12-14-2001

UA12/6 Outstanding Black Graduates Recognition Ceremony

WKU Diversity Programs

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The Outstanding Black Graduates program came into existence on the campus of Western Kentucky University in May of 1997. Since then, this program has grown and flourished into a program that is eagerly anticipated by the University, families, friends, and in particular, the graduating students.

This program is designed to recognize the academic and personal achievements of the graduates, and to encourage them to accept the challenge and responsibility to continue to strive for excellence in their personal, academic, and professional careers. It gives family, friends, and the university community an opportunity to applaud each graduates’ success. In addition, it is hoped that this ceremony would be a recruitment, retention and motivational tool; one that inspires younger students to persevere so that they too, can recognize the pride and sense of accomplishment upon receiving their degree. A third goal is to develop a new tradition that strengthens the bond to the institution for graduates long after their departure. This program symbolizes the University’s sincere commitment to cultivating a lasting and meaningful relationship with African American students.

Today, we continue the tradition by honoring the December 2001 graduates.
**Our Speaker**

**MR. RON COXSOM**

Ron Coxom is President of GME Consulting Srvc., Inc., a real-world training/development consulting service that increases sales and improves performance of individuals, corporations, and organizations that focus on sales/leadership and customer service. He is a high energy speaker with more than 16 years experience in sales/leadership, sales management, and customer service. His level of enthusiasm is compassionately revealed by motivating individuals to take responsibility and to become committed.

An accomplished presenter and speaker, Mr. Coxsom is sought-after to encourage individuals and teams. His award-winning experience and applicable programs are seen on Television Network (ASTN) as well as materials for workshops, tapes, and seminars.

Mr. Coxsom's speaking style is described as "forthright without glamorization", with "information worthwhile and specific, accenting his validity." He has spoken to a variety of audiences which described his messages as "knowledgeable and motivational, with programs enabling individuals and companies to move to the next level, improve employee morale, and most of all increase sales." Mr. Coxsom's empathy for others is compassionately revealed through his messages which have inspired people to take responsibility, change unsuccessful results (habits), and live up to their full potential. His own story is compelling and includes challenges and triumphs. He encourages others to focus and become committed by overcoming the challenges and not allowing the past to manipulate the future.

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**History & Significance of the Kente Cloth**

Kente is an Asante ceremonial cloth hand-woven on a horizontal treadle loom. Strips measuring about 4 inches wide are sewn together into larger pieces of cloths. Cloths come in various colors, sizes and designs and are worn during very important social and religious occasions. In a total cultural context, kente is more important than just a cloth. It is a visual representation of history, philosophy, ethics, oral literature, moral values, social code of conduct, religious beliefs, political thought and aesthetic principles. The term kente has its roots in the work kenten which means a basket. The first kente weavers used raffia fibers to weave cloths that looked like kenten (a basket); and thus were referred to as kenten ntoma; meaning basket cloth. The original Asante name of the cloth was nsaduaso or nwontoma, meaning a cloth hand-woven on a loom and is still used today by Asante weavers and elders. However, the term kente is the most popularly used today, in and outside Ghana. Many variations of narrow-strip cloths, similar to Kente are woven by various ethnic groups in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa.

The symbols embossed on the Kente stoles have significant meanings. The diamond represents wealth and riches. The golden stool is a symbol of leadership and unity. Knowledge, the foundation of your undergraduate experience, is symbolized by the golden key.

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Source: www.erols.com
This program symbolizes the African American tradition of “community” achievement. Each student has submitted a personal statement to recognize those who have played a significant role in their accomplishment and success.

“Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who are prepared for it today.”  
-Malcolm X
Sharonda N. Corlew  
Daughter of Renita E. Corlew & Curtis Corlew

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee  
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Psychology with a minor in Business Administration  
Future Aspirations: To become a Psychologist and open her own care facility for troubled youth.

