

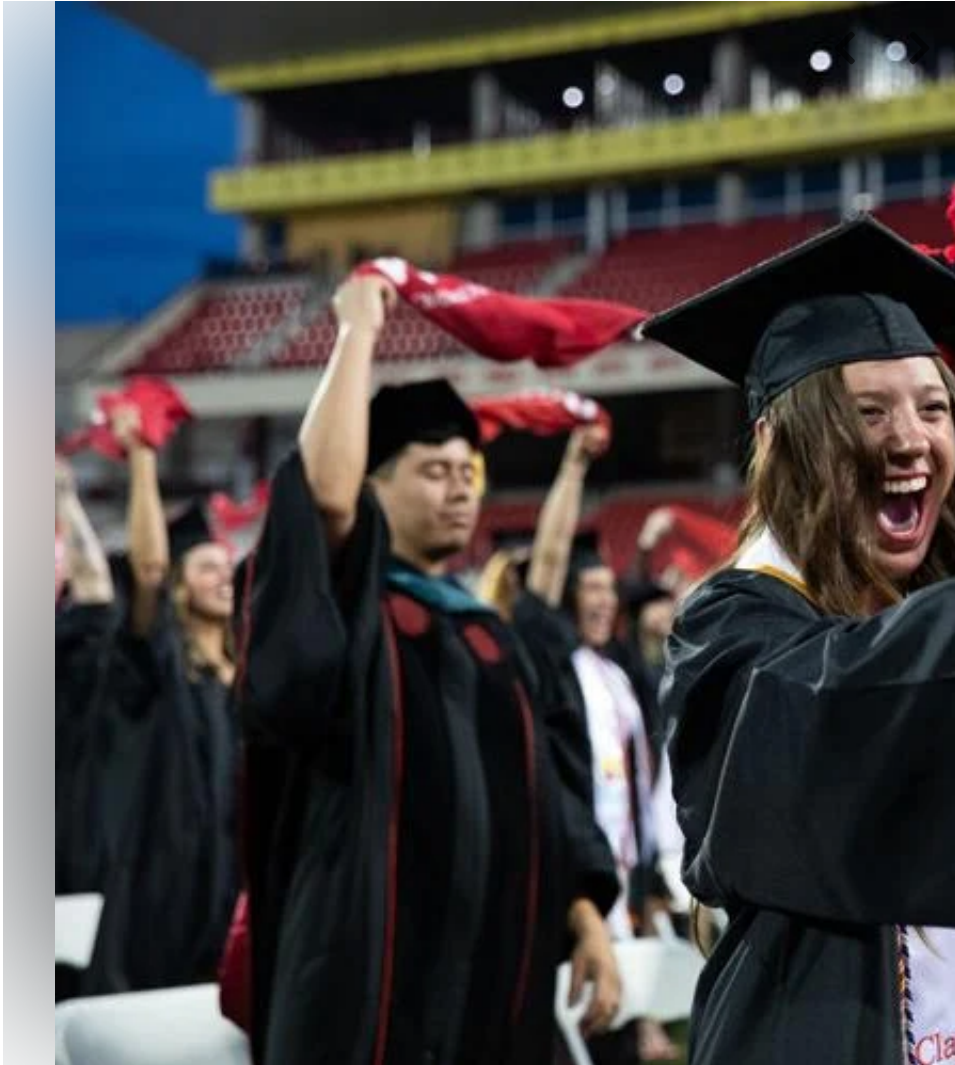
https://www.bgdailynews.com/news/wku-celebrates-class-of-2024-graduates/article_099b06ab-51fe-505f-8cdc-66cf50c61dfd.html

WKU celebrates Class of 2024 graduates

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Western Kentucky University College of Health and Human Services graduation commencement ceremony Thursday at Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith

PHOTOS BY Grace Ramey / grace.ramey@bgdailynews.com

Splashes of red and black stretched out over the Houchens Industries-L.T. Smith Stadium field as the Class of 2024 gathered for Western Kentucky University's 195th Commencement.

Graduates began celebrations Thursday with the annual "Topper Walk" down Avenue of Champions alongside their respective colleges, flanked on each side by droves of family and friends.

President Timothy Caboni, addressing the crowd afterward, said events like this are reminders of the bonds built through educational collaboration.



"Our rich and storied traditions make our Hill a special place," he said. "They bond us to the institution and bind us to one another, across generations, for a lifetime. They become a part of who we are as individuals and who we are as a community."

He reminded graduates of the university's motto – “the spirit makes the master” – and encouraged them to go forth and better both themselves and those around them.

“We live in challenging times fraught with distractions and, unfortunately, often enveloped by darkness,” Caboni said. “As I finish today, I challenge you with this – be a light in a sometimes dark world; choose good over evil, right over wrong, selflessness over selfishness; and make sure that you're not just focused on making a good living, but that you make a good life for yourself, for your families, for your communities and for our world.”

Graduates from each of WKU's five colleges convened on campus throughout Friday to officially mark their graduation.

The university conferred 3,112 degrees and certificates to spring and summer graduates, consisting of 86 associate, 2,039 bachelor's, 533 master's, 55 doctoral and 15 specialist degrees, plus 288 undergraduate certificates and 96 graduate certificates, according to a release.

The Hilltopper Army ROTC Program also commissioned 14 graduates as second lieutenants in the U.S. Army to serve in the active Army, National Guard or Army Reserve.

Among the degree recipients were elementary education majors Collin Wray and Kelsey Lear, both of whom recently completed student teaching assignments. Wray worked at Bristow Elementary and Oakland Elementary Schools while Lear worked at Rockfield Elementary.

Wray, a native of Florida, will return home to teach fourth grade. He said WKU gave him a welcoming community and local schools helped expand his outlook on his field.

“Two years older than everybody in a place where you’ve never been, I didn’t know anyone coming in. Then you meet people like Kelsey and all my friends through class, it gave me lifelong friends,” Wray said. “And I think Warren County Public Schools are so diverse that it gave us a different way of looking at education and tackling different obstacles.”

Lear, a native of Taylorsville, always wanted to work around kids and said she learned at WKU that elementary education is “meant for me.” She will soon begin her career in Warren County Public Schools teaching intermediate grade levels.

“I can’t say (which school) yet, but I sign my contract next week, so I’m excited,” she said with a wide smile.

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