



One Hundred and Fifty-Sixth
Commencement

May 2, 2026

10:00 AM

Dear Class of 2026,

It is my great honor to address you today as the newest graduates of the University of Tennessee Southern. Congratulations on reaching this momentous milestone! Today is a celebration of your hard work, your late nights, and the relentless curiosity that brought you to this moment. You have not only mastered your chosen fields but have also shown the resilience and character that define the Firehawk spirit. As you turn your tassels, you aren't just finishing a chapter; you are stepping into a world that needs your unique talents and fresh perspectives more than ever.

While you may be leaving our campus, you are not leaving our family. Today, you join a network of alumni who are leading industries, solving complex problems, and shaping the future across Tennessee and beyond. I hope you carry the values you learned at UT Southern—integrity, excellence, and a spirit of service—into everything you do next. Take a moment to thank the family, friends, and mentors who supported you along the way. Your success is a testament to their belief in you, as well as your own dedication. We are incredibly proud of everything you have achieved, and we cannot wait to see where your journey leads. Remember, no matter how far you travel, you will always have a home at UT Southern.

Welcome to the Firehawk alumni family!

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melinda S. Arnold". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melinda S. Arnold, Ph.D.
Chancellor
University of Tennessee Southern

PROGRAM OF EXERCISES

*ACADEMIC PROCESSION

Mr. J. Stephen Sanders, Bagpiper

*INVOCATION

Rev. Laura McMasters

*NATIONAL ANTHEM

Dr. Samuel Sherman, Director

Dr. Peter Douglas, Piano

WELCOME

Melinda S. Arnold, Ph.D., Chancellor

CONGRATULATORY REMARKS

Dr. Keith Carver, Senior Vice Chancellor, UTIA

GREETINGS ON BEHALF OF THE SENIOR CLASS

Ms. Kaitlyn Leigh Scroggins, President

CLASS OF 2026 CONFERRAL OF DEGREES

CONCLUDING REMARKS

*CHORAL RESPONSE

UT Southern Concert Choir

*SENDING FORTH

Ms. Tina McGill

DISMISSAL

Mr. J. Stephen Sanders, Bagpiper

*Please stand as you are able.

HONORS

Graduation honors listed are based on the cumulative grade point average at the end of the Fall 2025 semester. Final honors are subject to change based upon the cumulative grade point average recorded at the conclusion of the student's final semester.

