

To: Provost's Office
From: Commencement Committee
Re: Response to Faculty Senate regarding Commencement 2026
Date: December 7, 2025

The question is... Feedback from faculty overwhelmingly showed a preference for commencement at the Civic Center (52 preferred the Civic Center compared to 14 who preferred the field). What other groups were consulted on the matter, and what was their feedback? Can you provide us the raw data, in the form of surveys or something, from students, staff, or other groups showing their preferences?

We appreciate the opportunity to provide additional information and to confirm that the decision regarding the location of the 2026 commencement ceremonies was made through collaboration and feedback from a wide range of campus stakeholders. In addition to the Faculty Senate, the following groups were consulted and provided input:

- **Graduate Student Council (GSC):** We met with the GSC President to discuss feedback from their recent meeting regarding commencement. The Council strongly favored holding the ceremony on campus and offered several ideas for enhancing the event beyond the success of the 2025 ceremony. Following our meeting, the GSC President distributed a survey to all graduate students; a summary of the results is attached. Respondents expressed a preference for holding the ceremony in Maggs at 6:00 p.m. and for the live reading of names.
- **Student Government Association (SGA):** Commencement was discussed during an SGA Board meeting, with notes attached. Student representatives expressed strong support for keeping the ceremony on campus and shared suggestions for improvement. Their primary focus was the timing of the stage crossing and strategies to encourage greater participation by December graduates in the May ceremony.
- **Extended Cabinet:** The Extended Cabinet unanimously supported hosting commencement on campus. Members acknowledged weather concerns but noted that many universities nationwide successfully hold outdoor ceremonies, even in less predictable climates. They emphasized the importance of robust contingency plans and shared overwhelmingly positive feedback from the 2025 ceremonies. Members cited both personal experiences and constituent comments, emphasizing the profound impact and sense of pride that came from holding commencement on campus.
- **Family Advisory Council:** We met with the Family Advisory Council over the summer to discuss commencement plans. Council members expressed strong support for continuing to host ceremonies on campus. They reported hearing positive feedback from peers and had viewed the 2025 livestream, which they described as outstanding. Members reflected on their own and their family members' graduation experiences, noting that outdoor ceremonies are common and that students deeply value celebrating on their own campus—allowing them to share that space with family and friends. A follow-up survey yielded four responses, evenly split between on-campus and Civic Center preferences. One response in favor of the Civic Center cited weather concerns and the potential for more guest tickets in smaller, school-based ceremonies.
- **Staff Senate:** Commencement was also discussed with the Staff Senate, and meeting notes are attached. Staff expressed overwhelming support for continuing to hold ceremonies on campus. They cited significant challenges experienced at the Civic Center and a greatly enhanced sense of participation and pride since moving the ceremonies to campus. At the Civic Center, approximately 65 employees could be involved; on campus, that number grew to over 400. Senators emphasized that, with lessons learned, the campus is now the most fitting and meaningful location for commencement.

In addition to these formal consultations, extensive informal feedback was received from graduates, families, and employees following the 2025 ceremonies. Many described the events as “amazing” and wondered why the university had not transitioned to on-campus ceremonies sooner. Guests and graduates appreciated the opportunity to take photos and celebrate in familiar campus spaces, noting the joy and emotion of the day. Several families sent emails and handwritten notes expressing gratitude—one wrote, *“It was the best graduation I have attended and I have 3 children and 9 grandchildren.”* Several employees who were also parents of graduates shared emotional accounts of their own experiences, underscoring the pride associated with celebrating commencement on campus.

Collectively, this feedback reflects broad and enthusiastic support from across the university community for continuing to hold commencement on campus. While weather remains an important consideration, detailed contingency plans are in place to ensure a successful event under any circumstances.

Attachments:

- Graduate Survey Responses
- SGA Meeting 10.17.25
- FAC - Commencement Feedback Survey
- Staff Senate Meeting 10.1.25

Graduate Survey Responses - How do Graduates Feel about Commencement?

