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OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita honors 309 graduates during 133rd commencement



By Rachel Gaddis

December 9, 2020

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.— Ouachita Baptist University celebrated 309 graduates from the classes of 2019 and 2020 during its 133rd commencement ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 5. The ceremony, which was rescheduled from its original date in May due to COVID-19, was held outdoors at Cliff Harris Stadium on Ouachita's campus and followed Arkansas Department of Health protocols for guest and graduate safety.

University officials conferred Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Music Education and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees. Dr. Ben Sells, Ouachita president, presided over the commencement exercises.

"Many of the graduates and their family members are in person, while other grads and their families needed to participate online. To our graduates in-person and online, this ceremony is about you and celebrating your Ouachita degree," Dr. Sells said as he opened the ceremony. "You're surrounded by people who helped make this day possible, people who believe in you and will continue to be for you, people who are eager to see all that God will do in and through you."



Photos by Andy Henderson

In his commencement address, Dr. Sells began on a personal note.

“Lisa and I arrived at Ouachita in 2016 like many of you. We feel a special kinship with you because we began our Ouachita journey together,” he said. “That kinship, however, isn’t based just on the years we’ve spent together but on what we’ve lived through together – a pandemic of great enduring consequence.

“Ouachita is a university that makes paramount a love of God and a love of learning. We aspire to help prepare you to serve the purposes of God in your generation. Therefore, I believe it’s important and timely that we reflect on this question: ‘How then shall we live, both in the shadow of a pandemic and in the light of eternity?’”

Dr. Sells remarked on the university’s shift from residential to remote learning in March 2020 in response to the pandemic, the efforts of faculty and staff to fulfill their commitment and calling to serve students, as well as the class of 2020’s “resilience to finish in the face of adversity.”

“I remember seniors departing from campus for the last time, some in tears, and some gathering for prayer in Berry Chapel,” Sells said with emotion in his voice. “I remember how you prayed for me.

“Crises and adversity reveal character, and experiences may also illuminate a truth – truth that changes our heart, our habits and our hopes for our future – truth that also forges character,” he continued. “It seems appropriate at this final moment of your Ouachita experience to consider the truths your Ouachita education has revealed to you and how those truths are changing your character for good.”



Photo (left) by Abby Blankenship. Photo (right) by Andy Henderson.

Dr. Sells then charged the class of 2020 with advice given to him by a mentor, a mentor who had been given the same advice 50 years prior: “If you can’t see very far ahead, go ahead as far as you can see.”

“Maybe 20 years from now, when one of my own grandchildren might be graduating from college or making a difficult career decision, they might ask me for some advice,” he said. “I’ll likely use the moment to tell them about you and how we found our way forward together in the spring of 2020.”

“Every graduating class deserves heartfelt congratulations,” Sells said as he closed. “But this year, we feel it deeper when we say to you, ‘Congratulations; well done!’”



Photo by Andy Henderson

Senior Class President Maggie Donnell, a social justice studies and psychology double major from Rogers, Ark., led the commencement invocation. The university's vision and mission statements were read by Lori Motl, director of admissions counseling, and Rickey Rogers, dean of students. Scripture reading was led by the top graduate from the Pruet School of Christian Studies, Seigen Nichols, a Christian studies/Christian ministry and business administration/entrepreneurship double major from Forest Hill, La. Dr. Kathy Collins, chair of the Department of Education, and Jim Rothwell, assistant dean of the Hickingbotham School of Business, served as commencement marshals.

The recognized graduates featured 167 honor graduates, including 32 who graduated *summa cum laude* with a grade point average of 3.95 or higher, with 16 of those graduating with a 4.0 GPA; 71 who graduated *magna cum laude* (3.75 GPA); and 61 who graduated *cum laude* (3.5 GPA). University officials also recognized 32 graduates who completed Ouachita's Carl Goodson Honors Program.

Additionally, students who attended Ouachita from Fall 2016 to Spring 2020 represent the highest four-year graduation rate on record for the university at 60.5%, well surpassing the most recent state average of 32% published by the National Center for Education Statistics.

View the names of May 2020, August 2020, December 2019 and August 2019 [graduates recognized on Dec. 5 here](#). Watch the full commencement video at vimeo.com/obu/2020grad and visit vimeo.com/obu/2020slideshow to view the senior slideshow. For photos of each graduate as they crossed the stage, visit [our Smugmug album](#) and use the password *2020grad*. See Dr. Sells' [full commencement address here](#).

Ouachita Baptist University, a leading liberal arts university in Arkadelphia, Ark., is in its 134th year as a Christ-centered learning community. It is ranked the No. 2 Regional College in the South by *U.S. News & World Report*. The university has an average student/faculty ratio of 13:1 and has a 99% career outcomes rate for its graduates. Its seven academic schools include business, Christian studies, education, fine arts, humanities, natural sciences and social sciences. For more information about Ouachita, visit www.obu.edu or call 800-DIAL-OBU.

Lead photo: Ouachita graduates sit six feet apart during the university's 133rd Commencement ceremony held at Cliff Harris Stadium on Saturday, Dec. 5. Due to the original May 2020 Commencement being postponed to December because of the pandemic, Ouachita honored 309 graduates from the classes of 2019 and 2020. Photo by Abby Blankenship.