Summa cum Laude, 3.90 to 4.00***

Magna cum Laude, 3.70 to 3.89**

Cum Laude, 3.50 to 3.69*

THE CLASS OF 2026

BACHELOR OF ARTS

Zoe Fayth Dennis, Fine Arts

*Keely Faith Grover, Fine Arts

*Clare Elizabeth Jones, Fine Arts

*Lucas Daniel Keown, English

Silkiari Vazquez Troche, Interdisciplinary Studies

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE

**Tayte Aldridge-Halliwell, Computer Information Systems

Matthew Andrea, History

***Tiffany Lauren Andrews, Elementary Education

Cierra Alyssa Arnold, Behavioral Sciences

**Tonya Michelle Ashby, Elementary Education

Gaspar Audisio, Behavioral Sciences

*Lindsey Claire Aymett, Elementary Education

Alexandria Baclich, History

**Riley David Barratt, Interdisciplinary Studies

**Annkathryn L. Berry-Brown, Public Health Education

Makenson Jean Binder, Sport Management

Isabela Rose Bodily, Elementary Education

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
(CONTINUED)**

Ethan Boyer, Biology

*Gwendolyn Brackin, Special Education

Tavien Brandon, Interdisciplinary Studies

**Richard Andrew Britton, Chemistry

**Kendra Marie Brungardt, Biology

**Brayden C. Buckner, Behavioral Sciences

**Courtney Lyn Burrow, Elementary Education

Dyllon Butcher, Behavioral Sciences

Iain S. Campbell, Homeland Security

Sierra Ventura Campbell, Interdisciplinary Studies

*Jacob Carden, History

**Stephanie Renee Cates, Elementary Education

Ryan Catone, Cybersecurity

Cecilia Caprial Cayll, Chemistry

Holly Chatman, Special Education

**Colin C. Cheplen, Behavioral Sciences

**Olivia E. Cheplen, Biology

***Skylar K. Cisne, Elementary Education

Caroline Ardell Cook, Kinesiology

***Bibiane Lucille Crane, Homeland Security

*Addison Crawford, Criminal Justice

John Marion Crutcher, History

***Lauren Curtis, Elementary Education

**Mattie Layne Danley, Elementary Education

**Ginger Lynnette Devers, Elementary Education

Tyler S. Dudley, Interdisciplinary Studies

**Aaliyah I. Dunavant, Elementary Education

*Mattison J. Dunavant, Criminal Justice

Riley Beth Edwards, Special Education

*Carlee Emerson, Special Education

*Emma Grace Eubank, History

**Carleigh Flatt, Elementary Education

**Hannah Fleming, Elementary Education

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
(CONTINUED)**

Sandra Dianne Freeman, History

**Hector Garcia Maestre, Kinesiology

*Amber Rose Gardner, Elementary Education

**Allie Garner, Elementary Education

***Katie Garner, Elementary Education

***Kristen Garner, Elementary Education

Isabella Garza, Biology

*Stella Grace Gilbreath, Biology

***Alexia Irene Greer, Elementary Education

*Ian Gulley, Special Education

**Kaitlyn Rebecca Guzman, Special Education

Joshua Hunter Hancock, Interdisciplinary Studies

Jackson Chad Hargrove, Interdisciplinary Studies

**Jason Elijah Hartsfield, History

Kaitlyn Eleise Harvey, Biology

Grace Eliza Hastings, Kinesiology

Tamyia Amari Haston, Elementary Education

**James Cooper Hlubb, Cybersecurity

***Emily Grace Hovis, Behavioral Sciences

*Caden Jacks, History

Dakota Jackson, Cybersecurity

John Michael Jeter, Cybersecurity

*Caden Laine Jones, Elementary Education

**Jennifer Robin Jones, Behavioral Sciences

**Gracie Louise Kelly, Elementary Education

Emberlyn Kilburn, Public Health Education

***Courtney Brianne Lamb, Special Education

*Chloe LeClair, Interdisciplinary Studies

Jeremy J. Lincoln, Kinesiology

***Anna Elizabeth Lirette, Special Education

***Seth R. Lloyd, Interdisciplinary Studies

***Emily Jo Lopp, Elementary Education

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
(CONTINUED)**

**Holli Loveless, Behavioral Sciences

Alyssa Leigh Lunsford, Kinesiology

Sezlynney Lytle, Criminal Justice

***Miranda Reavis Manderson, Elementary Education

**Elijah Reese Mashburn, Behavioral Sciences

*Macy Lee Maurer, Elementary Education

Tad Maxwell, Sport Management

***Madison McCurry, Elementary Education

***McKenzie Love McElyea, Elementary Education

Alexis Faith McEwen, Biology

**Jamison Lee McIlveen, Criminal Justice

Alyxandrya Shay McLain, Behavioral Sciences

*Sabrina Mendenhall, Behavioral Sciences

Faith Middleton, Criminal Justice

*Alaina Rose Miller, Behavioral Sciences

*Sophie Leigh Miller, Criminal Justice

Zane P. Miller, History

Brileigh Grace Moore, Special Education

Rostand Ndong Essomba, Sport Management

Kimberly Nicole Neely, Interdisciplinary Studies

Courtney A. Norwood, Biology

Kamryn D. Nowlin, Interdisciplinary Studies

*Olukemi Ania Aramide Onadeko, Biology

***Emily Shae Persell, Elementary Education

***Lauren Fay Pettie, Kinesiology

*Kyla Ansley Piercy, Behavioral Sciences

**Siegfred L. Pitpitan, Homeland Security

Kaysen Isabelle Welsh, Elementary Education

**Iona Joyce Pollitt, Kinesiology

Emma Price, Biology

Ridge D. Raper, Interdisciplinary Studies

**William Reed, Elementary Education

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
(CONTINUED)**

- Tyler Layne Reischman, Kinesiology
Zachary Rippetto, Interdisciplinary Studies
Adeline M. Rivera, Public Health Education
***Rebecka F. Roddy, Biology
Caiden Rodgers, History
**Whitney Brooke Rushton, Elementary Education
**Daniel C. Sanchez, Behavioral Sciences
**Jasmine Leigh Schuett, Kinesiology
*Kaitlyn L. Scroggins, Biology
*Stephanie Shanklin, Interdisciplinary Studies
**Chloe Eileen Gayle Shelton, Behavioral Sciences
Ja-Kayla M. Small, Public Health Education
***Tanya McDaniel Stephens, Elementary Education
*Paige Elizabeth Stiles, Special Education
Jake A. Stuteville, Criminal Justice
*A'Maria Elizabeth Thomison, Behavioral Sciences
*Jeffery Juston Tipper, Interdisciplinary Studies
**Kacey L. Torrence, Criminal Justice
***Ella Townsend, Special Education
***Dayla Rae Trentham, Special Education
*Colton A. Tullis, Cybersecurity
Isaiah Varela, Kinesiology
Emileigh Faye Vaughn, Biology
***Jennifer Vaughn, Special Education
Natalia Vergara, Kinesiology
Zachary Wade, Behavioral Sciences
**Alexis Wagster, Special Education
*Allison L. Wells, Kinesiology
Grady J. Wheeler, Kinesiology
Kaden E. Whitson, Interdisciplinary Studies
Jackson Williams, Biology
**Leighanna Williams, Biology