This survey was sent out to all 700 graduates at SU; however, the first question asked if they plan to graduate in May. We had 50 responders who plan to graduate in May. Considering that there are approximately 200 students who can/will graduate in May, 50 responses represents a solid 25% of the population - and possibly represents a higher fraction, if you consider that typically only about 150 graduate students participate in commencement - that would mean that you are seeing what $\frac{1}{3}$ of the relevant population thinks.

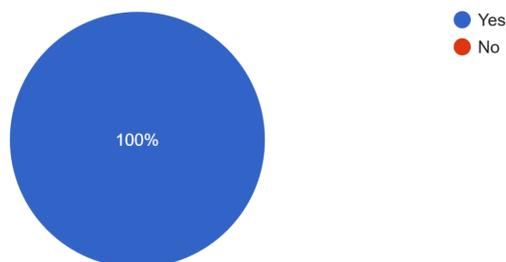
Here are the major takeaways:

- ★ About 70% of responders really care about these details
- ★ Feelings about the type of graduation:
 - 78% would be willing to attend a smaller, grad-walk experience
 - 70% would attend a school-specific ceremony
 - 66% would attend a traditional ceremony
 - Preference for type of graduation varies, but there is a higher preference for grad walk (36%), followed by traditional ceremony (24%)
- ★ Overwhelmingly, graduates care more about space (82%) than beauty, which shows a preference for Maggs over Holloway
- ★ Overwhelmingly, respondents prefer a human reader to an AI reader (82%)
- ★ Most graduates (70%) want the time to remain at 6pm

And some charts that show relevant quantitative results:

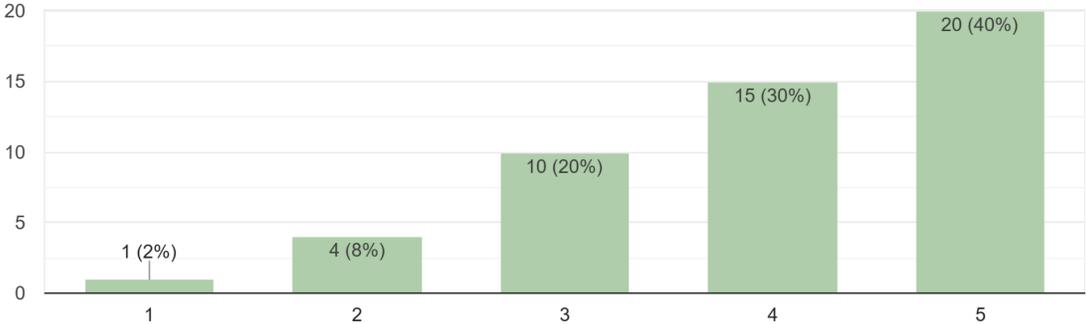
Will you be graduating with master's degree, doctoral degree, or any other post-undergraduate degree or certificate this UPCOMING May?

50 responses



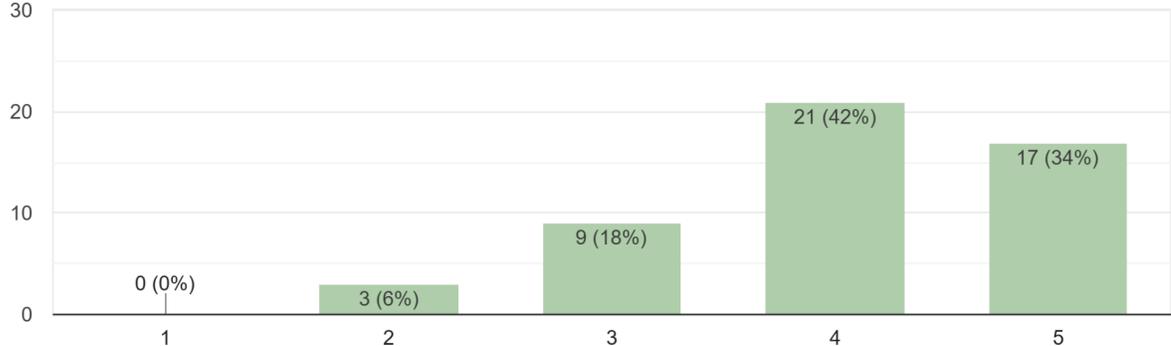
On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you care about the specific details of graduation?

