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WKU to honor famed bluegrass musician Bush during 185th commencement

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 7 hrs ago

Joseph Ayers of Bowling Green hugs his mother, math instructor Robin Ayers, and his friend Daniel Ruanto of Bowling Green as they finish the Topper Walk on Friday, May 11, 2018, at WKU's new commencement ceremony. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

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Western Kentucky University will award degrees and certificates to more than 2,650 graduates this weekend, including Bowling Green native and famed bluegrass musician Sam Bush, who will receive an honorary doctorate in fine arts.

“He’s been a good ambassador for the state,” WKU spokesman Bob Skipper said of the university’s plan to honor Bush.

Bush’s recognition isn’t the only change to graduation festivities this year, as Skipper said some tweaks have been made to help streamline certain events.

For starters, the Topper Walk that was added last year has been moved up an hour to 6 p.m. Members of the 2019 graduating class are being asked to show up in front of the Kentucky Museum at 5:15 p.m. Friday ahead of the Topper Walk to Houchens-Smith Stadium.

After the parade featuring international flags and graduates waving red towels as they make their way down the Hill, the commencement ceremony will begin immediately following the seating of students at the stadium, a news release said.

The ceremony will feature remarks from WKU President Timothy Caboni, Bush’s recognition, the commissioning of 11 ROTC cadets and the recognition of Kyla Scanlon of Louisville as the Ogden Foundation Scholar (the university’s top undergraduate award) and Rachel Kaiser of Covington as the recipient of the John D. Minton Award (awarded to the top graduate student).

Skipper said the Topper Walk and the commencement ceremony itself should move a little faster in response to feedback from last year.

“We took those comments to heart and are making some changes to improve the ceremony,” he said.

WKU will confer degrees and certificates to 2,654 graduates. That includes 72 associate, 1,844 bachelor’s, 483 master’s, 59 doctoral and seven specialist degrees, along with 128 undergraduate certificates and 61 graduate certificates.

After the ceremony, graduates and their families and friends can attend the Big Red Bash on WKU's South Lawn. The celebration will feature music, food and fireworks, which Skipper said will start later in the evening this year.

On Saturday, WKU's five academic colleges will host special recognition ceremonies at Diddle Arena for their graduates, who will walk the line and shake hands with Caboni.

"That'll be a little more of an intimate setting where the graduates will be celebrating with members of their own colleges," Skipper said.

The schedule includes Gordon Ford College of Business at 8 a.m.; Potter College of Arts & Letters at 10:30 a.m.; Ogden College of Science and Engineering at 1 p.m.; College of Education and Behavioral Sciences at 3:30 p.m.; and College of Health and Human Services at 6 p.m.

A news release said the Friday and Saturday ceremonies will be broadcast live on WKU-PBS and webcast live on the WKU YouTube Channel at www.youtube.com/wku news and at www.facebook.com/wkunews.

– A list of other events is available at www.wku.edu/commencement/special-celebrations-spring.php.

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