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE (CONTINUED)

Emma Williams, Special Education

**Navaeh Lorena Willoughby-Whiddon, Chemistry

Ceterria Wilson, Interdisciplinary Studies

Heather Anne Wilson, Elementary Education

JaMil Pierre Wilson, Behavioral Sciences

Elizabeth M. Wren, Interdisciplinary Studies

**Karlee Jane Wright, Special Education

LaVoyd Aydan Yates, Kinesiology

*Sheyla Johanna Zambrano G., Behavioral Sciences

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Katie Alexander, Management

***Mercie Danielle Ashmore, Management

**Olivia Madison Barksdale, Management

Jamil Betancourt, Management

Jackson Langley Bradford, Management

Jack Tobias Brockie, Management

Nathan Troy Calahan, Management of Information Systems

Jay H. Carroll, Accounting

Timothy Lane Courtemanche, Management

Luis Cupertino De Santana, Management

*Anigail Grace Edde, Accounting

**Callie Gabrielle Garland, Management

Jacob Kaleb Garner, Management

Lacy Garner, Management

Natalie Garner, Management

Kenneth Garretson, Management

Madison Lindsey Golden, Management

Bryce Jesús Gómez, Management

Caleb Michael Grooms, Management

***Stephanie Hodgson, Accounting

Gracie D. Houser, Management

***Karis Alivia Knaggs, Management

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (CONTINUED)

Shizuya Kubo, Management

Neidyn Lopez-Hernandez, Accounting

***Daejah A. Maklary, Management

Rebekah Ellen Marshall, Management

*Mikayla McCain, Accounting

Patrick Chambers McGilberry, Management

*Kade W. Montgomery, Management of Information Systems

Gilbert T. Mussman, Management

***Lucca Agustin Olocco Allub, Management

***Lillie Ruth Runions, Management

**Emma Dawn Vizina, Management

Ryan J. Wells, Management

**John K. Whitehead, Accounting

***James Bryce Woodard, Accounting

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING

Taylor Ann Beasley

***Christian Grace Billingsley

*Jayci Emma Boozer

Hannah Brown

*Savanna Jane Buchanan

Charles Daniel Burk

Cason Trae Durrance

***Keidra Monique Gardner

Cameron Dustin Green

Trysten Rayne Hobbs

**Sophia Rose Iacobelli

*Kaylee Nicole Knight

**Ripley N. Ratliff

*Delaney Grace Smith

*Lulie Marie Thomas

**Emily Grace Watson

MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Craig Robert Bega Jr.
Clayton R. Birdsong
John Clayton Bodily
Emma Grace Brindley
Jeffery William Brown
Nathan Reed Brown
Juan F. Bucheli Mendez
Jennifer B. Carroll
Truman Jason Carroll
Richard Myles Donahue III
Cora Grace Duke
Garrison Hall Farmer
Quentin Ferron
Jacob Aaron Hudson
Conner MeVey
Halle Brynne Murrey
Lydia Smith
Madison LeAnn Tidwell
Brantley Whitwell
Cali Whitwell

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Nathan Lee Daniels
Racheal Garner
Mackenzie Grace Keeler
Tyler Austin Malone
Jessica Nicole Newport
Brandon J. O'Brien
Katelyn Pope

ACADEMIC DRESS

Academic institutions have created a wide variety of customs including distinctive dress, colors, and ceremony to recognize academic accomplishments. The origins of academic dress (regalia) consisting of gown, hoods, and hats, date back to the medieval universities of Europe when universities were emerging from religious organizations. Originally, the academic attire was worn for warmth and the faculty instructed classes while wearing their academic regalia. English traditions originating at Oxford and Cambridge led to the development of academic regalia in the United States. In 1895 American colleges and universities standardized academic dress in this country. The costumes, colors, trimmings and patterns that you see today are all traditional and specify the highest degree earned by the wearer, the institution that awarded the degree, and the field of study in which the degree was earned.

