



GOOD NEWS

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KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY NAMES DR. KOFFI C. AKAKPO AS ITS 19TH PRESIDENT

The Kentucky State University Board of Regents announced May 30, 2023, that Dr. Koffi C. Akakpo will serve as the 19th President of Kentucky State University.

“Today is undoubtedly an exciting time in Kentucky State’s history, and we are confident that the foundation laid by this extensive presidential search process—involving input and deliberation from a wide range of constituents and stakeholders, including both internal and external campus community members—allowed us to choose the best leader for Kentucky State and its future,” Kentucky State University Board of Regents Chair Tammi Dukes said.

Following a national search, the Board selected Dr. Akakpo from a diverse and impressive pool of candidates. He is expected to assume his duties as President as soon as July 01, 2023. Terms of his contract are expected to be finalized soon.

“Kentucky State University is poised for a great future. Thanks to the leadership and support of Governor Andy Beshear, the General Assembly, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, the Kentucky State University Board of Regents, the KSU campus community, alumni, donors, and supporters,” said Regent Dukes. “Under Dr. Akakpo’s leadership, the University can advance in many areas, and we are pleased to hand the baton to him at such a critical time in the institution’s journey. We are confident he will bring the vision and execution required to help Kentucky State University continue to advance and succeed in its critical mission of enhancing society and impacting individuals by preparing future generations of engaged citizens and effective leaders.”

University officials noted that President Akakpo quickly rose to the top of an esteemed candidate application pool, and his life’s work, 16 years in leadership roles in higher education with a proven record of success in strong fiscal accountability, student-first philosophy, and strategic planning, has positioned him to take the helm. He comes to Kentucky State University from Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC), central



Kentucky’s largest comprehensive public two-year college, serving over 15,000 college credit students annually across multiple campuses and via online classes.

During his four-year tenure, BCTC has expanded programs, adding Computer Engineering Technology, Integrated Engineering Technology (in partnership with the University of Kentucky), Orthotic & Prosthetic Technology, Health Science Technology, and Emergency Medical Services – Paramedic; has received a Center of Academic Excellence for Cybersecurity Education designation from the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security; and has increased the number of credentials by 26 percent and the number of individuals who earned credentials up by 22 percent despite the pandemic. In addition to increases in enrollment, the college had an overall increase in graduation rates from 24 percent to 35 percent, including graduation rates for African Americans rose to 24 percent from 12 percent and 20 percent for Hispanic students.

“My work focuses on championing postsecondary institutions, tackling the uncertainty they face, and securing their current and future prosperity, particularly through bold thinking, transformational problem-solving, and strategic partnership building,” President Akakpo said. He believes that the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the entire KSU community must unite and do all in their shared power to convert problems into opportunities through intentional, data-informed decisions and bold, futuristic planning.

He holds a Ph.D. in higher education administration from the University of Toledo, Ohio, a Master of Business Administration from Ashland University, Ohio, and a Master of Science from Universite du Benin, Lome, Togo.

The Kentucky State University Board of Regents would like to thank Myers McRae Executive Search for assisting the nine-member presidential search committee throughout this process.

KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY OPENS WEST LOUISVILLE OFFICE

Kentucky State University officially opened its new West Louisville Office at the Louisville Central Community Center on Friday, April 21.

The office is part of the University’s Cooperative Extension Program efforts in support of the Commonwealth’s initiative to support the success and well-being of the West Louisville community. The West Louisville initiative was codified when Governor Andy Beshear signed SB 270 into law in April 2021.

Community members and dignitaries celebrated the ribbon cutting as a good day. “Events like this today give us hope—hope for new opportunities, hope for better lives, hope for a brighter future for West Louisville and beyond,” Gov. Beshear said. “That is the mission of our HBCUs, and they see that through daily.”

Opening the West Louisville Office is part of a multipronged approach to addressing health education, wellness, and food insecurity issues in African American communities. Personnel at the West Louisville Office have already made connections in the community and have conducted programming about urban agriculture, aquaponics, 4-H and nutrition at Greenwood Elementary School and Shawnee High School. In addition, in the Louisville Central Community Center, Kentucky State University has offices and meeting rooms allowing personnel to host informal educational events and demonstrations.

Senator Robert Stivers, President of the Kentucky Senate, lauded all involved “to create partnerships that change trajectories” for people in this community and beyond.

Senator Gerald A. Neal, Kentucky Senate Minority Floor Leader, said this celebration was personal to him as a native of this area of Louisville and as an alumnus of Kentucky State University.

