

W-S native named valedictorian at N.C. State

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY
THE CHRONICLE

Amira Watson takes her education very seriously. The future dentist just graduated from N.C. State at the top of her class as valedictorian with a 4.0 grade point average.

Born in Winston-Salem and raised in Kernersville, Watson is a 2017 graduate of East Forsyth. She was raised by her parents to believe that education is key, and that focus has been in her family for generations.

"It was definitely ingrained in me, I believe," Watson said about her drive for excellence in the classroom. "I wasn't a first gen college student. My grandfather went to Alabama State, my mother went to Winston-Salem State, and so did my dad. Education has always been super important."

"Going to school and getting a good education with good grades has always been important in the household."

Heading into college, Watson knew she wanted to be a dentist; it was just a matter of what her major was going to be. She decided on biological sciences due to it being something she enjoyed, as well as having all of her prerequisite courses needed for dental school.

Watson built good study habits in high school that made the transition to college level work a little easier. She says maintaining a perfect GPA was not an easy task and recalls a tough time she had her freshman year when she earned a D on a test. Because she had built such a strong foundation for years in high school, she was able to bounce back and



Submitted photo
Amira Watson was named the valedictorian of the spring 2021 graduating class of N.C. State.

maintain her A average.

"I was a Goodnight Scholar, which is one of two N.C. State's full rides, so I knew that I had something to uphold in terms of GPA and academic standing, but also it was really important for me to get good grades," she said. "I didn't want to stop what I started in high school."

"It wasn't always a breeze, but hard work and dedication pays off. I had study groups, good friends, and a good village while I was at N.C. State was really important to my success."

Upon finding out she had earned the title of valedictorian, Watson stated she felt like all of her hard work had paid off.

"I was definitely excited," she said. "They rank you after each semester and I knew that if I got all As my final semester, that I would be locked in. I knew that I could do it and a lot of my friends asked me if it was worth it and it definitely was because that was my goal coming into college."

Watson had to also maintain her perfect average during the pandemic. She also had to endure the loss of her mother at the beginning of the COVID-

ID-19 pandemic. With all of that to deal with, many students would have let their grades slip, but Watson maintained her focus and persevered through the traumatic time.

Watson was accepted into dental school in December of last year. She said many of her friends asked if she would cruise during her last semester. She chose to not relax.

"I needed to finish what I started, and I wanted to go ahead and get that win for myself and achieve that goal," she said. "It definitely was a sigh of relief and I hope to continue a good pattern of grades when I get to dental school too. It was definitely a relief that all my hard work had paid off and that I was going to get the recognition that I wanted."

As an African American woman, Watson felt it was more important for her to earn this distinction as valedictorian so others who look like her see that it is possible.

"I am so big on representation; representation definitely matters," she went on to say. "You want to see people who look like you, doing the things you want to do. There's a valedictorian of every college

and major, but I've never known one to be Black, so that was something huge for me.

"I felt like I was making a really huge impact on my peers and some of my friends that it could definitely be done, especially in a STEM major. That's pretty impressive and it was a big win for me, but it really felt like a big win for everyone, because I was Black. It made me really proud."

Watson says she hopes she was able to inspire someone else with what she was able to accomplish. One of her goals in life has been to help others in any way she can.

"That's my number one goal; I always want to do stuff for other people, whether that's simple inspiration or some sort of service," she continued. "I am a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. I am a fall '19 initiate of the Kappa Omicron chapter of N.C. State, so service is huge to me and I always want to make some sort of community impact."

"The women of Alpha Kappa Alpha have definitely had a huge impact on me, so knowing that I am a part of the organization now and that I have that impact on younger girls is something that is huge for me and makes me proud. It's an amazing feeling and I really don't have words for it."

The Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) for the Winston-Salem Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WSMPO)

serves as a forum for cooperative transportation planning and decision-making for the MPO region which includes Forsyth County and portions of Davie, Davidson and Stokes Counties. The next meeting of the TAC will be held Thursday,

May 20, 2021 at 4:15 p.m. This meeting is being held via teleconference with applicable video access to protect our community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Agenda materials for this meeting can also be found at www.cityofws.org/Departments/Transportation/MPO/TAC.