The bachelor's gown, designed to be worn closed, has pointed sleeves, and long pleated front panels. The master's gown, which may be worn open or closed, has very long sleeves, open at the wrist, that hang down nearly to the ground. The back part of its oblong shape is square cut and the front part has the arc cut away. Doctoral gowns may be worn open or closed and have large, full, bell-shaped sleeves. Bachelor's and master's gowns are untrimmed while the doctoral gown has velvet panels on each side of the front opening and three velvet bars across the upper part of each sleeve. The color of the velvet can be black or the appropriate color identifying the field of study.

The hood was originally a functional garment, worn to shield the head from the elements. In the English tradition, it has developed into a bright and decorative garment worn only on special occasions. The awarding of the hood signifies the earning of an advanced degree and the longer the hood the higher the degree. The color of the border around the neck represents the field of study with the lining signifying the institution from which the degree was earned.

Hats also have significance and variation. The flat mortarboard is the convention, but the softer tam or befeater is sometimes specified for the doctor. The tassel worn on the cap may be black, gold, the college or university's color, or the color of the appropriate academic discipline.

ACADEMIC DRESS (CONTINUED)

The colors associated with different fields of study are as follows:

Agriculture – Maize

Accounting & Business – Drab

Economics – Copper

Engineering – Orange

Forestry – Russe

History – White

Journalism – Crimson

Arts, Letters, Humanities – White

Dentistry – Lilac

Education – Light Blue

Fine Arts & Architecture – Brown

Health/Physical Education – Sage Green

Human Services – Citron

Law – Purple

Library Science – Lemon

Music – Pink

Philosophy – Dark Blue

Sciences – Golden Yellow

Veterinary Science – Gray

Medicine – Green

Nursing – Apricot

Psychology – Citron

Theology – Scarlet

Commencement ceremonies are designed to honor the accomplishments and achievements of those receiving degrees. The pageantry associated with graduation is designed to add significance to this special event.

ACADEMIC DRESS

STOLES, CORDS, & TASSELS

Solid Gold Cord and Red Stole denote graduate of the W. Garie Taylor Honors Program.

Blue and Green Cord denotes member of Alpha Chi National College Honor Scholarship Society.

Gold Stole denotes member of Gamma Beta Phi National Honor Society.

Purple and Green Cord denotes Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education.

Blue Cord denotes member of Pi Gamma Mu International Honor Society for Social Sciences.

Gold and Green Cord denotes member of Sigma Beta Delta International Honor Society for Business, Management & Administration.

Red and Black Cord denotes member of Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

Tapping Key denotes Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Honor Society.

Grey Stole denotes Student-Athlete.

White Stole denotes Ingram Scholar.

Orange and Red Cord denotes Senior Impact Giving.

Purple and Gold Cord denotes a Resident Assistant.

White, Gray, and Orange Cord denotes an Orientation Leader.

THE UNIVERSITY MACE

The mace is symbolic of the University's authority to confer degrees and is carried in all commencement ceremonies and other auspicious academic events. The mace has an ancient history as a symbol of authority. In medieval times it was a studded, club-like weapon, made of iron and capable of breaking armor. It came to be associated with the protection of the kings in both France and England and was carried by the king's sergent-at-arms. In the 13th century it began to be used for civil purposes and figured in the processions of city mayors and other dignitaries. Eventually the mace became a symbol also for academic institutions, an emblem of order and authority in the pageantry of ceremonial occasions.

The Mace of the University of Tennessee Southern features the seal of the Institution, with its historic roots symbolized by the three Greek columns in the campus gazebo. These three were saved in a fire, from 1971, that destroyed Tennessee Hall, a building at the very heart of the campus. The motto "Cognito, Opportunitas, Veritas," translated from Latin as "Knowledge, Opportunity, Truth," is emblematic of the core values upon which the Institution was built.



THE HONORS PROGRAM AND HONOR SOCIETIES

The **GARIE W. TAYLOR HONORS PROGRAM** seeks to promote a community of scholars through the development of challenging curricula, cultural enrichment, and interaction with leaders in the religious, political, academic, business, scientific and arts arenas. Participation in the Honors Program is limited to students who meet minimum ACT/SAT and GPA requirements.

