

Crackdown on diversity programs altering college graduations

BY CHEYANNE MUMPHREY
AND CAROLYN THOMPSON
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHOENIX — As a first-generation college student, Austin Kissinger was looking forward to celebrating graduation with others of similar backgrounds who helped each other find their way at the University of Kentucky. Typically, Kentucky students who are the first in their family to graduate from college pick a faculty member to join them in a special ceremony.

Earlier this month, the university canceled the ceremony, along with other convocations that recognize Black and LGBTQ+ students, citing the Trump administration's campaign to rein in diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Those student groups pooled resources for a celebration together off campus — without the school's involvement — but Kissinger said the about-face left him and others feeling unsupported.

"It's kind of like you're taking away our celebration, like you're not letting us embrace who we want to be," said Kissinger, a graduating senior who leads the university's First Generation Student Organization. "You're not letting us represent what we do at the university."

President Donald Trump's calls to eliminate any program that treats students differently because of their race have brought new scrutiny of affinity graduation ceremonies. The events have long been a way to build community and recognize the achievements and unique experiences of underrepresented students.

Many affinity ceremonies are on track to proceed as usual around the



Austin Kissinger is seen at Gatton Student Center on the University of Kentucky's campus Tuesday, April 29, in Lexington, Ky.

country, with colleges saying the events comply with new guidance.

But some colleges are pulling back support. Those include Harvard University, which is battling the Trump administration over demands related to campus activism and diversity efforts on campus. Despite suing the administration over some of its attempts to force changes on campus, Harvard told students it would no longer provide funding, staffing or spaces for affinity celebrations, the Harvard Crimson student newspaper reported.

SOME COLLEGES ACT TO COMPLY WITH TRUMP ADMINISTRATION GUIDANCE

At the University of Kentucky, spokesperson Jay Blanton said the main commencement celebrates all students. He said the university did away with others to comply with the law and "how we believe it is being interpreted by the administration."

"The success and support of our students is a principle and purpose that is incredibly important to

us. Everything we do on this campus, we do with that in mind as our goal," Blanton said. "At the same time, we believe we must comply with the law and are doing so here."

Around the country, universities have come under increasing pressure to get in line with the political agenda of Trump's administration, which already has frozen billions of dollars in grants for Harvard, Columbia University and other colleges over allegations they have not done enough to counter antisemitism.

The Education Department directed colleges to distance themselves from DEI with a "Dear Colleague" letter in February. It said a 2023 Supreme Court decision outlawing the use of racial preferences in college admissions also applied to things like hiring, scholarships and graduation ceremonies. The administration contended American educational institutions have been discriminating against students, including white and Asian American students.

"In a shameful echo of a darker period in this country's history, many Ameri-

can schools and universities even encourage segregation by race at graduation ceremonies and in dormitories and other facilities," read the letter, which was signed by Craig Trainor, the Education Department's acting assistant secretary for civil rights.

The practice has roots in the era of segregation at some schools, but organizers of Black convocations today say they are a way to celebrate the accomplishments of diverse student populations that were once overlooked. Many colleges also have "Lavender graduations," which celebrate LGBTQ+ students and grew out of a time decades ago when many lacked support from their families.

For students who are the first in their families to attend college, it can be easy to feel out of place or unsure of where to turn for help, Kissinger said. At Kentucky, he said he often felt like he had to figure

out everything on his own. The affinity ceremony, he said, was intended as a celebration of resilience and pride that they reached graduation.

WITH CEREMONIES CANCELED, SOME FIND OTHER WAYS TO KEEP UP TRADITIONS

Arizona's Maricopa County Community Colleges called off all its cultural and special interest convocations, citing in a statement "enforcement priorities" set by the U.S. Education Department. But the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community volunteered to hold a convocation ceremony for American Indian graduates.

"While we are deeply disappointed by the cancellation of convocation ceremonies for minority students, we believe it is important to come together as a community to honor our graduates and their families," community President Martin Harvier said in a statement.

At Ohio University, Aaron Thomas arranged for his alma mater's Black alumni weekend to go forward this spring after the university canceled it to comply with a state prohibition on DEI, which echoes the federal directive. Thomas, who runs a production company near the university's campus in Athens, Ohio, planned to foot the bill for an alumni barbecue until the mayor's office, nonprofits and restaurants pitched in to organize a weekend of events.

Among the schools with affinity events planned over the next few weeks is California State University, Long Beach, which says its celebrations for Pacific Islander and Cambodian students, among others, comply with the administration's guidance because they are open to anybody.

"Our students are looking forward to these celebrations, which are open to all and are consistent with guidance from the Department of Education," spokesperson Jim Milbury said.

On its website, a statement included with information about the cultural celebrations acknowledges the changing college landscape:

"Particularly as federal immigration policies evolve, there may be concerns that representatives and officers from U.S. immigration enforcement agencies may visit university campuses across the country," it says. "While we have no knowledge of any planned visit to our campus, we offer this information."