50 responses



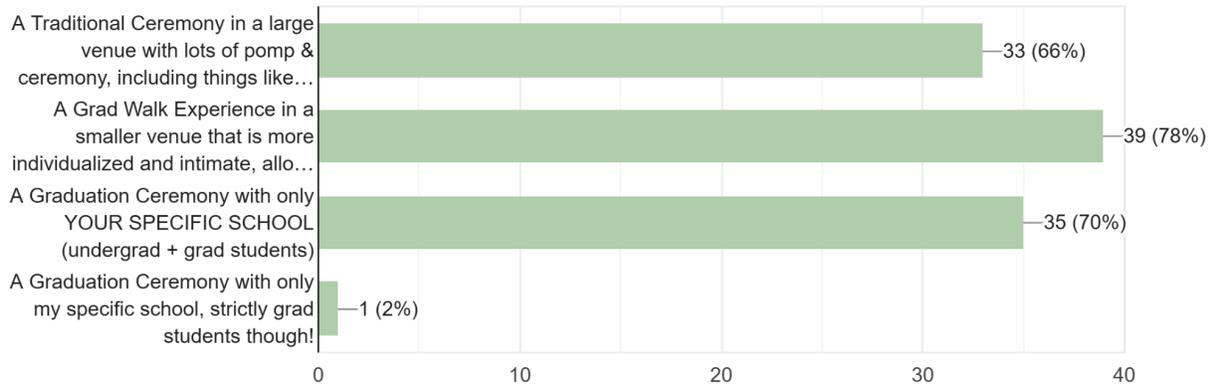
How satisfied have you been with your graduate experience at SU so far?

50 responses



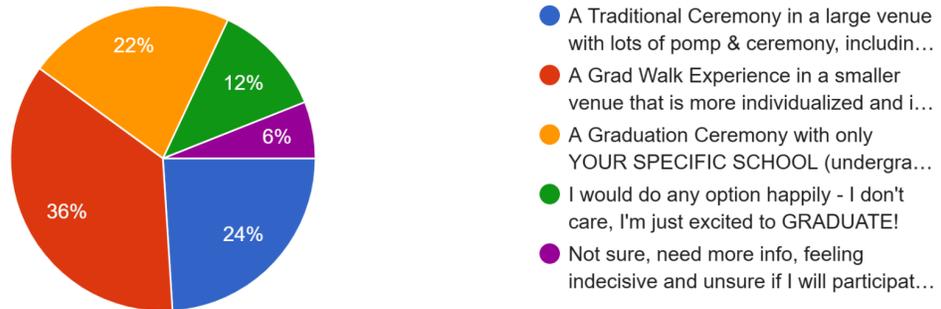
Which type of graduation ceremony would you be willing to attend? choose all that apply

50 responses



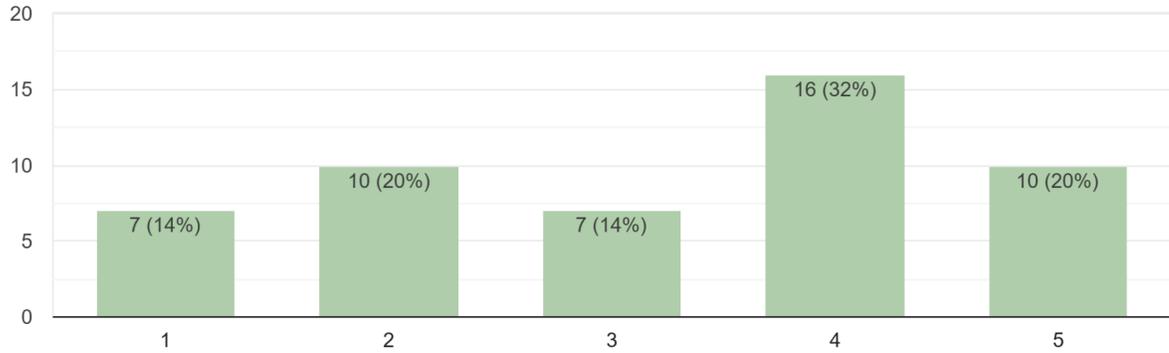
Which graduation ceremony option would you prefer?