I would first like to give all praise to the Lord, God almighty for giving me the strength to endure this journey. Without him I would not have had the strength to make it. My journey has been a struggle but with faith, family, and friends this journey was made with great stride and integrity. I would like to also thank my mother for all the things she has done along the way to help me accomplish my goals, "Thanks Mom." There has been numerous times that I thought that I would have never make it to this point but I did, so I would also like to thank my brother, the Corlew, Copeland, and Lyman family for giving me encouraging words when I needed them.

My experience here at Western Kentucky University has been a life lesson. I have learned that success is not given, it is earned. With determination and hard work, the sky is the limit. I have met many enemies as well as many friends along the way. So I would like to thank Lashaun Davis for being the dedicated friend along this life journey, it’s been fun. Thanks to C.J. Woods and the MSSS staff for encouraging students to understand the importance of continuing their education. "Education is the tool to success." Finally I end by saying that this is the beginning and I leave Western Kentucky University with wisdom and understanding. Thanks.

LaShaun Davis  
Daughter of Amanda McKell & Victor Davis

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee  
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Human Resource Management  
Future Aspirations: To become a Human Resource Manager for a large corporation, get married, and have a family.

I would first like to give thanks to God for giving me the strength to make it through these years at Western. No matter how hard the road got he always showed me the way. He showed me that hard work and determination will pay off on in the end and He has a plan for all of us.

"I'm still" from my freshman year to now, many thought I would have transferred by now, but I didn't! I would like to thank my momma for always being there and giving me the support I needed to succeed (I don't know where I would be without you, you are my ROCK!) I would also like to thank my Daddy, Tito, Chris, Jovan, my family, and friends for always believing in me. I would like to say thank you to C.J. Woods for always offering a kind word, a joke to lift my spirits, or words of encouragement to keep me going.

Don't be afraid to take chances, and always believe in yourself. If you don't no one else will, and hold fast to your dreams because they are your personal achievements and anything is possible if you put your mind to it.
Thank you God for all that you have done for me. I know that I'm blessed to have completed a Master of Arts in Education degree from Western Kentucky University. Who would have known that this Black female child from the West Side of Chicago would be who I am today? I am thankful for true friends who believed in me and my potential. In July 1999, Michelle McCray, Bryan McCray, Kevin Hill and Donald Naylor, Jr. assisted me in my journey to the Blue Grass state and I thank them for their support on that day and the days that followed. I am also thankful for my colleagues here at Western who have screamed, spoken softly or listened to me in my many times of need and/or frustration which consists of Dr. Monica Burke, Dr. Karen Westbrooks, Dennis Perkins, Tina Westbrooks and Heather Dykes. Most importantly, I am thankful for my family and love ones who have been a great support system to me throughout my college experience which includes my mother, Loretta Ellis; my sister, Shevelle Ellis; my family/friends, Delores Webster, James Webster, Pascal Harris, Jackie Harris, Deborah Lay, Sirelena Perry, Katina Beard, Tiffany Perry and my boyfriend, Donald Jones. In addition, I would like to thank my newly found sister, Marion Nolan for being open to our new relationship.

First, I would like to thank my mom, Danita Evans, my dad, James Evans, and my grandmother for all of their support and help along the way. Also, I would like to thank my best friend, Sonya Copeland, for being there for me in good times and bad times. Lastly, I would like to send a special Skee-Wee to all my Sorors. Thanks and God bless.
**Lidell L. Evans**  
Son of Alicia McElvaine  

**Hometown:** Chicago, Illinois  
**Degree:** Master of Arts in Education/Student Affairs  
**Greek Organization:** Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.  
**Future Aspirations:** To become a President of a college or university.  

I would like to give a shout out to Alicia McElvaine, my mother, for being herself. She has stuck by me through the good and the bad and has pushed me when I didn’t believe in myself. Without her support, I don’t think I could have gone this far. I would like to also thank Alice Falls, my grandmother who is no longer living, but just like my mother she has given me the support and motivation that I need to strive for excellence. Next I would like to thank Samantha Ivery for being a wonderful friend and my support system. She has been there no matter the problem or time of day. She has helped me make it through my good and bad times at Western. I hope she will continue to be there for me because I have learned a lot from her and our friendship. I would like to thank the people at Western who have helped me the last 2 years it will never be forgotten, especially Michael P. Crowe Jr. and Peggy Haas. I love you guys.

