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Ouachita honors 30 graduates in inaugural Applied Behavior Analysis Hooding Ceremony

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For immediate release
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By Kiki Schleiff Cherry
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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University honored 30 graduates during the inaugural Applied Behavioral Analysis Hooding Ceremony on Aug. 7 at Walker Conference Center with Dr. Stan Poole, vice president for academic affairs, presiding. The ceremony recognized the university's first class of master's degree recipients since the 1990s by presenting them with their traditional academic regalia.

Graduates received the Master of Science degree in applied behavior analysis, which prepares them to sit for the Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) Exam and equips them to serve in fields that address specialties such as autism, developmental disorders and Alzheimer's disease.

Picture 1 Monica Smith (Photo by Kiki Schleiff Cherry)

A charge was given to the class over video by Dr. Steve Gonzalez, visiting assistant professor of applied behavior analysis.

"Never stop learning. Always continue to achieve," Gonzalez said, "and strive to be a better person."
He encouraged the class to not be afraid to be afraid, and to embrace challenges, stating that "you have inspired me through our course interactions."

The program, which is the first of its kind in Arkansas, was launched just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The low-residency program combines online and in-person instruction and allows students to complete it in just 15 months.

Picture 2 (Photo by Kiki Schleiff Cherry)

"This class has persevered through extraordinary circumstances," said Dr. Monica Hardin, associate vice president of graduate and online education. "This is the first master's-level class at Ouachita in over 30 years and launched in a time when the rest of the world was shutting down. The perseverance of our students and faculty are unparalleled and I am grateful to each of them for their commitment to the program."

Dr. Sheila Barnes, director and professor of applied behavior analysis, shared the symbolism of the regalia before presenting the graduates with their hoods. She challenged them with these words: "Your scholarly achievements were hard fought but will serve you well. You have earned Ouachita's first graduate degree in applied behavior analysis, a credential that will enable you to make a difference in the lives of so many."

Following the hooding, Poole gave the benediction and Jon Merryman, director of alumni, led in the singing of the alma mater.

Ouachita Baptist University, a private liberal arts university in Arkadelphia, Ark., is in its 135th year as a Christ-centered learning community and is ranked the No. 2 "Regional College in the South" by U.S. News & World Report. The second cohort of applied behavior analysis students currently is underway, and applications open for the third cohort on September 1. Learn more about the university's highly personal approach at www.obu.edu.

Graduates earning a Master of Science degree in applied behavior analysis in August 2021 include, in order of hometown:

Alma, Ark. – Chelby Mae Mitchell, William Keith Montgomery
Arkadelphia, Ark. – Haylee Herndon Cook, Charity Carmen Curlin
Bauxite, Ark. – Elizabeth L. Thompson-Mattox
Bono, Ark. – Mallory Grace Shelton
Clarksdale, Miss. – Anne Friedman Weiss
Conway, Ark. – Lori Elliot Page
Danville, Ark. – Michaela Camille Papasan
El Dorado, Ark. – Monica Marie Smith
Fayetteville, Ark. – Connie Marie Schade
Fort Smith, Ark. – Lakota S. G. Kasworm
Hot Springs, Ark. – Charley Marissa Capps
Little Elm, Texas – Michiko Kuwayama Lee
Little Rock, Ark. – Bethany Lynn Blanche Long, Kally Marie Smith, Bailey Marie Terrell, Victoria Lynn Williams
Magazine, Ark. – Kaylee Lauren Pickartz
Mansfield, Ark. – Mia Renee Harper
Maumelle, Ark. – Katie Waller Sanders
Myrtle Beach, S.C. – Katelyn Ann Sherrill

Nashville, Ark. – Sadie Rae Prejean
Prairie Grove, Ark. – Megan Houston Chambers
Roland, Ark. – Robyn Alyssa Blaylock
Rogers, Ark. – Amanda Dawn Gray
Texarkana, Ark. – Madeline Nicole Harris, Bailee Lynn Stevens
Tulsa, Okla. – Lisa Michelle Hoffman
Wynne, Ark. – Calli Brooke Martin

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