50 responses



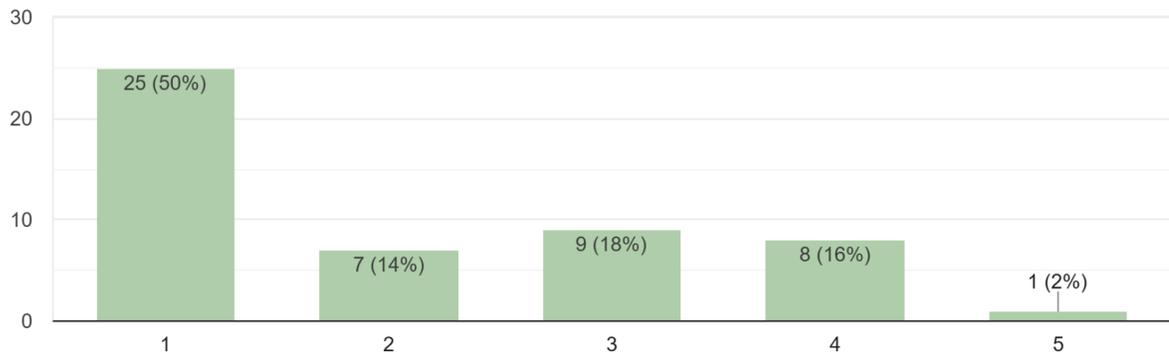
How likely would you be to attend a graduation CEREMONY held in Maggs Gymnasium? (The floor has been recently updated, the AC has been improv...ace would be decked out with drapery and lights.)

50 responses



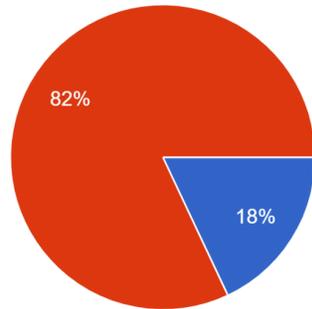
How likely would you be to attend a graduation CEREMONY held in Halloway Hall Auditorium? (at this venue, you would only be given 2 tickets for guests)

50 responses



What matters MORE?

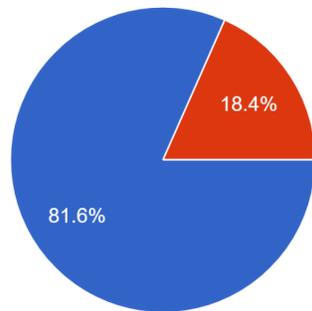
50 responses



- Beauty: Hollow Hall Auditorium (only 2 guests allowed)
- Space: getting to invite up to five people to graduation

Would you like your name to be read by a human person or by an AI reader?