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**Tai-Ann Forté**  
Daughter of Bernice Forte & Bobby Jo Green, Jr.  

**Hometown:** Bowling Green, Kentucky  
**Degree:** Bachelor of Science in Social Work  
**Future Aspirations:** To live a Godly and prosperous life; to raise my beautiful daughter as God sees fit; and to be the best in my profession and not settling for less.  

I would like to thank God for giving me a chance to better myself and to be a true witness in knowing that “I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me.” Thank you God for blessing me with a beautiful little girl during my college career, which gave me more of a reason to strive for the best and be more determined about the way I wanted my life to go.

Jovian: I love you and thank you all those time you would look at me with your big brown sparkling eyes and open arms, hugging me when you knew that things were getting hard and I felt like giving up. You have truly been an inspiration to me. Mommy will always love you and wish that God will open up the doors of heaven and pour out all of his blessings upon you.

Mom: Thank you for supporting and loving me even when you knew that I was going to fall flat on my face. But, look at me now: I’ve gotten back up and well on my way to success. I could not have asked for a better mother.

Dad: Thank you for loving me, and being by my side when I had Jovie really know you as her Pat Pal.

Jo/Dewanda: Thank you for all of the time you’ve picked Jovie up for me when class was getting out late. If it weren’t for you all helping me raise her, graduating from college would not have been in my pathway.

To all of my other family, church family, and true friends thank you for your encouraging words, heartfelt prayers, and loving me unconditionally.
Crystal Ann Hardeman
Daughter of Joe. M. Hardeman

Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky
Degree: General Studies with an emphasis in Education
Organizations: The Order of Eastern Star and The Amazing Tones of Joy
Greek Organization: Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.
Future Aspirations: To attend graduate school and receive a Master's degree in Exceptional Childhood Education. I then would like to pursue a career at a high risk school as a special education teacher.

Lord, you have truly been an inspiration in my life. You have brought me success in ways I didn’t think I was capable of achieving. Through all my trials and tribulations and at the times when I felt like I was by myself, You were there to pick me off my feet to let me know that You stood by me every step of the way. I can TRULY say that everything that I have achieved in my life has come through You and ONLY You. My relationship with You has grown tremendously and that’s one accomplishment that I wouldn’t trade for anything in the world.

Daddy, you have been my mother and my father. There is no one who could have raised me the way you have. You have been my ultimate role model. In spite of the setbacks our family has endured, you have never once made me feel as though I was neglected or alone. I have to be the luckiest daughter in God’s creation to have been blessed with a father like you. When I was down and out, you always found a way to inspire me. Even throughout my successes, you have always shared how proud you were of me. For several years, it has just been you and I with God watching over us. This is why I can truly say I have the best family anyone could hope for.

To some of the best friends that God has put in my life: I would like to say thank you for teaching me what a TRUE friend is all about. You have shown me the meaning of true brotherhood and sisterhood.

To my grandmother: I wish you could have been here. Rest in Peace. I will love you forever.

Ricky Harris, Jr.
Son of Ricky & Alicia Harris

Hometown: Franklin, Kentucky
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology
Greek Organization: Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

I would like to thank my parents for their support. Without them, I could not have made it. Also, I would like to thank my fiancé, the Brothers of AφA, and anyone else that I left out.
Kelly Alonzo Hooks, Jr.
Son of Rose and Kelly Hooks

Hometown: Hartford, Connecticut
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Corporate and Organization
Organization: International Association of Business Communicators
Future Aspirations: To live for the moment, because no one is promised tomorrow.

I would like to thank the Lord, God, for giving me the determination and motivation to get through these past four and a half years here at Western Kentucky University. My time spent while on the hill were trying times, but were the best years of my life. WKU has helped me build character and establish a strong foundation for me to finish one chapter of my life and start a new one. Without my family, I don't think I would have made it through the storm to see the rainbow and all it has to offer on the other side. Thank you to my brother Kevin and my mother Rose. This is just the beginning of a most worthwhile journey that I'm about to travel. I have all the tools needed and the navigation to get me to the destination I want. Always remember that in life, sometimes you have to make your own pathway to get where you want to go in life. Never give up on your dreams and live your life to the fullest, because you will never know when it's your time to go. God bless the families due to the tragedy of September 11, 2001. You will never be forgotten.

