

# History-making NCCU grad: overcome fears

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The youngest commencement speaker in North Carolina Central University's history told some 600 new graduates that they must push aside normal fears of failure in order to successfully pursue far-reaching goals.

"Your desire to succeed must surpass your fear," Dr. Annika Barnett told graduates during NCCU's 122nd commencement ceremonies, which took place Dec. 14, in the McDougald-McLendon Gymnasium.

Barnett, 26, received her bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in chemistry from NCCU in 2009 before attending Harvard University Medical School. She is the first NCCU alumna to graduate from Harvard Medical School, where she earned the Dr. Bemy Jelin Prize for academic excellence.

"There are three things that you should never fear: fear of failure, fear of change and fear of the unknown," said Barnett. "If you learn to face these head on, it will lead to success that you could never imagine."

In order to complete her medical degree, Barnett said she had to overcome each of these



NCCU Photo  
**Dr. Annika Barnett speaks to graduates and guests on Dec. 14.**

fears. "No one wants to fall flat on his or her face in front of everyone," said Barnett. "In this age of social media, it is very easy for everyone to see when you succeed and when you fail."



Johnson

She said she viewed her application to Harvard as "just one more application to put out there" as she neared the end of her studies at NCCU.

Barnett encouraged the Class of 2013 to push past the isolation of the unknown.

"When you do something that no one else has done before you, it is lonely," said Barnett. "It is uncomfortable being the different one. But you have to go out of your comfort zone to grow."

Barnett graduated

from the prestigious medical school in May 2013 and earned a spot in the highly competitive Johns Hopkins Hospital pediatrics and anesthesiology residency program. There are only four pediatrics and anesthesiology residency programs in the country and a total of just eight slots.

"Something in me knew that if I didn't at least go and try, I would regret it. I would always wonder 'what if,'" said Barnett. "Don't live your life in regret. Don't let fear of failure keep you from going for what may seem like a long shot."

Barnett urged the graduates not to view her story as an anomaly.

"You all have the capability and gifts to achieve your dreams. The thing holding you back is fear," Barnett said in closing. "I pray my story of fearlessness liberates you today. I challenge you to embrace your fears. If your dream

makes you nervous, then you are on the right track."

Before the conferring of degrees, NCCU Chancellor Debra Saunders-White presented a proclamation from U.S. Rep. and NCCU alumnus G.K. Butterfield to Dr. Bernice Johnson, interim provost and vice chancellor for Academic Affairs. Johnson will retire from NCCU on Dec. 31, after 34 years of service.

"For more than three decades, Dr. Johnson has positively impacted the lives NCCU students," said Saunders-White. "Her service to NCCU is beyond compare."

Saunders-White hosted the traditional reception for graduates and their families on Friday, Dec. 13. Separate receptions by campus colleges and departments took place after the Commencement ceremony.

## Grant

every student. We understand that good health is at the core of academic success and will work towards the goal of healthy children at every level."

Lynne Mitchell, preventive health director at the Forsyth County Health Department, added, "Optimal health is best achieved when people not only know what to do but live in an environment where healthy choices are easy to make ... Where we live, work and [play] impacts a person's health and health status. It is difficult to achieve health if the neighborhood you live in doesn't support healthy options and behaviors."

REACH will address underlying issues affecting communities' health by focusing on policy, system and environmental change strategies to make healthy choices easier. The project aims to

impact at least 75 percent of the African American population in East Winston.

"There are many initiatives and programs in this community that promote healthy eating and physical activity," says Whitt-Glover. "We will work within existing programs to help make the healthy choice the easiest choice to make—it's called 'Healthy-by-Default.'"

Gramercy Research Group, [www.gramercyresearch.com](http://www.gramercyresearch.com), is an independent research firm focusing on community- and faith-based participatory research, chronic disease prevention and health disparities.

For more information or to become involved with the UCLA Healthy-by-Default REACH Project, contact Jonathan Collins at 336-293-8540, ext. 109, or [jcollins@gramercyresearch.com](mailto:jcollins@gramercyresearch.com).

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## Concert

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copies in just over a month. After spending three weeks at the top of the charts, Chandler purchased a cape, a monocle, a top hat and a cane and became "The Duke of Earl," appearing in movies and on TV.

Chandler also had a monster pop and soul smash in 1970 with "Groovy Situation," hitting number eight on the R&B charts. He was a frequent guest on Soul Train in the show's pioneering years in Chicago, appearing three times in the first two seasons. Chandler's "Familiar Footsteps" was the show's original theme



Chandler

song. In 1978, capitalizing on the shift to dance music he again scored a huge hit with "Get Down," hitting number three on the R&B charts.

Hailing from Chicago, the Chi Lites had a string of hits with a lush, creamy sound that was distinguished by four-part harmonies and

layered productions.

During the early '70s, the group racked up 11 Top Ten R&B singles, ranging from the romantic ballads "Have You Seen Her" and "Oh Girl" to protest songs like "(For God's Sake) Give

More Power to the People" and "There Will Never Be Any Peace (Until God Is Seated at the Conference Table)."

For ticket information, go to [rjreynoldsauditorium.com](http://rjreynoldsauditorium.com).

## Medical

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as one of the nation's top physician assistant programs, will move 24 faculty and staff and its 128 students from its present location at Victoria Hall to the fifth floor of 525@Vine.

"This new space will allow us to scale up our program, support new curriculum advancements as well as create a high-tech home base for community-based interven-

tions throughout the region," said Reamer Bushardt, chair of the Department of Physician Assistant Studies.

Dr. Gregory L. Burke, director of Public Health Sciences added, "We're excited to seek synergistic relationships with our new neighbors, including Inmar, the Emerging Technologies Center of Forsyth Tech and the numerous startup companies located in and around the Innovation Quarter."

## Virgil

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an active pro bono public interest litigation practice. He teaches courses on community economic development, poverty, evidence and the nonprofit sector.

Virgil is also the founding Director of the Institute for Public Engagement at Wake Forest University; a university-wide institute that promotes community based participatory research and engaged teaching across Wake Forest University.

Prior to joining Wake Forest, Virgil taught at

another law school for several years and practiced law in Cleveland, Ohio and Omaha, Neb. He clerked for the Honorable George W. White, Chief Judge, U.S.



Reynolds

District Court, Northern District of Ohio, is a former Legal Aid lawyer, an Equal Justice Fellow and a recipient of the Joseph Branch Excellence in Teaching Award.

"Wake Forest Law's clinical/experiential programs are fantastic, invaluable resources for both law students and the local community," said Mark Vaders of the Class of 2013.

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