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News

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PhilaU Celebrates its Largest Graduating Class Ever at Commencement

PHILADELPHIA, May 16, 2015 -- Philadelphia University celebrated the largest graduating class in its 131-year history in front of a joyous crowd of faculty, family and friends at the Pennsylvania Convention Center on May 16.

Some 961 undergraduate and graduate students, many with decorated caps and big smiles, walked across the stage and accepted their diplomas at Commencement. In all, 1,188 students have graduated from PhilaU this year.

President Stephen Spinelli Jr. opened the ceremony with a challenge for the soon-to-be graduates. “You have a moral obligation to confront today’s challenges, to be innovative and productive people, critical doers and leaders when others around you hesitate,” he said. “You must seek opportunities, act decisively, and solve problems in order to provide value to the people in your time.”

Health sciences graduate Nicole Vital addressed her peers at the undergraduate ceremony. The Texas native told the Class of 2015 that, after she adjusted to several weather calamities in the colder climate of Philadelphia, she found a home at PhilaU and a family of faculty and classmates who instilled in her all the skills needed for a successful future. Vital will continue at PhilaU in the graduate physician assistant studies program.

William R. Sasso, Esq., chairman of Stradley Ronon’s management committee and board of directors, delivered the undergraduate Commencement address, and received the honorary degree Doctor of Humane Letters.

Sasso shared his list of eight things that matter in life – showing up, results, listening, engagement, excellence, tolerance, honor and hugs – and asked graduates to keep those things in mind “as you consider the way you want to live your life and the person you want to become in the months and years ahead,” he said.

The honorary Doctor of Humane Letters also was conferred upon Planet Fitness CEO Christopher Rondeau H’15, a recipient of the 2015 Leader of Innovation Medal. A \$1 million

scholarship in Rondeau's name was established this week at PhilaU by members of the Planet Fitness family.

The 2015 valedictorian was Joseph Licata, a physician assistant studies graduate. The President's Award for Excellence was granted to Brittany Buckmire, fashion industry management graduate, Anastasiia Savchenko, who earned her master's degree in sustainable design, and Matthew Wilson, a health sciences graduate from the School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

At the morning ceremony for graduate students, diplomas were awarded to the first graduates of four master's level programs: architecture, community and trauma counseling, geodesign and the innovative Strategic Design MBA.

Jon Reichlin, chairman of Nathan Sports, delivered the graduate Commencement address at a morning ceremony and received the honorary degree Doctor of Humane Letters. Reichlin funded the Robert J. Reichlin High-Performance Apparel Chair.

Reichlin talked about the unusual arc of his career path—including working on a shrimp boat and as a modern dancer—in his inspiring remarks to students. “Graduating Class of 2015, let your fears be your best teachers,” he said. “Let your humility guide you to constant questioning and trust that innovation and growth will follow. Be unrelenting. Live and work with passion. Conduct yourself with integrity. And don't let anybody build any boxes around you.”

David Raufer '90 M'15, among the first Strategic Design MBA graduates and a managing principal of the design/build firm BuildTank Inc., gave the graduate student address, likening the students' educational journeys to the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1803, saying both relied on a diversity of ideas to accomplish their goals and create something new.

As the new graduates celebrated their achievement, Spinelli told them, “This day signifies a new beginning for each of you; however, no matter where your journey leads, you will always be a member of the Philadelphia University family.”

Philadelphia University, founded in 1884, is a private university with 3,700 students enrolled in more than 70 undergraduate and graduate programs. As the model for professional university education, the University, through its award-winning Nexus Learning approach, prepares students to be leaders in their professions in an active, collaborative and real-world learning environment infused with the liberal arts. Philadelphia University includes the innovative Kanbar College of Design, Engineering and Commerce; the College of Architecture and the Built Environment; and the College of Science, Health and the Liberal Arts. For more information, go to www.PhilaU.edu.