Cindy L. Houchins
Daughter of Mr. & Mrs. O.D. Houchins, Sr.

Hometown: Bowling Green, Kentucky
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Social Work
Organization: National Association of Social Workers, The Order of Eastern Stars
Honors & Awards: Evening Star Woman of the Year & Student Recognition Award
Future Aspirations: To make a small difference in someone's life by touching the hearts of others.

DON'T QUIT

I thank God for my family and friends. But most of all, I thank God for his goodness and mercy because without it, I would not be a college graduate today. On many occasions, I wanted to give up, stop trying, and go home; but God whispered to me and said, "I am with you. Don't quit."

I want to thank my three daughters for their support and encouragement throughout my educational pursuits.

Thank you Leslie for your support and encouraging words. Leslie, continue on with your college education; dreams do come true. Don't quit!

Thank you Terri for being there for me and helping me do my homework in Math 116. Terri, continue on with your college education; follow your dreams. Don't quit!

Thank you Tyra, for putting up with me, your patience, and your understanding of all the missed school activities I did not attend because I had a class or a homework assignment due. Follow your dreams. Don't quit!

AND ALWAYS REMEMBER:

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,
When the funds are low, and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit-
Rest if your must, but don't you quit.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar.

So, stick to the fight when you're hardest hit-
It's when things go wrong that you must not quit.

Thank you.
I am a firm believer that God will not place more on you than HE thinks you can handle. In my four and a half years at Western Kentucky University, I had to always remind myself of that phrase to get me through the last few semesters of my college career. For that reason, I would like to give thanks to the man up above for seeing me through this chapter of my life. Without the Lord, my family, and some of the faculty and staff here at Western, I do not think I would be at the place I am today.

Mom & Dad: Thanks for being everything that a daughter could ask for in two wonderful parents. A person could never ask for more than what you have given me.

Papa: Thanks for always asking me about my grades and school. It always gave me the extra push that I needed to make it through yet another day.

Lance, Reneese, and Enna: Thanks for showing me all the fun that I could have in college and for being my true stress relievers.

Derek: Thanks for helping me mold myself into the woman that I am today and the woman I hope to be when I become Mrs. Derek S. Potter.

My Alpha Kappa Alpha Sisters: Thanks for making each day full of sisterly love and support, especially in my time of need. You are all something very special.

For everyone else who has touched my life, I say thanks and without you, my Western experience would not have been the same.
Love can truly build a bridge. The love that my family, my Heavenly Father, and friends have given me has built a bridge that has led to one of the greatest accomplishments in my life. I have learned so many things here at Western, and feel very blessed for every experience and challenge that God has allowed me to endure. My experiences here have taught me to believe in You, and most of all, never fail yourself. My educational experience will not stop here, I will continue to absorb and learn everything that I can. Life is a novel full of life experiences. I am nothing but a page-turner, and Western is only half the book.

“I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my own ship”

~Louisa May Alcott

Thank you Lord for blessing me with so much. I’m so thankful for having a loving family that supports my decisions. Everything that I have been able to do is because God has allowed me. We can do nothing alone and that is something in my time here that I have learned. So how blessed can one man be? How blessed am I? I’m blessed with a loving family. I’m also blessed with true friends. If I could weigh my blessings, it would break the scale. Now how blessed am I? More than I will ever know.
Trace Offutt
Son of Mrs. Helen M. Offutt

Hometown: Bowling Green, Kentucky
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications/Sociology
Future Aspirations: To be better than I am today and to make improvement all of the time, every day.

I would like to say, first of all, praise to the Good Master. Thank you for all of the blessings that you have given me. I want to acknowledge my grandma Edith, my mom and father, and the many people whom have supported me while at Western Kentucky University. Thanks, I could not have completed this without you.