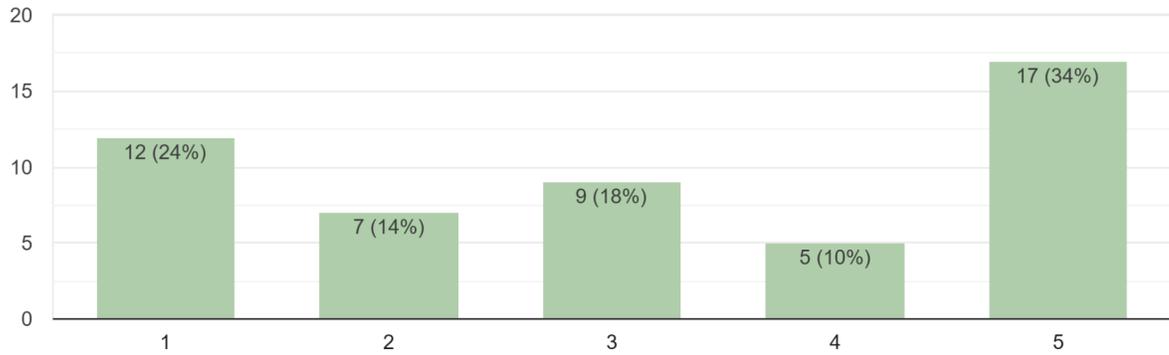
49 responses



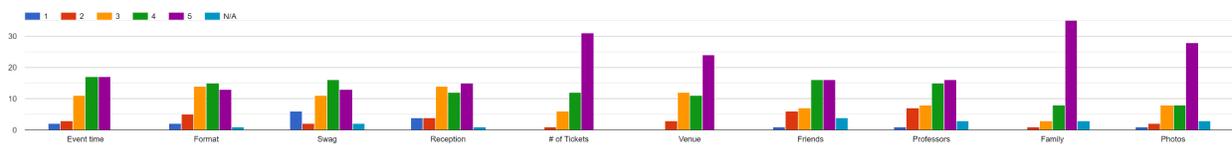
- Human : they might mispronounce it, but they are still a person
- AI: I'd rather have robotic perfection, baby!

How important is the AI vs. Human reader to you?

50 responses

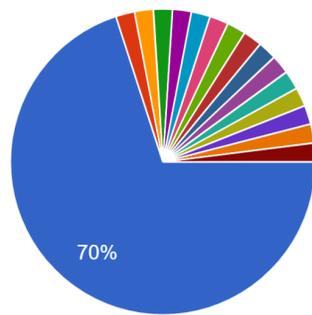


Please rate the importance of the following items



Preferred time of graduation ceremony?

50 responses



- 6:00 pm, like normal (line up starts aro...
- 12:pm
- morning between 8am-10am for cere...
- Afternoon (so families can go out to di...
- Late morning
- During the day
- 5:00pm
- 4
- ▲ 1/2 ▼

SGA meeting 10.17.25

With the feedback received from stakeholders and those who attended the 2025 ceremony, we are leaning towards the 2026 ceremony being held on campus again.

- Agreement from students, questions about student feedback regarding the removal of fall commencement ceremonies.

Do you have any feedback on enhancements we could make to improve the undergraduate ceremony? We currently have the following:

- tabs on the regalia will have the centennial logo
- letter from President in diploma cover will include a special message
- speakers – working on this now

Enhancement Feedback from SGA:

- Unique names
- Confirming who is on screen, name, and voicing name matches
- Question about 2025 fall commencement and feedback
- Zoom/webinar for fall graduates to explain the process/assist in answering questions

Welcome feedback on what else can be done:

- have students send invites to their faculty?

Do not need a platform, just sending an email asking could be sufficient due to the individual departments. Encouraging via a mass email (work with SGA, script they could follow).

- Incorporating alumni and SU history into the videos before and during ceremonies

Students loved the idea.

Invited students to send addition feedback and ideas if they thought of any.

