



For Immediate Release
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Audiology Student Receives Army Commission in Campus Ceremony

Elkins Park, Pa. – When Antioch native Payton Burke '21AUD decided to go into the United States Army, it wasn't a big surprise to her mother, Joanie Burke. Payton's grandfather, Leonard Horn, was in the Army and stationed at Redstone Arsenal Army base in Huntsville, Ala. In fact, Payton's mother was born at that Army base in Alabama.

The family generational pull toward the Army took another step in providing service to the country recently when Payton Burke received her commission to the Army from Salus University president Michael Mittelman, OD '80, MPH, MBA, FAAO, FACHE, at a ceremony attended by family, friends, faculty, administrators and an Army recruiter Feb. 29, 2020, on the University's Elkins Park, Pa. campus.

"My gosh, it's amazing. I'm emotional, excited and proud," said Joanie Burke, who had flown in from Antioch, Calif., with Payton's brother, Ethan Burke, the day before the ceremony honoring her daughter. "She called a few years back and said this was what she was thinking of doing and asked how I would feel about it. I was a little nervous at the beginning and I told her, this is your life. You've made the right decisions all along your journey so far and I was confident she would make the right decision now."

Payton asked Dr. Mittelman, a retired Rear Admiral in the United States Navy, to administer the oath. Although it's somewhat unusual for a Navy officer to commission an Army recruit, Dr. Mittelman was honored to oblige a Salus student.

"Payton has been a wonderful student leader. Everything that she's touched has been successful. She's mature, she's intelligent and she really understands what serving in leadership is all about. That's why I'm thrilled to be able to do this. The Army is really getting a winner here," said Dr. Mittelman, who also provided a brief history lesson before the ceremony of the oath, its meaning and the subtle differences on what the oath means to each branch of the military.

James Caldwell, OD '89, FAAO, EdM, dean of Student Affairs and assistant professor at Salus, has worked with Burke in a number of capacities as a student leader and is not surprised that she's going to serve the country.

"When she hit campus as an enrolled student here, she raised her hand, she was curious about opportunities for leadership, and she rose into those positions. She represents her profession of audiology in an outstanding way. But most importantly, she really embraces our 'One Salus' mindset. Everything she did as a student leader, not only took care of her fellow audiology students, but she was really interested in creating a broad Salus community," said Dr. Caldwell, who attended the ceremony. "It's not at all surprising now that she's going to serve our country. In my mind, it just fits into who she is as an individual, as a person and soon, as a healthcare provider. We're so proud of her."

Those words are echoed by Radhika Aravamudhan, PhD, dean of the University's Osborne College of Audiology (OCA), who also attended the ceremony to see one of her own students advance her career path.

"This is our second audiology student to go through this ceremony, so this is pretty exciting," said Dr. Aravamudhan. "The discipline and core values (in the military) are something that they learn a lot about. "I'm confident that Payton will enjoy everything, learn a lot and go on from there."

For her part, Burke said she's ready for the next step. She'll have a four-week officer's training commitment in Oklahoma this summer after which she'll complete her fourth-year rotation at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Bethesda, Md. After that, she's committed for three years as a military audiologist wherever the Army decides to send her.

"I feel like I'm ready. This ceremony meant so much to me and warmed my heart. I was just so happy to see everybody that came here today to share this with me," she said.

Photo captions:

Antioch native Payton Burke, left, received her United States Army commission from Salus University president Dr. Michael Mittelman on Feb. 29, 2020, during a ceremony on the university campus in Elkins Park, Pa. (Photo by Mike Morsch/Salus University)

Payton Burke will complete her fourth-year rotation in audiology at Walter Reed Military Hospital in Bethesda, Md. (Photo by Mike Morsch/Salus University)

About Salus University

Salus University, founded as the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1919, today is a diversified, globally recognized professional academic center of learning that offers a wide range of degree programs in the professions of Optometry, Audiology, Physician Assistant, Public Health, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. Salus operates four clinical facilities in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties that provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, and speech-language pathology services. The University has more than 1,200 students, and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit www.salus.edu. Salus is currently celebrating a century of the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, its founding school. For more information about the legacy, please visit www.salus.edu/centennial.