WKU team takes first in concrete canoe competition

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WKU's Concrete Canoe Team takes home first place in the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) 2026 Civil Engineering Student Championship held from June 25 through June 27 at Fairmont State University in Fairmont, West Virginia. (Submitted)

After spending months working on a patriotic vessel to honor America's 250th Anniversary, Western Kentucky University made history by winning first place in the American Society of Civil Engineers' (ASCE) Civil Engineering Student Championships held from June 25 through June 27 in Fairmont, West Virginia.

"I stood up and started crying seeing everyone happy and excited," said Sophia Adams, co-captain of WKU's Concrete Canoe Team.

WKU was among 25 teams that qualified for the ASCE competition, according to a WKU press release.

The ASCE has three society-wide competitions that teach students skills they'll utilize daily in their civil engineering careers. WKU competed in the ASCE Concrete Canoe Competition — ASCE's flagship competition where teams are evaluated and scored based on a combination of the final canoe product, oral presentations, a design paper and the race result.

Adams said she was happy to go out with a bang during her last year on the Hill. When the team won, she said memories came flooding back from all the late nights and team meetings.

Adams was a co-captain alongside Luke Evans, who also graduated from WKU last academic year. While Adams was in charge of communications, she said Evans oversaw the design process.

Evans said he was shocked initially that WKU won first place in the competition. He said they competed against a lot of big schools, so he was overjoyed and excited to win after all the hard work the team put into the final product.

In honor of America's 250th Anniversary, Evans said WKU's canoe was named the USS Alliance. Evans said the canoe's name was inspired by an American Revolution-era worship with the same name.

It took two to three months to create the displays for the canoe, according to Evans. One of the displays had over 30 pictures of veterans from the different team members' families.

“We have a lot of teammates whose family members have fought and served for this country,” Evans said.

Throughout the process, Evans said the team met twice each week to create a lightweight and durable canoe. Teams were required to create technical designs, experiment with concrete mixes, build and test a canoe, and make modifications for the final product as needed.

Evans said WKU tested its first concrete canoe design at the end of the fall semester. At the competition in June, the team was also required to display and present the canoe before racing it.

The USS Alliance weighed 182 pounds and was over 19 feet long. WKU won the overall competition and received top honors for their technical presentation and final product, marking the university’s fifth consecutive year placing in the top five.

“This was all worth it,” Evans said. “This was awesome.”