



President's Report

Spring/Summer 2026

THOROBREDS LEADING for *Impact*

A Message from the PRESIDENT

Greetings,

Compelling evidence of the progress taking place throughout our institution continues to build, and Kentucky State University's Class of 2026 provides a perfect example. It was one of the largest graduating classes in recent history, requiring two ceremonies to accommodate the number of graduates.

Across the summer, fall, and spring terms, the University awarded 428 degrees and credentials. That represents a 28 percent increase over last year and a remarkable 112 percent increase in just four years.

These figures reveal more than the size of a graduating class. They reflect the University's growing ability to help students persist, complete their programs, and move forward prepared to contribute to their professions and communities.

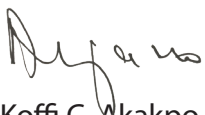
The breadth of the Class of 2026 is equally significant. Kentucky State awarded 316 undergraduate degrees and credentials and 112 graduate degrees, including 16 doctoral degrees. Half of our graduates came from Kentucky, up from 36 percent last year, while others represented 26 states, one U.S. territory, and 14 countries. Thirty high school students also earned associate degrees through our dual-credit program before receiving their high school diplomas.

Behind these numbers are individual stories of determination and opportunity. Our graduates include students who persevered through life-changing circumstances, crossed borders and cultures to pursue an education, completed accelerated pathways, returned to college later in life, and advanced through graduate and doctoral study.

Their achievements demonstrate the reach and continued relevance of Kentucky State's mission. They also reflect the dedication of our faculty and staff, the encouragement of families and alumni, and the support of partners who believe in the University's future.

Throughout this report, you will see additional evidence of Kentucky State's momentum: stronger academic outcomes, expanding research, new external investment, statewide service, and continued improvements to our campus. Each accomplishment contributes to a stronger University and greater opportunity for the students and communities we serve.

Onward and Upward,



Koffi C. Akakpo, Ph.D.
President
Kentucky State University



KENTUCKY STATE
UNIVERSITY

CLASS OF 2026 *by the numbers!*

LARGEST GRADUATING CLASS IN RECENT HISTORY

428 Degrees & Credentials
AWARDED



28%
Increase from
last year



112%
Increase from
four years ago



Degree Breakdown: 316 Undergraduate
Degrees & Credentials **112** Graduate
Degrees



Representing: 26 STATES, 1 U.S. TERRITORY (PUERTO RICO) & 14 FOREIGN NATIONS



- The Bahamas
- Canada
- Djibouti
- Dominican Republic

- Ethiopia
- Germany
- Ghana
- India

- Nepal
- Nigeria
- Senegal
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Uganda

50%

OF GRADUATES ARE FROM KENTUCKY
(up from 36% last year)

3 Students completed
degrees in just 3 years

30 High School seniors earned associate degrees through
the Dual-Credit Program while still in High School

Average age of all
degree & certificate
recipients

27 years old

28 Students from
Frankfort
High School

INCLUDING:

1 Student from
Franklin County
High School

1 Student from
Woodford County
High School

YOUNGEST GRADUATE 17 YEARS OLD

OLDEST GRADUATE 61 YEARS OLD



1,897 TOTAL CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED
BEFORE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



Investing in Thorobreds

\$10,139,172

Awarded In:

- ✓ Institutional Aid
- ✓ State Grants
- ✓ Federal Grants
- ✓ External Scholarships

Supporting Kentucky
State students and
families



TOP DEGREE PROGRAMS

Graduate Programs

- Business Administration
- Computer Science
- Doctor of Nursing Practice
- Environmental Studies

Undergraduate Programs

- Business Administration
- Criminal Justice
- Nursing
- Psychology

THOROBREDS LEADING FOR *Impact*



From Valedictorian to Climate Research

Zhakeya Hawkins Turns an Accelerated Academic Journey into Opportunity

In one year at Kentucky State University, Zhakeya Hawkins completed two years of undergraduate study, maintained a 4.0 GPA, competed as a scholar-athlete, and graduated as valedictorian of the Class of 2026.

Hawkins arrived at Kentucky State with an associate degree earned while still in high school. As a USDA 1890 National Scholar, she built expertise in mathematical computer science, data science, and geospatial technology while conducting research in the University's Geographic Information Systems Lab.

Her accomplishments extended beyond the classroom. Hawkins competed in cross country and track and field, winning the women's pole vault and setting a meet record at the 2026 Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Indoor Track and Field Championship.

She is now applying that preparation as a post-baccalaureate research scholar at the University of California, Merced. Working with the Aerosol-Climate Group through UC Merced's BRAAG-SURI program, Hawkins is studying connections among atmospheric aerosols, agriculture, air quality, and the global climate system. Her research combines satellite observations and climate simulations with skills in image analysis, data science, and geospatial modeling developed at Kentucky State.