GAMMA BETA PHI SOCIETY is an honor and service organization. Membership in the society is open to students with at least 12 semester hours credit and rank in the top 20 percent of their class. Students must meet the national standards of worthy character, good mentality, creditable achievement, and commendable attitude. The purpose of the society is to recognize and encourage individual excellence in education, to promote the development of leadership ability and character in its members, and to foster, disseminate and improve education through service projects to the school and the community.

KAPPA DELTA PI recognizes scholarship and excellence in education; promotes the development and dissemination of worthy educational ideas and practices; enhances continuous growth and leadership; and fosters inquiry and reflection on significant educational issues. Membership is open to students in education programs who have attained sophomore standing, have completed or are enrolled in at least 12 semesters of education courses, and possess a minimum GPA of 3.0.

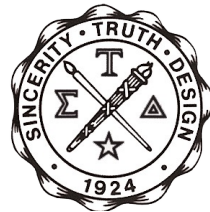
PI GAMMA MU encourages excellence in the social sciences. The society provides recognition for scholastic achievement, and offers enrichment opportunities through service projects, publications, scholarships and lectureship grants. Membership is limited to those of high scholarship and good moral character. Juniors and seniors who rank in the upper 35 percent of their class, maintain a grade average of "B" or better, and have 20 hours in social science courses may be inducted.

SIGMA BETA DELTA is for students of business, management, or administration who are pursuing baccalaureate degrees. The purposes are to encourage and recognize scholarship and accomplishment among students of business, management, and administration, and to encourage and promote aspirations toward personal and professional improvement and a life distinguished by honorable service to humankind. Organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes, membership is limited to those of high scholarship and good moral character. Candidates in the upper 20 percent of their class may be inducted into membership following completion of at least one-half of the degree program in which they are enrolled.

SIGMA TAU DELTA has served the English discipline for more than 75 years. With over 600 chapters worldwide, it is the most active honor organization in the field. Sigma Tau Delta fosters excellence in all areas of English and literature studies: it encourages further achievement in the field; it promotes creative and analytical writing, offers scholarships, new-teacher awards, writing awards, internships in publishing houses, and gives students a forum for publishing their scholarly and creative works in the award-winning journal *The Rectangle*. Members must maintain a 3.0 grade point average in English courses and have had at least two courses above the freshman level; they must be in the upper 35 percent of their class after at least three semesters in college.

OMICRON DELTA KAPPA was founded with the idea that leadership of exceptional quality and versatility should be recognized, that representatives in all phases of college life should cooperate in worthwhile endeavors, and that outstanding students, faculty and administrators should meet on a basis of mutual interest, understanding and helpfulness. ODK was the first national college honor society to give recognition and honor for meritorious leadership and service in extracurricular activities and to encourage development of general campus citizenship. Inductees must be juniors or seniors, in the top 35 percent of their class, and show leadership achievements.

ALPHA CHI NATIONAL SCHOLASTIC HONORARY SOCIETY is the College's premiere academic society, inducting only the top 5 percent of the junior class and the top 10 percent of the senior class, with a minimum grade point average of 3.75. Since its inception on February 22, 1922, over 400,000 college students—from diverse backgrounds, academic disciplines, and centers of higher learning across the country—have affirmed the ideals of Alpha Chi, with their emphases on Character and Truth.



GONFALONIER

The gonfalonier is a faculty member selected by their college colleagues to carry the college's ceremonial banner, known as a gonfalon, during the commencement procession. This honor is bestowed in recognition of the faculty member's service, leadership, and dedication to students and to the academic mission of the institution.

Arts & Humanities: Angelina Morris

Business: Jim Greene

Education: Michael Cathey

Math & Science: Shanna Hanes

Nursing: Karen Ferguson

Social Sciences: Dan Scherr

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE SOUTHERN CONCERT CHOIR

Conductor:

Dr. Samuel Sherman

Chorus:

Dr. Jennifer Aust

Emily Cozart

Dr. Peter Douglas

Keely Grover

Audriella Henderson

Clare Jones

Rose Knuckles

Alyxandrya Mclain

Andre Tulio

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Bella Images

Kenzie Adkins

**Special thanks to the Advancement Office,
National Management Company, and the Office of Academic Affairs**

ALMA MATER

Let us greet our dear old College with a hearty cheer!

For our hearts are ever loyal, Alma Mater dear.

We're the students of the UT Southern, old and dear,

With our faces all set onward, Voices ringing clear.

Broad the fields about us lying, Soft and blue the sky
Sing, Oh sing, aloud her praises, Raise the flag on high.

Though our bonds can ne'er be broken,

Sealed by friendship's tie

Our true hearts will ever cherish, Memories gone by.

