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WKU kicks off Commencement ceremonies by recognizing over 4,000 graduates

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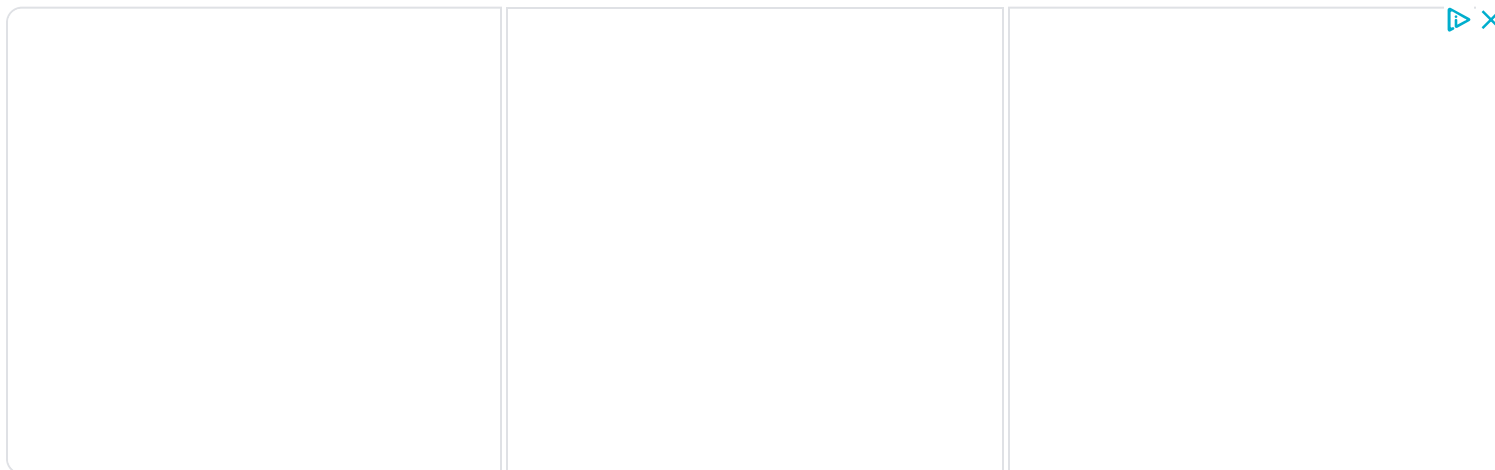
Graduates of Gordon Ford College of Business and College of Health and Human Services participate in the first round of Western Kentucky University's commencement ceremonies Saturday morning. A total of 4,180 students were recognized during Saturday's festivities.

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After their final school year was ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, 4,180 graduates were finally awarded degrees and certificates by Western Kentucky University under a clear blue sky at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

Graduates of Gordon Ford College of Business and College of Health and Human Services participated in the 10 a.m. ceremony, while graduates of Potter College of Arts & Letters,

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences and Ogden College of Science & Engineering were recognized in the 6 p.m. ceremony Saturday.



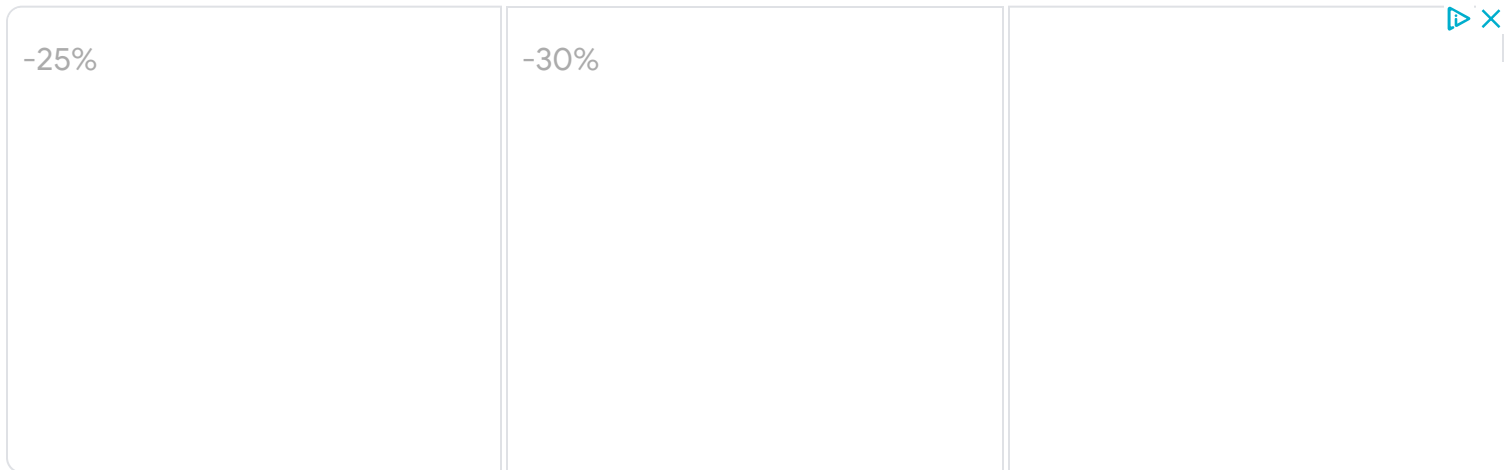
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Graduates came from the fall 2020, spring 2021 and summer 2021 semesters.

WKU reported that out of the 4,180 degrees and certificates awarded, there were 139 associate, 2,836 bachelor’s, 725 master’s, 85 doctoral and six specialist degrees, and 271 undergraduate certificates and 118 graduate certificates.

Graduates were seated on Feix Field surrounded by hundreds of their closest friends and family during Saturday’s ceremonies that followed “Healthy on the Hill” guidelines.

“You’ve reached a key milestone – one that is likely to be among the most significant in your lives,” WKU President Timothy Caboni said during the first ceremony. “We celebrate today the continuation of what I hope is a lifelong journey of learning and discovery.”



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“Your senior year was different in so many ways,” Caboni continued. “You experienced the unimaginable consequences of a global pandemic unleashing its wrath on our world. But together, you faced the challenges that unfolded. You continued your studies and you overcame in order to achieve. Class of 2021: Well done!”

Jose Canchola, 22, of Scottsville was one of the 4,180 individuals recognized Saturday. For Canchola, the milestone is one he couldn’t have reached without the support of his loved ones.

“It’s just an exciting moment for me and my family,” Canchola said. “They have really helped me out the past five years. Without them, I couldn’t have done it. I’m really ready for the real world. I’m ready to get my master’s (degree) as well. I’m very thankful for my friends and family.”

Canchola received his degree in sports management.

Fellow graduate Michael DeNoia, 23, of Red Bank, N.J., also saw the occasion as a significant achievement after the time he spent at the university.

DeNoia received a degree in health care administration during Saturday morning’s ceremony.

“It means a lot to me,” DeNoia said. “I made a lot of great memories on this Hill. I made lifelong friends with my fraternity Phi Delta Theta, and now I get to walk across the stage and see my future endeavors.”



Both Canchola and DeNoia said there was a learning curve due to the pandemic forcing most of their classes online, but they advanced through the school year with the assistance of their professors.

Commencement ceremonies will continue in the coming days. The Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky will recognize 78 students from 43 counties in its 14th graduating class. The ceremony will begin at 2 p.m. Sunday at E.A. Diddle Arena.

The commencement celebration for spring and summer 2020 graduates of all five academic colleges will begin at 10 a.m. May 8 at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

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