Cutty A. Parker
Daughter of Cheryl Parker & David Thomas

Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky
Degree: Bachelor of Arts in Corporate Communications
Organization: The Amazing Tones of Joy
Honors & Awards: Dynamic Leadership Institute
Future Aspirations: To be an officer in the Kentucky Air National Guard and to attend graduate school. I want to become more involved with the community in leadership activities.

I want to thank my family, friends, and ATJ for your support over the years. I am truly grateful.

After a while, you learn the subtle difference,
Between holding a hand and chaining a soul,
And you learn that love doesn’t mean leaning
And company doesn’t mean security,
And you begin to learn that kisses aren’t contracts
And presents aren’t promises,
And you begin to accept your defeats
With your head up and your eyes open,
With the grace of a woman, not the grief of a child,
And learn to build all your roads on today
Because tomorrow’s ground is too uncertain for plans,
And futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight.
And after a while, you learn
That even sunshine burns if you get too much.
So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul,
Instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.
And you learn that you really can endure...
That you really are strong
And you really do have worth
And you learn and learn...
With every goodbye, you learn.

~Author Unknown
I would like to take this opportunity to thank God for all that he has done for me. It is by his grace and mercy that I have been this successful through these twenty-two years of my life. He has allowed me to experience many wonderful things in my college career here at Western Kentucky University. I have been truly blessed to have come this far and be able to say, “I did it, and I am graduating from college”. Everything that I have, I owe to my Lord and Savior. I love the Lord with all my heart and soul, unconditionally. I can truly say that God is good all the time and all the time, God is good.

I would like to thank my mother for always believing in me and encouraging me to continue seeking to do the best. Mama, I want to let you know that there’s not a person in this world that can ever take your place. When I felt like I was alone and by myself, you were always there. When I thought I had no one, I had you. You have never left me nor forsaken me and I thank God for you day and night. I Love You!!

To my step-father (James), I want to thank you for being so good to me and treating me as if I was your own. You have spoiled me and showered me with unconditional love and I appreciate all that you have done. I Love You!!

To my brother and sister-in-law who are very important people in my life, I Love You. I want to thank you both for all that you have done for me since I started college. Martha, I could not have asked for a better sister to enter my life. Shawn, I love you that I am proud to say is my brother. Seth, Auntie Loves You!

Daddy, I Love You.

God has showered wonderful blessings upon me.

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Christina Shaneen Smith
Daughter of Larry Smith & Mary Smith

Hometown: Louisville, Kentucky
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education
Greek Organization: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
Honors & Awards: NJHSC Woman of the Year-1998 at Morehead State University; 1997 Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges; and 1999 Recognizable Mascot “Big Red”
Future Aspirations: To teach in Elementary School in Louisville and to continue in the

To God be the Glory for the things He has done and the things that are to come. First, giving all honor and praises to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It’s through him that I realize all my blessings flow. I thank God for his consistent and extraordinary grace and mercy that He allows me to experience on a daily basis. For this milestone that He’s given confirmation to, I say “Thank You Jesus.”

To my parents, thank you for your undeviating prayer that kept me going. To my mother, there is no one like you in the world! For your guidance, your patience, your compassion, your support (in so many ways), thank you. We’ve reached this goal together, however, I have the degree to show (ha, ha). Love you mom, more than you would ever know. To my siblings, each and every one of you had something to do with this day. To my sisters: Lisa—thank you for being so proud of me and letting me know it. Kim—thank you for your kindness and your weird way of showing it. Marcy— you are so very special to me and I am so glad you are here to witness this event. Monique—my lil sis as well as my soror, keep on keeping on. Continue to let the Lord work through you. You are a blessing to WKU. Vickie—you’re a precious girl. Thanks for being there. To my only brother Larry—you are a remarkable young man with a big heart. Thank you for doing what you did. Mrs. Godo-Solo, my WKU mom, thank you for loving your job. To my friends and sorors, you are all very special to me. For the encouragement and support, thank you, thank you, thank you! I’m outta here. This puts a new meaning to “this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Lord, I am rejoicing!
Marilyn Spaulding  
**Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Ray Spaulding**

Hometown: Russellville, Kentucky  
Degree: General Studies with an emphasis in Social and Behavior Science  
Honors & Awards: Nominated by instructor as an honoree at the Modern Languages Awards Ceremony.  
Future Aspirations: The rest of my life begins the day after I graduate. With my degree in hand, I hope to utilize all that I have learned towards the betterment and empowering of others to help them realize their full potential. In addition, I wish to let them know that they, as well as myself, can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.  