“I want to thank the University and all that it has meant, and all that it is doing now and all that it will do to contribute to not only my growth and



development but the growth and development of individuals across the commonwealth,” Sen. Neal said.

Kentucky State University Interim President Ronald A. Johnson and Dean of the College of Agriculture, Community, and the Sciences Dr. Kirk Pomper were joined by community members and local leaders such as Louisville Deputy Mayor Barbara Sexton Smith, Rep. Beverly Chester-Burton, and Reverend Roosevelt Lightsey Jr. of Community Missionary Baptist to celebrate the ribbon cutting of the West Louisville office.

“It’s an honor to bring Kentucky State University’s Cooperative Extension Program to the West Louisville community,” said Interim President Johnson. “This would not be possible without the support of our local and state leaders and the dedication of the visionaries at the University. Today’s opening is yet another great example of the difference that Kentucky State is making toward achieving an Intended Future in West Louisville and across the Commonwealth of Kentucky.”

“This is only the beginning of wonderful partnerships here in West Louisville,” Dr. Pomper said. “We are very excited about the programming that this office will give us the opportunity to conduct.”

**KENTUCKY STATE UNIVERSITY
ANNOUNCES NEW RESEARCH
FARM FOR SUSTAINABLE CROP
DEVELOPMENT**

Kentucky State University announces the acquisition of a new research farm dedicated to the study of environmentally sustainable crop development. The 100-acre farm, located just outside of Frankfort, was purchased through USDA research grant funding, and will support research in testing crops that can be grown in an environmentally sustainable manner.



The University’s sustainable agriculture program is designed to provide more profitable income opportunities for small family farms, promote environmental stewardship, and enhance the quality of life for farm families and communities. The new research farm will serve as a hub for interdisciplinary research, bringing together faculty and students from a variety of fields to investigate crops that require less water and fertilizer, are resistant to pests and diseases, and can be grown using environmentally friendly practices.

"We are thrilled to expand our initiatives in sustainable agriculture with the acquisition of this new research farm," said Dr. Kirk Pomper, dean of the College of Agriculture, Community, and the Sciences, at Kentucky State. "The new farm also has forested land that will support student research in water quality and forest health management, and farmland that will be monitored via agritechnology methods."

One of the primary areas of focus for the new research farm will be the study of new crops that can be grown in a sustainable way. The goal is to develop crops that are both sustainable and profitable for farmers, helping to support local food systems and promote economic development.

"This land will continue to be active agricultural land for years to come and is just one of many initiatives underway in Kentucky State’s Intended Future Plan that focuses on leveraging the ability of small family farms to compete at scale," said Dr. Ronald A. Johnson, interim president of Kentucky State. "As the demand for sustainable agriculture continues to grow, Kentucky State will be steadfast in its commitment to advancing research in this critical area of opportunity for small family farms in the Commonwealth of Kentucky."

Specific research at the farm will focus on row-crop production, horticultural crop production, agroforestry, control of invasive plants, soil health integrated pest management, and pollinator health. The farm will also serve as a resource for local farmers, providing training and technical assistance for sustainable farming practices.

**SENATOR GERALD A. NEAL
ENCOURAGES GRADUATES TO
STAY BALANCED, REMEMBER
THEIR VALUES, AND CONTINUE
ONWARD AND UPWARD**

Kentucky State University welcomed over 250 students as alumni at its 2023 Commencement Convocation. Graduates represented 21 states, one territory, and three foreign countries.



Kentucky Senate Minority Floor Leader Senator Gerald A. Neal delivered the Commencement address asking graduates, "When you look at the blank slate ahead, how will you shape your future?"

"Among you are future nurses, social workers, business leaders, teachers, scientists, engineers, doctors, attorneys, activists and many other professions," Senator Neal said. "Regardless of the path you choose, you’ve already taken the vital steps towards building a successful career. There are few achievements more powerful, more transformational, than what you’ve accomplished so far."

Senator Neal challenged the Class of 2023 to remain intentional about their objectives and be prepared for the trials ahead.

"Remember, failure is often the first step towards success and setbacks and sufferings are inevitable," he began. "In fact, they are one of the few certainties of human existence. But both failure and success are not the objectives; they are merely useful experiences to setup the next step, the next opportunity, the next challenge in reaching multiple goals as you go forward."

He encouraged graduates to remember the power of gratitude and to thank those who helped them reach this milestone.

