

The Honorable Mike Burns Shares How To Become A 'VIP' With NGU Fall Graduates

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The Honorable Mike Burns, Representative for District 17 of the South Carolina House of Representatives, addressed the over 200 undergraduates, graduates, doctoral candidates, and first

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PA Medicine graduates at fall commencement on Saturday, December 8, 2018. ■ Kathryn Allen Wilkie ('16, P.A. '18) from Sumter, is the first NGU undergraduate to be accepted and graduate from NGU's PA Medicine program.

Tigerville, SC – (December 12, 2018) North Greenville University (NGU) celebrated fall commencement on a cold wintry morning on Saturday, Dec. 8 in Turner Chapel. The Honorable Mike Burns from District 17 of the South Carolina House of Representatives addressed the over

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200 undergraduates, 4 graduates, doctoral candidates, and first Physician Assistant (PA) Medicine graduates.
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Following the processional of the administration, faculty, and candidates, NGU President Dr. Gene C. Fant, Jr. welcomed all honored guests. Rev. Michael Blackwood, the executive pastor of Lifelong Church in Lyman, led the invocation. Department Chair of Health Science Dr. Christine Haltiwanger offered an Old Testament reading. Department Chair of Secondary Education Andrew Hodges read New Testament passages, and the NGU Concert Band and NGU Concert Choir provided the music.

Rep. Burns told those assembled that the university is a great place, and has been here for many, many generations. "I can't tell you the thrill it is to see the work that this university puts out through the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It makes this state, country, and the world a better place."

He talked about several House bills that he is involved with in his political office and then referred to a Rev. Billy Graham quote, "everybody wants to be a VIP, a very important person."

Burns shared his meaning of the VIP acronym. "Vision; the Scripture tells us that when there is no vision, the people perish. We need to keep our vision in front of us, so we're always marching toward it. Secondly, Integrity; we need to walk the walk and talk the talk. It's not good enough to tell people what we believe; we need to live it. We need to be found faithful. And finally, Presence; we will be successful if we listen to the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we pause and listen to that voice down deep within us, He will guide us."

He concluded his speech by charging the graduates with three ways to live out their lives. He said, "always do the right thing, always realize where your gifts and rights come from; not from government, but your creator, and if you put God first, you will have success."

This commencement ceremony was meaningful for the graduates and families, but just as meaningful for the university. NGU graduated its first PA Medicine program class since its inception in 2017.

On November 1, 2016, NGU's T. Walter Brashier Graduate School received approval from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) for its Master of Medical Science in Physician Assistant (PA) Medicine degree program and began offering classes at its Tim Brashier Campus in Greer in January 2017. Twenty students were selected out of over 500 applicants to participate in the inaugural class.

Kathryn Allen Wilkie ('16, P.A. '18) from Sumter, is the first NGU undergraduate to be accepted and graduate from the program.

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"I don't think I could be any more ecstatic than I am right now. It is surreal that the day that I have dreamt about and worked so hard for, for many years has finally arrived," said Wilkie.

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She said that throughout the years there had been many hardships, frustrations, and tears. "Reflecting on those moments and seeing where I am and who I am today makes this experience that much sweeter."

She has nothing but accolades for NGU's program.

"The professors are extremely knowledgeable and are outstanding teachers. Their past clinical experience has been invaluable in our education and has better prepared us for our future endeavors within the health care realm," she said.

Wilkie says she feels prepared to enter the workforce as a PA.

"We have had an entire clinical year that has allowed us to work in various disciplines of medicine throughout the states. These experiences have taught me more than I could have ever imagined and have made me a well-rounded and knowledgeable future provider," she said.

Wilkie didn't grow up wanting to be a physician assistant.

"When I reflect on the fact that I am graduating from PA school, I honestly have to laugh a little." She said, "it is no surprise that most people who work in health care have Type A personalities. There are numerous rules and regulations, things are black and white, and plans are made for following to a T. Well, I meet the stereotype."

When she was in the sixth grade, she decided that she wanted to become a physical therapist. From that moment on, she was extremely focused on doing whatever it took to follow that career path.

"My senior year of undergrad, I applied for physical therapy school without a shadow of a doubt that I would be accepted. After a few months, I received an email telling me that I was waitlisted. I was honestly heartbroken because I had worked so hard to get to that point."

She was most disappointed that things did not go according to her plan.

About that same time, she learned that NGU was starting a PA program. Instead of doing her research, she said she wallowed in self-pity and became frustrated with God.

"I had felt called to become a physical therapist and did not understand why things were not going how I had planned."

After graduating with her undergraduate degree, a friend told her that she could get her a job in an

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emergency department as a medical scribe.

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"I did not have any jobs lined up at that time and thought that it would be a good opportunity to add more health care experience to my resume."

She went to work the first night and had the opportunity to work with a PA.

"I'll never forget that night because it was the moment that I fell in love with medicine."

Since that time, she has pursued becoming a PA and never looked back.

Wilkie says this story is important to her because it showed her how God's plan is much greater than she could imagine. She said in her stubbornness; she was frustrated because things did not initially go her way. However, God knew that she was more suited for a different career and He set her on the right path.

"If it hadn't been for the heartbreak of not being accepted into physical therapy school, I would have missed out on a career that I love. This story makes me remember that sometimes when we feel disappointed and heartbroken, that God uses those times to make all things work together for our good."

Wilkie highly recommends NGU's program to any student wishing to pursue a career in PA medicine.

"My favorite thing about the program is the class size. Whenever I felt like I was struggling with a topic or concept, all the professors were readily available to me. It made it much easier to stay on top of your work and not feel as though you were struggling behind."

"You would be hard pressed to find another university who have faculty that cares about their students as much as ours do. They have worked so hard to ensure that we have the materials and the knowledge to succeed in school and our future medical careers," said Wilkie. "With their wisdom and guidance, I am graduating feeling confident in myself as a health care provider."

Wilkie is the first of three NGU undergraduates to be accepted into the program. Alex Holsonback ('16) from Clinton is a member of the PA Class of 2019, and Isabella Brechbill ('18) from Newark, OH, is one of the thirty students enrolled out of over 800 applicants in the incoming Class of 2020.

"The NGU PA program is extremely proud of its first graduating class. They have worked hard to gain the knowledge and experience necessary to provide compassionate and evidence-based medical care," said PA Medicine Program Director Jordan Hairr. "We look forward to the positive impact these students will make in the lives of their patients and communities."