



NEWS FOR THE COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

APRIL 2025



WKU online programs earn top national rankings in 2025 U.S. News & World Report

U.S. News & World Report has once again recognized Western Kentucky University among the top institutions for online learning, ranking WKU's online bachelor's programs No. 71 in the nation.

The 2025 rankings were determined based on factors such as program engagement, services and technology, faculty credentials and training, and expert opinion. According to the report, "U.S. News chose factors that weigh how these programs are being delivered and their effectiveness at awarding affordable degrees in a reasonable amount of time."

"It is truly exciting to see how innovation and collaboration between the WKU Online team and our academic programs have delivered such remarkable results," said Dr. Jay Carroll, Assistant Director of WKU Online.

WKU's Online bachelor program climbed from 90th to 71st this year, reflecting the university's commitment to accessible and high-quality education. Designed to accommodate busy schedules, WKU's online courses allow learners to earn a degree without putting life on hold. Courses are taught by experienced faculty who also teach on campus, ensuring that online learners receive the same exceptional education as in-person students.

Several individual programs also earned impressive rankings this year. WKU's online undergraduate business program ranked No. 41 in the nation. The veteran's bachelor's program rose to No. 37, the veteran's MBA program climbed to No. 49, and veteran's graduate education was ranked No. 31. Additionally, the MBA program earned a ranking of No. 75, and graduate education secured No. 104.

WKU offers over 80 online degree options, including certificate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs. All programs are regionally accredited.



7 WKU Students and Alumni Named Semi-Finalists for Fulbright US Student Program

Seven WKU students and recent graduates have been recognized as Semi-Finalists in the 2025-26 Fulbright U.S. Student Program competition. The Fulbright U.S. Student Program is one among a suite of exchange programs in partnership with more than 160 countries around the world supported primarily by an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. It funds an academic year of research, study, or English teaching for approximately 2,200 grantees annually in more than 140 countries worldwide.

Over 11,000 graduating seniors and recent graduates nationwide submitted applications last fall that were evaluated by panels of American university faculty based on academic and professional achievement as well as record of service and leadership potential in their respective fields. Additional evaluation committees at American embassies and Fulbright Commissions worldwide will select Finalists throughout the spring and notify on a rolling basis. Once Finalists accept their awards, they are designated Fulbright Grantees or Fulbright Students.

WKU's Semi-Finalists for the 2024-25 award year are:

Autumn Howard ('24 *English and Spanish*), who applied for an English Teaching Assistant award to Spain.

Nguyen Nguyen ('24 *Chinese*), who applied for an English Teaching Assistant award to Taiwan.

Htee Shee Paw ('25 *Corporate & Organizational Communication, Professional Legal Studies*), who applied for an English Teaching Assistant award to Thailand.

Parker Raybourne ('22 *Political Science, Public Relations, and Advertising*), who applied for a Fulbright research award in Italy to study the efficacy of public-private partnerships to address rural "brain drain."

Manzar Rzayeva ('22 *Biology*, '24 *Master's in Public Health*), who applied for a Fulbright research award in Germany to study access to maternal healthcare services among migrants.

Shwe Win ('23 *Public Health*, '25 *Master's in Public Health*), who applied for an English Teaching Assistant award to Thailand.

Sydney Windhorst ('25 *International Affairs*), who applied for an English Teaching Assistant award to Italy.

WKU President named KMEA Administrator of the Year

Western Kentucky University President Timothy C. Caboni was named the Kentucky Music Educators Association's (KMEA) 2024-25 Administrator of the Year.

The award was presented Friday, February 7, at the KMEA 2024-25 Awards Ceremony at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville.

KMEA is an organization of over 2,000 professional music educators from kindergarten to the university level dedicated to the cause of music education in Kentucky. Associated with the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), it serves as a voice for Kentucky's music educators.

The KMEA award recognizes and thanks administrators for emphasizing and valuing their institution's music programs.

"I'm so thankful for my experiences in band that created opportunities to practice leadership from middle school through college. As a musician, section leader and drum major, I am indebted to the educators who created those opportunities and challenged me to be a better and more excellent version of myself — and those lessons still resonate and echo today as a university president," said President Caboni.

President Caboni affirmed that music is an important part of the WKU experience. "We need more young people to learn the lessons that band and music can teach them, lessons that translate beyond the concert hall and football field. Each lesson prepares them for success, in making a good living and a good life, for themselves and their families well after their time studying in college."

"We are creating those opportunities every day for young people at WKU. I'm proud that we are accomplishing some amazing things and reaching goals we have set for ourselves as an institution," he said.

When President Caboni, who earned a graduate degree from WKU in 1994, returned to campus in 2017 as the university's 10th president, he set forth a personal priority to ensure institutional support of WKU's music programs.

The work began by increasing athletic band scholarships, opening doors for more students to pursue a degree at WKU. Since 2017, WKU's Big Red Marching Band grew from 240 to more than 300 members, taking the helm as the largest marching band in Kentucky.

One of the marching band's most notable challenges has been the absence of a dedicated practice space. In fall of 2023, WKU broke ground on the new 120,000-square-foot Hilltopper Fieldhouse. In addition to supporting the athletics program with space for athletic teams to train and prepare for competition, the new fieldhouse at WKU will serve as the primary rehearsal facility for the Big Red Marching Band, providing a permanent place for the band to hold practices.

In addition to President Caboni's award, Dr. Gary Schallert received the prestigious 2025 Phi Beta Mu Outstanding Bandmaster award; Dr. Matthew McCurry was inducted into Phi Beta Mu, the International Bandmasters Fraternity; and Dr. Lauren Whitham and the University Singers were chosen to perform at the KMEA Conference.



WKU's 11th annual Dance Big Red breaks record, surpassing \$105,000 for Norton Children's Hospital

More than 700 WKU students raised over \$105,000 through Dance Big Red, an annual student-led dance marathon that benefits Norton Children's. The marathon took place in March at Raymond B. Preston Health & Activities Center. Additionally, more than 200 special guests, including sponsors, families and community members, attended the Community/Dance Little Red Hour to support the student dancers.

"We are beyond grateful for the overwhelming response from students, donors and sponsors," said Larkin Jarboe, Dance Big Red Co-Chair. "Thanks to the support of everyone pulling together, we surpassed goals and broke records. Dance Big Red raised \$105,571.80 for Norton Children's Hospital, directly impacting pediatric heart care and pediatric cancer care for patients from across the state. The result of this event is a dream come true."

Dance Big Red has held various fundraising events over the past year and worked in partnership with Warren County Public Schools' Dance Little Red and various Dance Mini Reds. The student members planned various campus outreach opportunities to donate and get involved. They also met with Norton Children's patients and their families to learn about their journeys.

"The continued success of the event is a testament to the strength of leadership and compassion found at WKU," said Dana Warder, Norton Children's Hospital's Western Kentucky PR/Communications Manager. "Since the inaugural event, Dance Big Red has raised nearly a million dollars for Norton Children's through Norton Children's Hospital Foundation. It was an amazing night of stories that inspire and give hope."

Western Kentucky University President Timothy C. Caboni said, "I'm incredibly proud of our WKU students for volunteering their time and energy to support Norton's Children's Hospital. Their dedication to making a difference reflects the spirit of Hilltoppers — compassionate, driven and committed to serving others."

"The WKU community and spirit showed out to support Norton Children's Hospital," said Lilly Pollitzer, Dance Big Red Co-Chair. "Together, we are making a direct impact to families in this region. Our executive board is ready to start planning Dance Big Red 2026."