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Local students graduate from Gatton Academy

- SUBMITTED May 15, 2018



On Saturday, 88 students representing 48 counties from across the Commonwealth of Kentucky were recognized during The Gatton Academy's 11th graduation ceremony in Van Meter Hall.

Gatton Academy Executive Director and Mahurin Professor of Gifted Education Dr. Julia Roberts expressed that the graduation ceremony was a celebration for Kentucky.

"A graduation ceremony at The Gatton Academy is really one for the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky," Roberts stated. "I congratulate the graduates who are well on the path to being prepared to lead Kentucky in the future."

Gatton Academy Director Dr. Lynette Breedlove shared her praise for the graduating seniors and her gratitude for the WKU faculty and staff members in making The Gatton Academy both a rewarding and challenging educational experience for Kentucky.

"Graduating from The Gatton Academy is a notable achievement. Our students seize opportunities to dive into curriculum and research experiences. I am proud of how they have persevered," Breedlove said. "I am exceptionally grateful for the commitment of the WKU faculty and staff who have opened their classrooms, offices and laboratories to provide our students with so many remarkable opportunities which has prepared them for infinite possibilities."

Nineteen members of the class were selected as National Merit finalists; five seniors earned National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) scholarships; four students were recognized as semifinalists in the Siemens competition; 86 percent of the class participated in faculty-sponsored research during their time at the academy; 15 graduates completed the school's STEM + Critical Languages curriculum in either Arabic or Chinese; and 95 percent of the senior class studied abroad while at The Gatton Academy. The graduating class completed a total of 5,390.5 hours of service during their two years at The Gatton Academy, which is an average of 61.25 hours per senior.

Olivia Gilliam, a graduating senior from Madisonville, reflected on how each student found their identity over the past two years.

“The most valuable thing we possess is our identity. For many of us, we spent the majority of our younger years being known as the smart kid,” Gilliam stated. “In coming to Gatton, we were no longer the smart kid, but a smart kid. We were able to become who we wanted to be ...our true identity. From spending all of our money on India Oven and hosting 2K tournaments on our wings to trading cryptocurrency in the computer lab and watching movies in the den every Friday night. We relinquished the identities that were given to us and replaced them with priceless personalities. Thank you, Class of 2018!”

Hood Harris delivered the commencement address. Harris is the president of AT&T Kentucky and his words centered on the future for each of the graduates in the room.

“We heard earlier today that you all could change the world,” Harris stated. “I want to say that it is not just that you can make a difference, but that you must make a difference and you will make a difference in our world. You are going to be the basis on which this world becomes a better place.”

While reflecting on her Gatton career, Frankfort senior Niki Rajendran looked at not only the firsts the group had experienced together, but also those events that marked lasts.

“One day we'll have our last school test, our last time scheduling classes on TopNet. One day we'll have our last wild Friday night exploring campus with the people we've made a million memories with. One day we'll lock our rooms, return our keys and walk out of those doors at

Schneider for the last time as students. One day we'll be standing in alphabetical order in caps and gowns with the people who have become our family. All of these people that will likely never be all together in the same room again. That day is today, and I couldn't be more thankful that it was with you guys."

In the fall of 2018, students from the graduating class will attend 32 colleges and universities across the United States and Canada: University of Alabama in Huntsville, Arizona State University, Baylor University, Case Western Reserve University, Centre College, College of Charleston, University of Chicago, University of Cincinnati, Columbia University, Eckerd College, Georgia Institute of Technology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, University of Maryland-College Park, McGill University, Michigan State University, University of Mississippi, Northeastern University, The Ohio State University, Oklahoma State University, University of Pennsylvania, Purdue University, University of Southern California, Stanford University, Tulane University, University of Virginia, Washington University in St. Louis, Western Kentucky University, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Vanderbilt University, and Yale University. Three students will also be participating in GAP year programs prior to continuing their education.

Members of The Gatton Academy's Class of 2018 included:

Barren County

Robert Sims Alexander (Glasgow High School)

Monroe County

Tom Harrison Froedge (Monroe County High School)*

* Gatton Community Scholar

These graduates are recognized for completing two semesters of research with a research outcome that is presented to a professional audience after being accepted through a vetted process OR four semesters of participation in STEM+Critical Languages, AND documenting 60 hours of service.

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