Thank you Lord for all of my many blessings throughout this long hard journey at Western Kentucky University. The road has been rough and the going has been tough. Through it all, You stood by my side. Thank you Lord for the love and supportiveness of my family, friends, and neighbors. I dedicate my degree in memory of my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Charlie Ray Spaulding and to my daughter, Marina K. Spaulding.

Bruce William Woolridge  
**Son of Sheila Woolridge**

Hometown: Earlington, Kentucky  
Degree: Bachelor of Science in Exceptional Education Learning/Behavior Disorders  
Future Aspirations: To attend Graduate School and receive a Master's degree in Education Administration. I would like to teach for a while and then transition into the field of administration.

First of all, I would like to thank GOD for giving me the strength and perseverance to complete my goal. Next, I want to thank my wife, who endured those lonely nights when I moved on campus so I would not have to commute, she always made sure that I had everything I needed for school. We both sacrificed for me to complete my degree, without her help I could not have made it. I know she is looking down from heaven smiling because I finished. Thanks to Mrs. Leslie Godo-Solo for helping my dream become reality. Thanks for all my classmates and professors who taught and made me the person who I am today. Thanks to my family who has always encouraged me to go to school and to return when my wife passed away. Thanks to the Mt. Zion church family for your prayers and support. Thanks to my mother and grandmother for showing me the right way to achieve my goals. I Love you all!!! Miss and Love you much Sandy.
A Creed to Live By

Don't undermine your worth by comparing yourself with others. It is because we are different that each of us is special. Don't set your goals by what other people think. Only you know what is best for you.

Don't take for granted the things closest to your heart. Cling to them as you would your life, for without them life is meaningless.

Don't let your life slip through your fingers by living in the past or for the future. By living your life one day at a time, you live all the days of your life.

Don't give up when you still have something to give. Nothing is really over until the moment you stop trying.

Don't be afraid to admit that you are less than perfect. It is this fragile thread that binds us to each other.

Don't be afraid to encounter risks.

It is by taking chances that we learn how to be brave.

Don't shut love out of your life by saying it's impossible to find. The quickest way to receive love is to give love.

The fastest way to lose love is to hold it too tightly; and the best way to keep love is to give it wings.

Don't dismiss your dreams.

To be without dreams is to be without hope; to be without hope is to be without purpose.

Don't run through life so fast that you forget not only where you've been, but also where you're going.

Life is not a race, but a journey to be savored each step of the way.

The Office of Minority Student Support Services extends congratulations to each “Outstanding Black Graduate” for their commitment to success. We all wish you the best in all your future endeavors.

Mr. C.J. Woods, Director • Dr. Monica Burke, Assistant Director
Mrs. Tracey Williams, Tutoring Coordinator • Ms. Jackie Pillow, Office Associate
The Society of African American Alumni and the WKU Alumni Association proudly support the Outstanding Black Graduates Program.

We would like to offer our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following individuals who have generously contributed to our program.

Earlene Chelf and the Kentucky Museum for their support and the use of this beautiful facility.

Mr. Howard Bailey for his unwavering support.

Mr. Cornelius Martin
Dr. Gene Tice
Mr. Ron Coxsom
Mr. James Walker
Mrs. Leislie Godo-Solo
Mr. Adrien Deloach

The Society of African American Alumni

The Alumni Association of Western Kentucky University

&

Mr. Charles Johnson
Mr. Craig Robinson
Ms. Gambia Flemister
Ms. Alayna McDade
Mr. Christopher Taylor
Mr. James Varner

for taking time out of their schedules to help make this night a success.