

# Record-setting class completes WSSU journey

BY LAYLA FARMER  
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University has graduated its largest class in history. Nearly 800 degree candidates danced, cried, hugged, squealed and laughed their way across the stage at the Lawrence Joel Veteran's Memorial Coliseum Saturday morning.

"I'm just so excited today, about graduating from Winston-Salem State University. I had a tremendous experience and I am just excited to be here," commented Business Administration Major LaMonica Moore. "It's commencement, meaning that you're going to start a new journey so this is only opening up the door for me to soar as high as I can go."

Intermittent screams from the crowd answered the energy on stage, as graduates paused to wave to loved ones or mug for the camera. Those seated swayed in their seats, anxious for their turn to become the newest alumni of Winston-Salem State University.

"For those of us in higher education, this is the time of year that we wait for," Chancellor Donald Reaves told the crowd of more than 12,000. "This is what it's really all about."

It was a bittersweet moment for Cum Laude graduate Kristopher Ferguson, who was orphaned at age 10. The Miami, Fla.-native triple majored in accounting, finance and economics, becoming one of the only WSSU graduates ever to do so.

"I took up chemistry as a minor, but I just decided accounting wasn't for me. But I didn't want to drop it because I only needed one class," he explained. "So I decided to put in an extra year and finished two majors in that one year."

Majoring in three disciplines required long hours of study and a grueling course load, Ferguson revealed.

"I actually took 24 credit hours this semester," he said. "I knew if I stayed an extra year I had to make it worth it. I just sort of buckled down and hit the books really hard. I was really happy to finish with six A's out of those eight classes."

Marketing Major Jeromy Bailey started his own customized shoe business while attending WSSU.

Working in conjunction with two friends, Bailey created original artwork on sneakers for his fellow classmates.

The idea garnered the threesome a first place award from the university's undergraduate business plan competition.

Though he will soon relocate to Orlando, Fla. to begin his career at Proctor & Gamble, Bailey says he and his partners are committed to keeping the project alive.

"Absolutely it's something that we don't really want to let go so we're trying to develop it as much as we can," he commented. "Even though I have other career aspirations and things I've already committed

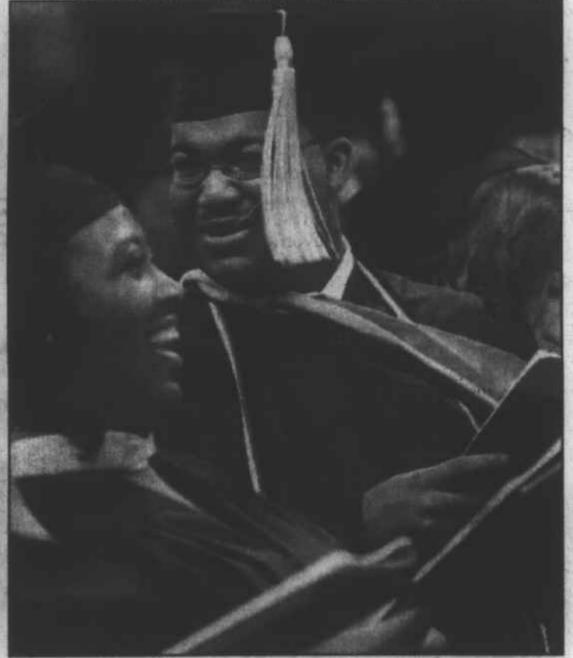


Thousands gather at the coliseum for Saturday's commencement.

Photos by Garrett Garms/WSSU



An excited graduate celebrates.



Kristopher Ferguson celebrates his achievements.

to, it's still something I think we can develop a little bit more."

Candrice Nolan transferred to WSSU her sophomore year.

"I've enjoyed all of the opportunities that I've had at Winston-Salem State University. When I first stepped on campus, there was a sense of family, of community and I really enjoyed that," said Nolan, who has landed a job at Pfizer, Inc., touted as the world's largest research-based biomedical and pharmaceutical compa-

ny. "It's not a home feeling."