| Id | What type of ceremony do you prefer? | Which venue do you prefer for Commencement? | What is the preferred timing for the Commencement Ceremony? | What year does your student anticipate participating in Commencement (finishing their degree requirements)? | What aspects of commencement are most important? Rank from most important at the top to least important at the bottom. | Are there any new traditions or elements you would like to see added? | Do you have any suggestions for improving accessibility for all families and guests? How would you make those improvements? Areas to consider: Parking, Seating, Live-Streaming, Interpreter | As a family member, caregiver, or provider of an SU student, would you like to be recognized at commencement? | Do you have additional feedback about the 2025 Commencement Ceremony? | Do you have additional feedback, ideas, or concerns about the 2026 Commencement Ceremony? |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Hybrid option (main ceremony with separate school recognitions) | On-Campus Outdoor Ceremony at the stadium (weather permitting) | No preference | 2027 | Photo opportunities;Walking across the stage and receiving a diploma cover;Keynote Speaker;Student Speaker(s);Individual School Celebrations;Having no limit on the number of guests;Venue for ceremony;Processional and recessional traditions;Type of ceremony;Time of ceremony; | Adding the component of receptions at the individual schools following the ceremony | shuttles from remote parking areas | No | | |
| 2 | Hybrid option (main ceremony with separate school recognitions) | On-Campus Outdoor Ceremony at the stadium (weather permitting) | Morning | 2026 | Walking across the stage and receiving a diploma cover;Time of ceremony;Keynote Speaker;Processional and recessional traditions;Type of ceremony;Photo opportunities;Individual School Celebrations;Having no limit on the number of guests;Venue for ceremony;Student Speaker(s); | | | Yes | I heard it was amazing | |

| Id | What type of ceremony do you prefer? | Which venue do you prefer for Commencement? | What is the preferred timing for the Commencement Ceremony? | What year does your student anticipate participating in Commencement (finishing their degree requirements)? | What aspects of commencement are most important? Rank from most important at the top to least important at the bottom. | Are there any new traditions or elements you would like to see added? | Do you have any suggestions for improving accessibility for all families and guests? How would you make those improvements? Areas to consider: Parking, Seating, Live-Streaming, Interpreter | As a family member, caregiver, or provider of an SU student, would you like to be recognized at commencement? | Do you have additional feedback about the 2025 Commencement Ceremony? | Do you have additional feedback, ideas, or concerns about the 2026 Commencement Ceremony? |
|----|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | Multiple smaller ceremonies by college/school | Off-Campus Indoor Ceremony at Civic Center (regardless of weather) | Afternoon | Spring 2026 | Having no limit on the number of guests;Individual School Celebrations;Photo opportunities;Time of ceremony;Walking across the stage and receiving a diploma cover;Processional and recessional traditions;Keynote Speaker;Venue for ceremony;Type of ceremony;Student Speaker(s); Venue for ceremony;Keynote Speaker;Having no limit on the number of guests;Type of ceremony;Individual School Celebrations;Processional and recessional traditions;Student Speaker(s);Time of ceremony;Photo opportunities;Walking across the stage and receiving a diploma cover; | ADA accessibility and seating with family - reasonable # of seats (tickets) | No | I only watched the live stream but was awesome and the feedback i heard was the ceremony was great but it was a close call with the weather | a parental list of "things to do" and timing of each (order cap & gown, photos, apply for graduation etc) | |
| 4 | Multiple smaller ceremonies by college/school | Off-Campus Indoor Ceremony at Civic Center (regardless of weather) | No preference | 2026 | Venue for ceremony;Keynote Speaker;Having no limit on the number of guests;Type of ceremony;Individual School Celebrations;Processional and recessional traditions;Student Speaker(s);Time of ceremony;Photo opportunities;Walking across the stage and receiving a diploma cover; | Having a designated area for senior citizens with mobility and health issues | No | | | |

Staff Senate Meeting 10.1.25

- Lisa – bookstore – lessons learned
- Consider the disconnect with the Civic Center compared to main campus
- Keep at the 9:00 am time frame instead of the late evening (weather)
- Civic Center, who can solve the issues ADA wise, on campus, easier to fix ADA wise
- Civic center is dark, being outside was better for photography, drone shots
- Running risk of weather is worth it
- Staff concerns can be fixed
- Sitting on the ground/eating lunch on the ground
- Leave at 2:30 pm when arrived at 5:30 am, clear communication about hours taking off – explain how to put on your timesheet
- Better food options for staff (joe and Lindsey)
- Ushers, team leads, media passes, communicate this more, better identification – well aware of who players are
- Call to ask for ideas and enhancements for upcoming commencement ideas
- Reception for individual schools
- SU graduation night at Shorebird stadium and having the firework show
- Colored firework show
- Champagne toast