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For Immediate Release

GSU Chooses Two Graduates as Commencement Speakers

University Park, Illinois, May 23, 2013 - Governors State University will award bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees to approximately 1,500 graduates at its June 8 Commencement. GSU will host morning and afternoon ceremonies at the Tinley Park Convention Center.

Two graduating GSU students have been chosen to give Commencement addresses. Michael Griffin, of Carpentersville, will speak at the 10 a.m. ceremony. Shaniqua Jones, of Harvey, will speak at the 5 p.m. ceremony. Griffin and Jones were both nominated as speakers by faculty members and chosen as worthy representatives of the class of 2013.

Nearly a decade after being severely wounded in Iraq, Griffin is receiving his bachelor's degree in social work, committed to helping fellow veterans deal with the scars of warfare.

In November, 2004, Griffin was a U.S. Army sergeant when his unit was attacked in what he describes as a "head to head" battle. He was shot four times by an Iraqi insurgent, suffering life-threatening injuries to his stomach and leg. "I was dying," he said.

Medics flew Griffin to Germany, then Walter Reed military hospital outside Washington, D.C., where he beat the odds just by surviving. Six months later, he was released but says he still does therapy. Griffin was recently awarded the Army Commendation Medal with Valor for providing key details about the enemy's whereabouts after he was shot.

After leaving the service, Griffin enrolled at Harper College, then entered GSU's bachelor in social work program. Griffin, the father of two children, plans to pursue a master's degree in social work and eventually earn a doctorate. He wants to work with veterans at the Hines VA hospital or a similar facility, helping former service personnel deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Last fall, Griffin was chairman of the committee that organized a community forum at GSU that took an uncompromising look at topics like PTSD, Don't Ask Don't Tell, women in leadership roles in the military, family members of combat victims, and putting wounded warriors to work through economic empowerment. More than 300 persons attended the forum.

Jones is receiving a master's degree in criminal justice. She plans to pursue an Ed.D. in leadership through GSU's College of Education. She is committed to bringing the principles of restorative justice – in which offenders are kept out of the court system by taking responsibility for their actions and working with victims to repair harm – to her own community and beyond.

This year, Jones launched a pilot program in restorative justice at her local middle school in Harvey. These are especially challenging times for middle school students since social media has become a dominant force and cyberbullying is rampant, she said.

In Jones' pilot program, offenses are examined at a series of conferences. All parties are involved – the offender, the victim, school administrators, social workers and teachers, and parents or legal guardians. At the end of the year, students who have gone through the program and have not committed any further infractions are recognized with an award.

Jones also trained the middle school principal, two assistant principals, and a social worker. The restorative justice program will be in place during summer school, and when classes start this fall.

At GSU, Jones worked with professors to develop a restorative justice certificate program. When it begins, GSU will be the only university in Illinois to offer training at this level.

Jones' life is extremely busy both at GSU and outside the university. She is married and the mother of four daughters and a son, ages 6 to 14. She also leads her own company, Senorita Entertainment, which books comedy shows in south suburban venues. At GSU, she is a member of the Student Senate.

Admission to GSU's Commencement ceremonies is by ticket only.

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