sites where we take animals and educate people are my favorite things”, explained Moore. “I have been everywhere and met lots of different people, that’s

super fun. And then also I’ve met all of my best friends through the Wildlife Center. I fit right in and I have really enjoyed it.”

Moore likes to specialize in the birds of prey, although she works with all the animals at the Wildlife Center.

“I think my favorite animals to work with are definitely the birds of prey, but probably the eagles just because they’re very impressive,” said Moore. “In fact, I got to have Freedom [the Georgia Southern live mascot] in my graduation photos on Sweetheart Circle.”

Moore has been a student worker at the Center for Wildlife Education for the duration of her college career and has loved every minute of it. After graduation, her work with animals is about to continue.

“I am in the process of applying for a full-time position at the Wildlife Center as the education assistant. So that’s very exciting. I’ll just be continuing what I love to do.”

Georgia Southern and the Wildlife Center have had a huge impact on Moore’s life.

“I wouldn’t be in the place that I am right now without Georgia Southern. To have a wildlife center that is connected to the University is just a huge benefit and it’s something that’s really unique. A lot of universities don’t have all the opportunities that Georgia Southern has along with its beautiful campus.”

Now that Moore is graduating, how does her mom feel about her future at the Wildlife Center?

“Oh, she’s absolutely over the moon about it. She’s always encouraged me to follow my passions and she knows I love animals. So if I’m happy, she’s definitely happy.”

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Educator turned soldier: Georgia Southern ROTC graduate commissions as officer in National Guard after returning for MBA degree

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William Collins

Bulloch County native William Collins ('17, '22) has dreamed of becoming a soldier for as long as he can remember.

“I’ve always had a desire to serve our country and to be a part of the military, but it never really quite worked out conveniently,” Collins said. “There was always something that came up, some kind of a barrier where I didn’t pursue it.”

Instead, Collins pursued an undergraduate degree in mathematics at Georgia Southern University and went on to become a math teacher at Bulloch Academy in Statesboro, Georgia. There, he was a “jack-of-all-trades,” he said, where he coached football, helped in the weight training room and led the science department, among other things.

Going into his fourth year of teaching is when Collins again felt the call to become a soldier.

“Fast forward, I’m teaching, I’m coaching, I have a full time job, but really, I just had this kind of lingering want and desire to serve and actually follow through with action,” Collins said.

At the time Collins was inspired by his son and wife to look within and create a legacy for his family.

“I realized I want my legacy to be that I did the things I said I was passionate about,” he said. “I did not want to be one of those people who always said they wanted to join the military but never did. I told myself ‘enough is enough, I am going to act.’”

He then began building his legacy by enlisting in the Army National Guard in 2020. As he went on to basic training and other duties as part of his enlistment, the more he felt called to pursue a military career.

Soon after, he left his teaching career, returned to Georgia Southern as a graduate student in the web MBA program through the Parker College of Business, and joined the University’s ROTC program.

“I did the web MBA program, and the ROTC portion of my day was in person on campus,” Collins said. “That gave me a little bit of freedom and flexibility.”

As a graduate student in the ROTC program, Collins was able to connect with his peers and serve as a mentor to younger cadets.

“Everything is peer on peer leadership where you hold the reins and are kind of in charge of what your future is going to look like and the development of other people,” he said. “I’ve really enjoyed that I get to pour into younger cadets coming into the program, really investing in them and seeing them grow.”

His experiences in the ROTC program and as a graduate assistant at the Shooting Sports Education Center have helped Collins, now a father of two, soon to be three, hone in further on the kind of legacy he wants to leave.

“The legacy I hope I leave is that I had a positive impact on the people around me and helped them to succeed in whatever they were trying to do,” Collins said. “I think the environment of culture of Georgia Southern has kind of helped develop that as a core value for me.”

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Nontraditional student returns to Georgia Southern University to chart new career path

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Khristine Clark Hammond

For years, Khristine Clark Hammond believed she had a solid professional career. She was an exercise physiologist, a health coach and a manager of wellness and fitness programs. But she found herself at a crossroads during the COVID-19 pandemic. After working in Savannah hospitals for more than two decades, she lost her job. The hospital fitness facility she managed closed during the pandemic.