The below items will be presented for adoption during this meeting:

- Consideration of additions and amendments to the FY 2020-2029 Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP)
 - 2021-2022 UPWP Amendments
- Public notice of public participation plan activities and time established for public review of and comments of the TIP will satisfy the Program of Projects (POP) requirements. Any person who believes they have been aggrieved by an unlawful discriminatory practices regarding the Winston-Salem Urban Area MPO programs has a right to file a complaint with Kelly Garvin, City of Winston-Salem, P.O. Box 2511, Winston-Salem, NC 27102, within 180 days following the date of the alleged discrimination occurrence.

A&T State student receives bachelor's degree - 38 years after she first enrolled

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Last Sunday was a very special day for Winston-Salem resident Michelle Wright. Nearly 40 years after she first enrolled at the N.C. A&T State University, Wright walked across the stage and received her bachelor's degree.

In the fall of 1983, after graduating from high school, Wright decided to take her talents to N.C. A&T, where she majored in music education. Wright said music has always been a big part of her life, so it was a no-brainer that she would go into that field.

"My whole family are music lovers, my mother and my grandmother were musicians in the church for years and my grandmother taught music in two different school systems ... on my father's side of the family, all of them sing so it was in my blood," Wright laughed while talking with The Chronicle last week.

Wright made it to her junior year, but like a lot of college students, the newfound freedom she had was too much to handle, which resulted in her dropping out in 1986. Wright said growing up, she didn't have a lot of freedom, so when she got on campus she took advantage of it.

"My dad was kind of strict," Wright said. "He exposed us to a lot of cultural things, but I didn't have the experience of other things like going to the parties and doing a lot of hanging out, so when I did get to A&T and freedom was gifted to



Submitted photo
Antonette Penn

me, because of me being naive and green, I didn't know how to manage ... so by year three I literally flunked out of A&T."

Wright said she always thought about going back and earning her degree, but she didn't think she was capable of getting it done. She started giving it more thought after her partner, Antonette Penn, heard about the Aggies at the Goal Line, a program designed to help former Aggies who did not complete their bachelor's degrees return to the university.

A few months after she started looking into the program, Wright's son was shot and killed. "In the midst of me trying to make a decision on what to do, if I could do it and all that, my son was killed," she said. Wright said her son's death is what pushed her to go back. And on Aug. 16, 2017, on what would've been her son's 23rd birthday, Wright started her second stint at N.C. A&T.

"I knew I had to have some purpose in my life because if not, I was going to be consumed by anger and hatred," she continued. "I just knew I had to channel that energy in another way ... and the fact that I started on Junior's birthday was a sign that this was what I needed to

be doing."

While holding down a full-time job, taking care of her mother and other family members, Wright completed the requirements for her bachelor's degree by taking six hours a semester and nine hours in the summer. She said it wasn't easy, but she was determined to get it done.

"The tassel was worth the hassle," Wright laughed. "It wasn't easy ... we're talking about returning to school after 30-plus years, school had evolved and I hadn't. I didn't know how to upload assignments - we were still turning in papers and writing in pen and pencil when I left - so I had to learn a whole new system. I had to make a complete paradigm shift to be able to make it."

With support from her family, church family, and other loved ones, Wright was able to finish what she set out to do 38 years ago and on Sunday, May 9, Wright walked across the stage and received her bachelor's degree in liberal studies. Wright said she isn't done; she has plans to start a master's program at UNC Greensboro later this year.

Wright said when she walked across the stage, she had to pinch herself to make sure it was really happening.

"I dreamed of that day I saw myself going across the stage, but at some points I didn't think it was possible. But when that day came, it was indescribable."

"I felt relieved. I felt accomplished. I finally did it," Wright said.



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The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Chronicle Media Group, LLC, 1300 E. Fifth St., Winston Salem, N.C. 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:
The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636