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### 2022 Student Commencement Speakers Announced

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April  
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# 2022 student commencement speakers announced



[Governors State University](#) (GSU) is proud to announce the student commencement speakers for spring 2022: Sonya Petty, an IDSS student and Peter Brassea, a Social Work graduate student.

GSU Newsroom sat down to reflect on their academic journey as they prepare to give student addresses in May.

## **Sonya Petty**

Commencement speaker Sonya Petty finished her education at GSU remotely, and looks forward to attending commencement on May 14.

Representing the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) (CAS) as an [IDSS](#) major, Petty will address her fellow graduates during the morning ceremony where CAS and College of Business will be honored.

She says she's grateful for the special opportunity.

"It's been two years since they had commencement (in-person), so I'm super honored."

Petty, a native of Chicago's South Side, began attending GSU in 2016. She took a break from in-class schooling and had 11 credits to complete when she decided to resume working on her degree in Interdisciplinary Studies.

When asked why she wanted to return at age 57, Petty who now lives and works in Durham, North Carolina, replies, "why not?"

"Anything is possible. I wish I had this energy in my youth, but I've been blessed to have a great career as a medical coder. I was a consultant. I've traveled to different countries and to remote places in the United States."

Petty says Governors State has a special place in her heart – especially as a non-traditional student.

"I think GSU represents a plethora of people whether you're 18 years old, middle aged, a senior, I think GSU represents a variety of people. My story is not any different than someone who wants to start out now. You have to have the mindset to do it," she says.

Interdisciplinary Studies opens the doors to other fields.

"It gives you a variety (of choices)," she says. After taking a few years from school, and now finishing her undergraduate degree, Petty looks forward to working on her master's degree in public health.

For now, she's looking forward to taking center stage at the ceremony to give her speech, where her 28-year-old daughter Akilah will be among the onlookers.

"My speech is called 'Still I Rise.' I want to encourage our students. We have endured so much, from the pandemic to separations to whatever. No matter what happens in your life, continue to move forward with your determination to graduate in spite of situations that may happen to you," she says.

## **Peter Brassea**

[Social Work](#) major Peter Brassea spent a long time working on the speech he will deliver at the evening commencement ceremony for GSU's [College of Health and Human Services](#) and [College of Education](#) graduates.

Given the importance of that day, he wants to get it right.

Early on, he will quote the famous scientist Albert Einstein, who once said, "Logic will get you from A to Z. Imagination will get you everywhere."

That comment "resonates" with Brassea.

"That's something personal I feel," he says. "It's about degrees and stuff, but it's about the bigger picture, how you do things, how you get through stuff. That's why I put it in the beginning."

He's grateful to university officials for selecting him.

"I want to be able to motivate at least one person in the room. Maybe a potential college student one day. Also, it's a good opportunity for me to give back, family, professors, all the people at GSU, to say 'thank you' in a different way."

He is the first in his immediate family to attend college. At first, he studied elementary education, thinking he'd become a teacher. But he changed to major in social work.

"It was easy because I felt I needed a change. It was challenging for me because I was in my last semester at my community college (Prairie State)," he says. "I kind of realized I wanted to be outside of four walls. I knew I wanted to help people, a calling to help others and be there for others. That's when I was introduced to social work and it's kind of dawned on me that it's a better option for me."

Brassea, 26, lives in Hazel Crest. After earning his master's degree in social work, his future is wide open.

"That's what I'm trying to figure out now," he says. "I'm actually in the process of applying to a few jobs. I'm not 100 percent sure I want to work right away. I'm applying to a school actually."

He did his undergrad internship at an alternative school, and enjoyed that experience.

Brassea is thinking of working in a school setting for year before returning to college to work on his doctorate.

He confessed that he is feeling a tad nervous at the prospect of speaking before so many people at commencement.

"I've said this year I wanted to do things that take me out of my comfort zone," he says. "This is one of them. I'm nervous but I'm also very excited."