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Class of 2019 students become M.D.s

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► Newly minted doctors celebrate after Florida State University College of Medicine's commencement ceremony May 18, 2019. (FSU Photography Services)

They arrived as students and departed as doctors. In between were raucous cheers, air-horn blasts, babies' cries and audible sighs as, one by one, the 113 graduates of the FSU College of Medicine's Class of 2019 crossed the stage and grabbed the diploma of their dreams.

This was the medical school's 15th graduating class, and Ruby Diamond Concert Hall was packed.

Also during the two-hour celebration, five grads received their military promotions. Seven grads were "hooded" by relatives – several of whom were College of Medicine alumni. Plus the 13 members of this year's Bridge class received their master's degrees.

FSU President John Thrasher was there to shake every hand. Commencement speaker Michael Muszynski offered the graduates an abundance of advice, including this final recommendation: "When you awake each morning, ask yourself: What good can I do today? And when the hard day's work has ended, and you lay your head to rest, ask yourself: What good *did* I do today?"



► *Commencement speaker Michael Muszynski, retiring dean of the Orlando Regional Campus, addresses graduates at FSU College of Medicine commencement May 18, 2019. (FSU Photography Services)*

Dean John P. Fogarty put this class's era in perspective. During their time here, the College of Medicine established a new curriculum, launched a PA program, developed new residency programs throughout the state, established FSU SeniorHealth and FSU PrimaryHealth, and expanded its SSTRIDE pipeline programs in Immokalee and Sarasota.

Along the way, Fogarty said, the Class of 2019 made its own mark.

“You studied here during turbulent times in our nation's history,” he said, “and instead of protesting, you focused on bringing the community together by creating Racism Awareness Week, an amazing collaboration with our local community.... Your class also developed and founded the HIV/AIDS vigils at the College of Medicine in collaboration with FAMU, Bond Community Health Center and Big Bend Cares.... Many of you also jumped at the chance to help Hurricane Michael victims in Marianna, Panama City and surrounding communities.”

These students also did everything they could during their med-school years to honor the memory of classmate Matt Wittman, who died in 2017. Friday afternoon, a commemorative plaque was unveiled in a shady spot outside the College of Medicine. Saturday morning, Wittman's white coat – usually displayed in the Clinical Learning Center, his favorite place to be – was brought onstage for a final tribute before these new doctors depart for their residency programs.

Muszynski, retiring dean of the Orlando Regional Campus, has been part of the College of Medicine since 2004. After regaling the grads with stories of his mentors and his challenges, such as the hostile reception that children with HIV/AIDS had gotten early in his career in pediatric infectious diseases, he concluded his message to the graduates with these and other questions:

“Will you reflect on your journeys leading to this moment? Can you do the thankless work of asking ‘Why?’ and ‘Why not?’ ... Will you dedicate yourself to doing good deeds? Will you dare to make waves? Will you dare to light candles in the darkness?”



► *Class President Bryno Gay addresses his fellow graduates at College of Medicine commencement May 18, 2019. (FSU Photography Services)*

Class President Bryno Gay (“I am only here today by the grace of God and a poor boy’s dream for a better tomorrow”) urged his classmates to reflect on their arduous journey.

“It’s easy to forget why we even wanted to pursue this profession when we miss birthdays, holiday celebrations and even our own anniversaries,” he said. “When we work all night and sleep seems more like a luxury than a necessity. When patients die, even though we’ve done everything in our power to try and save ‘em.”

Yet he kept it hopeful with this refrain: “Take a look around ... We’re here ... we’ve made it.”

As always, President Thrasher and everyone else in attendance seemed to believe that this was the absolute best way to spend the third Saturday in May.

The graduates crossed the stage in six groups, representing the six regional campuses where they had spent their third and fourth years: Daytona Beach, Fort Pierce, Orlando, Pensacola, Sarasota and Tallahassee. Each name was called out, preceded by “Doctor.” One by one, the dean from their campus (or an M.D. family member) stood behind them and brought the hood down over their head and onto their shoulders. Then they received their diploma and posed for a photo with Thrasher and Fogarty.

The day before graduation, 41 students were honored at an awards assembly in the Durell Peaden Auditorium. Brittany Tanner led the class with five recognitions, including the equivalent of the MVP award. Stephanie Hurwitz (the College of Medicine’s first M.D./Ph.D. student), Meghan Lewis and Steven Pifer were tied with four recognitions apiece.

Also recognized in the graduation program were four College of Medicine graduate students who earned a Ph.D. in biomedical sciences during the 2018-2019 academic year: Michael Bokros, Ryan Higgins, Lindsay Sailer (neuroscience-biomedical sciences) and Alyssa Rolfe.

Soon, the new M.D.s will be heading off for the residency programs where they’ll spend the next three or more years. Meanwhile, in 10 days the newly graduated Bridge students will be back in school – this time as members of the College of Medicine’s Class of 2023.

And for those keeping score ... the med school now has 1,368 alumni.