“I’d been there 18 years,” Clark Hammond said, “and that was all I really knew.”

Now at a critical turning point, Clark Hammond decided to pursue the career she had always wondered about.

“I’d always thought about going back to school for nursing, but because I was making good money and I was comfortable in my position, I didn’t have a huge drive to do it,” she admitted. “I was also balancing going into debt for more school, and really feeling like I should do it. So, when the pandemic hit and my facility closed, life circumstances helped me make the decision. It was like divine intervention. God pushed me to go

ahead and make the decision.”

During Georgia Southern University’s Dec. 10 commencement ceremony at the Enmarket Arena in Savannah, Clark Hammond could not have been more excited. In the month after she turned 50, she walked across the stage for her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. However, this was not the first time she was a student on the Armstrong Campus. She earned her bachelor’s in biology from Armstrong State College in 1995 and a master’s in kinesiology from Georgia Southern in 1998. Clark Hammond was admitted into the Waters College of Health Professions in the spring of 2021.

“It was a little bit of a culture shock,” said the nontraditional student. “It was much more challenging than I thought it would be. But everybody was in the same situation, so we all

bonded over having this stressful program to get through, and you really do have a great sense of accomplishment at the end.”

The Class of 2022 graduate also noticed significant classroom changes since she received her first degree.

“Back when I was in school, we didn’t have the internet,” Clark Hammond recalled. “I remember one time I procrastinated on a paper, and I had to drive to the Medical College of Georgia to get the resources I needed. Now you can just hop online and find resources and videos to reinforce what is taught in the classroom. As a multimodal learner, this was a significant contributor to my success as a student.”

Despite the age gap between her and most other students, the newly graduated nurse said she always felt like she fit in.

“My first semester, we had someone as young as 19 in the class,” Clark Hammond said. “While there was a wide range of ages in our cohort, we all shared the same experiences of this challenging program, which made it easy to relate to one another and ultimately bridge the age gap.”

The nurse also credited the work of the nursing school’s dedicated faculty and staff for the graduates’ success.

“Having been through the program, I would say they definitely prepare you,” she said. “You’re going to be given the resources you need to prepare, the support that you need, and the opportunities to explore the field and get a good taste of the various areas and specialties within the nursing field. The program really gives you the groundwork to be a successful nurse.”

The groundwork included opportunities for real-world experiences during two nursing externships. During clinical training last spring at Memorial Health in Savannah, Clark Hammond was introduced to the hospital’s labor and delivery program. She completed an externship over the summer and her practicum there this fall, which led to a job offer. She plans to begin working there in February.

“I had never thought about labor and delivery before I was in this program,” she said. “But this past spring, we had our maternal/infant clinical and I just fell in love with labor and delivery on the first day. The unit really allows the nurse to experience diversity within one unit. There is the post-anesthesia care unit or triage for emergency patients and delivery rooms. Labor and delivery is a fast-paced unit and that’s something that really appealed to me.”

Clark Hammond is thrilled about what lies ahead now that she has completed her studies. She was among the nursing graduates who gathered for the pinning ceremony held two days before commencement. This traditional rite of passage recognizes students’ hard work and welcomes them into the nursing profession. The ceremony had one more surprise for Clark Hammond when the Outstanding BSN Clinician Award winner was announced.

“They called my name and I thought, ‘Oh, that’s your name,’” said Clark Hammond, “and I couldn’t believe it. As I walked up to the stage, I felt myself getting all welled up and I had to fight back the tears. I was just so shocked and felt extremely honored.”

Clark Hammond describes herself as a lifelong learner and said graduating is bittersweet.

“It’s bittersweet because you have built relationships with these students and the faculty,” she said. “I am excited for the new beginning, but I am going to miss everyone a lot. But I know that I will be back for more. I am going to take some time to get started in my new career, but I see myself back in school working on a Master of Science in Nursing degree in the not-so-distant future.”

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