"Just as you have pushed yourself and sacrificed for your degree, many others have been striving and sacrificing on your behalf," Senator Neal expressed. "Your parents and those significant in your life have spent many years in the trenches waking up early, staying up late, and perhaps working jobs they didn’t like, investing an untold amount of time and emotional capital to ensure you have a bright future. Don’t miss the opportunity to thank them."

Interim President Ronald A. Johnson offered graduates three simple rules to guide their journey after Kentucky State.

"Focus on remaining competitive by becoming a lifelong learner. Do not stay where you are; recognize that you have to commit to learning new things," he shared. Adding secondly that, "one of the most important assets you have is your name and, particularly, integrity. If you tie integrity to your purpose you will be able to soar throughout your career." Finally, he encouraged graduates to give back to their alma mater.

"I take my hat off for your accomplishment, applaud your success, and look forward to hearing how you are going to change the world and make a difference in the lives of others."

**STUDENT-ATHLETE HITS HOME RUN,
NAMED CLASS VALEDICTORIAN**

Collier Higgs started playing baseball when he was just three years old and has loved the sport ever since. In fact, baseball is what led him to Kentucky State University. In 2018, he attended a baseball camp where he met and impressed Head Coach Rob Henry. After touring the university with his parents, Higgs knew that, "this HBCU was where I would call home for the next four years."



Higgs, an Owensboro, Kentucky native, delivered the valedictorian address to the Class of 2023 on May 12, at KSU’s Commencement Convocation. Of this moment, he says that he feels blessed and thankful.

"I never expected to earn this honor; it was never a goal that I set for myself," Higgs says. "I just wanted to work hard and being named valedictorian was the result."

As a first-generation student, Higgs says that he has received a lot of support throughout his college career.

"Coach Henry was initially my safety net and listening ear when I needed someone close and my mom was diagnosed with cancer," he shares. "My mom pushed me to continue college when my heart was at home with her. My teammates were my brothers when I needed them the most and I will never forget them. Dr. Gary Stratton and Mrs. Jackie Duvall helped me with advising and just being there for whatever I needed."

Higgs also acknowledged the business department faculty for keeping him focused and on track, and the dining services staff for, "feeding my soul every day."

Higgs received a degree in business administration. After graduation, he hopes to continue working in the sport that he loves.

"I truly hope to stay on track with baseball and play as long as I am able," he shared. "After I hang up my cleats, I want to find a career that makes me happy, supports my family, and, one day, open a business that focuses on baseball."

**FIRST-GENERATION STUDENT, WIFE,
AND MOTHER COMPLETES DEGREE
DESPITE OBSTACLES**

Alena Claycomb received her elementary education degree from Kentucky State University and walked with her classmates on Friday, May 12, at the 2023 Commencement Convocation.



The Lexington, Kentucky native is a first-generation student and has already accepted a position at Lansdowne Elementary in her hometown.

Claycomb has always had a passion for children and began as a paraeducator with the Fayette County Public Schools in 2009. She knew that she wanted to become a teacher, but was nervous about having to stop working to do her student teaching. But, Claycomb received a lot of encouragement to pursue her dreams.

"Every principal, teacher, and even parents have always asked me when I was going to go back to school and finish so that I could become a teacher," she said. "They thought that I was good at it and they could see the love and passion I have for all students."

As a wife and mother, Claycomb chose Kentucky State because it was the perfect fit for her busy lifestyle. After speaking with a former student, doing her own research, and leaning on her faith, Claycomb said a post on Facebook gave her the confidence to apply.

"One day, I came across a post shared by Mrs. Krissalyn Love. She wanted to help five mothers get back in school," Claycomb shared. "I reached out and told her I was interested." Claycomb didn’t know what institution Mrs. Love was offering assistance for until she spoke with her. "I learned it was KSU. So, I took that as my sign that it was time for me to go back to school and get my degree in elementary education."

Claycomb began her studies in Jan. 2021 and, because of the pandemic, was able to take all of her courses online. She worked hard and was able to complete the requirements for her degree in Dec. 2022.

Claycomb said Kentucky State prepared her for the success she is now experiencing. She learned how to, "better plan out my lessons, effectively teach the different subjects, and how to better understand the content."

As a first-generation student, Claycomb said that pursuing a college degree was extremely important for her children to see.

"I wanted my kids – ages 20, 18, 15, and 5 – to see that it is never too late to go after your dreams," she expressed. "No matter how long it takes or the obstacles that may get in the way, keep going because the finish line is near. I just had to stop letting fear hold me back."