Constance Turner, a clinical laboratory student, will travel to Brazil July 1 to begin a six-month Brazilian Exchange Program sponsored by WFUBMC.

"It's basically a biomedical exchange program for students who have healthcare backgrounds and are going to do various research," she explained. "I plan to go there, learn as much as I can and use that when I go to grad school."

Jacqueline Baldwin attended the university's evening and weekend program while caring for her daughter and three granddaughters. Baldwin's happiest moment at WSSU was witnessed by thousands.

"I also had the distinct pleasure and honor to introduce our presidential candidate's wife, Michelle Obama (when she visited WSSU recently)," she revealed. "It was great; I've never been so honored and it was wonderful, just the magni-

tude of it." Emmy Award-winning actress Cicely Tyson served as keynote speaker for the Spring Commencement.

"I cannot tell you how privileged I feel to be a part of this graduating class," said Tyson, who was awarded an honorary degree at the ceremony. "This one is a special gift."

The prolific thespian shared pearls of wisdom from her own

journey with the audience. In her brief speech, she likened the world to the waters of an ocean or river that change constantly.

"I have known rivers; ancient, dusky rivers," she said. "I have shaken rivers out of my eyes and I'm still here ... because I cut the word fear out of my life ... I let no one tell me that I cannot do anything."

## FTCC

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er to educate residents. One inter-institution collaboration is the Center for Design Innovation (CDI), a partnership between Forsyth Tech, WSSU and North Carolina School of the Arts. CDI fosters design-related enterprises in the Piedmont. WSSU is also working with Wake Forest University to bring the North Carolina Transitional Nano Medicine Institute to Piedmont Triad Research Park.

He said FTCC and its students are no stranger to his university. Since 2001, nearly 500 FTCC graduates have enrolled in WSSU to complete their education and earn four-year degrees. Those who have made the transition have been among the best students at WSSU, Reaves said.

"Community colleges, and especially Forsyth Tech, do an outstanding job in preparing students to transition to four year institutions," said Reaves.

Reaves promised to strengthen the ties between the two schools. He said both schools are working to "remove any and all barriers" that FTCC

students have when transferring to WSSU. He said there's also a new program in the works that will enable students to apply and be admitted simultaneously to both institutions. He believes this will eliminate students having to go through the admissions process again when they transfer.

One graduate who was a product of both schools was Tasha Ingram. A nursing major, she's been climbing her way up the educational ladder as a certified nursing assistant at Forsyth Medical Center.

Nursing programs at colleges have limited spots and getting into them can be a challenge. So Ingram found herself transferring to FTCC from WSSU in order to get into a nursing program. She said it turned out well and she plans to eventually get a graduate degree.

"I followed the path and that's where I was successful at, and I'm glad I did," said Ingram.

Other graduates had more unusual paths to graduation, such as Veronica Paragan who

is from New Orleans. She was ready to go to college several years ago but Hurricane Katrina interrupted her dreams. Her home was left intact by the devastating storm but she still felt the effects. The hotel she worked at was totaled, as were the homes of her parents and sister. Her family moved to North Carolina, where her father's sister lives.

"I came up here after everything, got a job up here ... got into the swing of things. Started school in spring of '06 (and) made a commitment to get it done," she said.

She described FTCC as "absolutely, positively wonderful." She plans to use her Associate's Degree in Business Administration to continue working in the hotel industry and pursue a bachelor's degree. She said she will return to New Orleans next month.

Even though FTCC had more than 1,000 graduates, only 425 attended the commencement. Nearly 2,500 friends and family members were in the audience, cheering their loved ones who walked across the stage.



Ingram



Paragan

Thank You

Mayor Joines, City Officials,  
Religious Leaders, Educators and  
all Fellow Citizens of Winston-Salem,  
North Carolina,

I thank you with all my heart for the birthday party you gave me in Corpening Plaza on April 19, 2008. My spirit soared to see and hear the singing and dancing and uplifting speeches made in celebrations.

I am grateful to you all. I feel Winston-Salem belongs to I belong to Winston-Salem.

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