Downsizing Sale
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Cash, check (with proper ID), credit/debit cards (with a 3% fee added) accepted, or Venmo. All sales are final. No returns or refunds. KY sales tax of 6% will be added unless buyer presents a resale exemption certificate. All items purchased are as-is. We are not responsible for accidents. **YOU MUST bring help to move large items as we DO NOT have staff to assist. All items must be removed by 3pm on Saturday. Please bring boxes and paper to pack your items. Call 270-903-7859 with questions.**

Simpson County opens life jacket loaner stations

BY BEVERLY BRAGG
FRANKLIN FAVORITE

With warmer weather arriving, Simpson County has once again made life jackets available at its two loaner stations along the West Fork of Drakes Creek. The free program, supported by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, provides life jackets for public use on local waterways from May through September.

The pair of stations opened in August 2023 due to a partnership between Simpson County officials and the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources.

One station is located at Drakes Creek on Highway 73 East, and the second is near Drakes Creek at the low water crossing on Barnes School Road.

The kiosks were constructed at the two main locations in Simpson County where people enter and leave Drakes Creek.

Each station is stocked with assorted sizes of U.S. Coast Guard-approved jackets and instructions on how to properly fit and wear a life jacket.

Kayakers and boaters may borrow the life jackets at no cost and the jackets can be returned to either one of the kiosk stations.

Palmer reports monthly to the Department of Fish & Wildlife to restock life jacket supplies that are not returned.

According to the Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife, the state's lakes, rivers, and streams are popular destinations and receive heavy use from recreational boaters, paddlers, and swimmers.

Kentucky law mandates that each person on a boat have readily accessible, Coast Guard-approved life jackets that fit proper-



Courtesy of SC Office of Emergency Management

Simpson County's life jacket loaner kiosk at Drakes Creek on Hwy 73 opened last week. A second life jacket loaner station on Barnes School Road low water crossing is also open.

ly. Furthermore, children under the age of 12 are required to wear a life jacket while in the open part of a moving boat.

Kentucky Fish & Wildlife started the Life Jacket Loaner Station program in June 2021 to promote water safety and make life jackets accessible to as many people as possible.

The department supplies all of the necessary signage, life jackets, and building plans for the life jacket loaner stations, and citizen groups or other public agencies acquire the materials needed to build the kiosks to specifications developed and provided by the department.

Robert Palmer, with the Simpson County Office of Emergency Management, said the season to supply


the loaner life jackets runs from May 1 to Sept. 30.

Simpson Fiscal Court, the Simpson County Detention Center, and the Simpson County Office of Emergency Management all worked together to bring the two kiosks to Simpson County in 2023.

Palmer worked through fiscal court to obtain the two kiosks and inmates from the detention center built them.

Fiscal court provided around \$1,000 in funding for building materials for the kiosks and the Department of Fish & Wildlife provided funding for the life jackets and signage posted at each station.

Beverly Bragg can be reached by emailing bbragg@franklinfavorite.com.



LEGAL NOTICE

INSPECTION PERIOD FOR THE PROPERTY TAX ASSESSMENT ROLL

The Daviess County real property tax roll will be opened for inspection from May 5 through May 19, 2025. Under the supervision of the Property Valuation Administrator or one of the deputies, any person may inspect the tax roll. This is the January 1, 2025, assessment on which state, county, and school taxes for 2025 will be due. The tax roll is in the office of the property valuation administrator in the county courthouse and may be inspected between the hours of 8:00 AM– 4:30 PM & Saturday May 10th & 17th between 8:00 AM and 12:00 PM. Any taxpayer desiring to appeal an assessment on real property made by the PVA must first request a conference with the PVA or a designated deputy. The conference may be held prior to or during the inspection period. The taxpayer can appeal his/her assessment by filing in person, filing via phone or sending a letter or other written petition stating the reasons for appeal, identifying the property and stating the taxpayer's opinion of the fair cash value of the property. Any taxpayer still aggrieved by an assessment on real property, after the conference with the PVA or designated deputy, may appeal to the county board of assessment appeals. The appeal must be filed with the county clerk's office no later than one work day following the conclusion of the inspection period (May 20th, 2025). A taxpayer failing to appeal to the county board of assessment appeals, or failing to appear before the board, either in person or by designated representative, will not be eligible to appeal directly to the Kentucky Board of Tax Appeals. Appeals of personal property assessments shall not be made to the county board of assessment appeals. Personal property taxpayers shall be served notice under the provisions of KRS 132.450(4) and shall have the protest and appeal rights granted under the provisions of KRS 131.110. The following steps should be taken when a taxpayer does not agree with the assessed value of personal property as determined by the property valuation administrator. (1) He must list under protest (for certification) what he believes to be the fair cash value of his property. (2) He must file a written protest directly with the Department of Revenue, Office of Property Valuation within 30 days from the date of the notice of assessment. (3) This protest must be in accordance with KRS 131.110 (4) The final decision of the Department of Revenue may be appealed to the Kentucky Board of Tax Appeals.

Rachel Pence Foster
Property Valuation Administrator
Daviess County, Kentucky



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