Hawkins plans to pursue a Ph.D. in data science and use machine learning, geospatial technologies, and environmental data to address challenges affecting agriculture, natural resources, food systems, and communities.

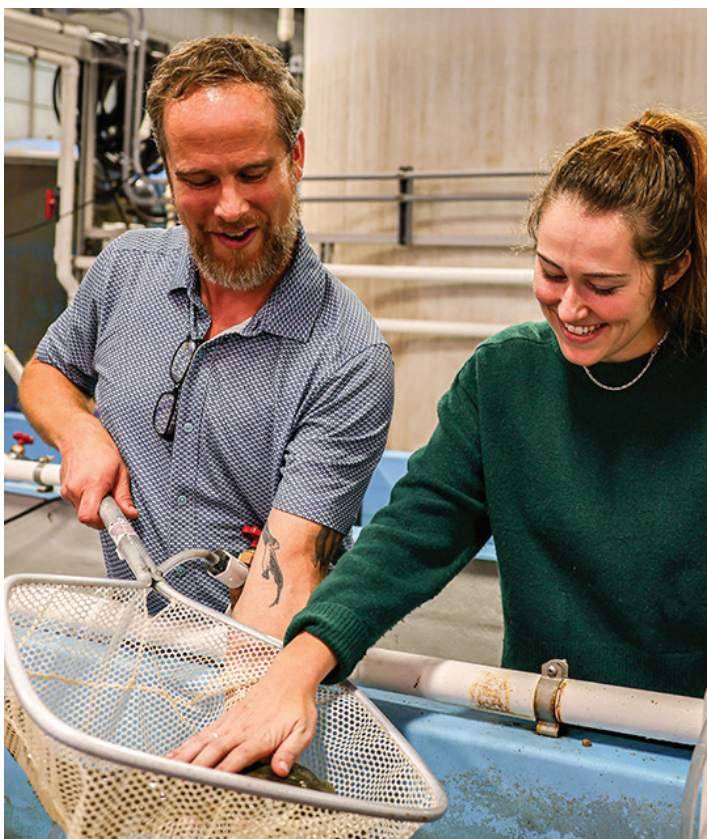
Her experience reflects the academic opportunity, research preparation, and personal drive that carried her from Kentucky State's commencement stage to advanced climate research

New Programs Create New Pathways

Kentucky State University is expanding its academic portfolio with new programs that connect the University's established strengths with emerging workforce needs. From aquatic science and public service to sports analytics and digital communication, these offerings create new pathways for students while preparing graduates for fields where skilled professionals are increasingly in demand.

Aquatic Science

Kentucky State's new Bachelor of Science in Aquatic Science is the first undergraduate degree of its kind in the Commonwealth and one of only a few nationwide. Grounded in research and hands-on learning, the program prepares students for careers addressing the interconnected challenges of clean water, sustainable food production, aquatic resource management, and environmental stewardship.



Digital Communication

A new 15-credit Certificate in Digital Communication provides focused preparation in digital media strategy, social media, multimedia storytelling, and content creation. Students can complete the five-course program in as few as three semesters, build a professional portfolio, and apply all credits toward Kentucky State's bachelor's degree in mass communication and journalism.

Public Policy

Launching in Fall 2026, the Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy prepares students for careers in government, nonprofit organizations, advocacy, regulatory affairs, and the private sector. The program emphasizes policy analysis, data-informed decision-making, professional communication, ethics, and applied learning tied to the issues shaping communities.

Sports Analytics

The fully online Master of Science in Sports Analytics combines data science, performance analysis, management, and communication. Designed as an accelerated, 30-credit program, the degree prepares graduates to use machine learning, predictive modeling, visualization, and other analytical tools to support better decisions in athletics and related industries.

Kentucky State's Growing Research Enterprise Attracts New Investment and Serves Communities

According to the National Science Foundation's Higher Education Research and Development Survey, Kentucky State University reports the third-largest university research expenditures in the Commonwealth, behind only the University of Kentucky and the University of Louisville.

That standing reflects a growing research enterprise with practical value for Kentucky's people, communities, and economy. Kentucky State is one of only five institutions in the Commonwealth included in Carnegie as a Research Colleges and Universities classification.

Two recent awards totaling \$3 million demonstrate the reach of that work.



Restoring Land and Expanding Opportunity

A four-year, \$2 million Appalachian Regional Commission POWER grant will establish a Kentucky State-led Center of Excellence focused on workforce preparation, land restoration, and economic recovery in Eastern Kentucky communities with deep ties to the coal economy.

Led by Dr. Buddhi Gyawali, the project will bring together Kentucky State, Virginia Tech, the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee State University, and community partners. Plans call for 13 training programs serving approximately 1,000 residents, landowners, practitioners, and other stakeholders through virtual instruction, hands-on field training, and community-based learning.



Extending a Proven Mentoring Model

A separate three-year, \$1 million award will expand Kentucky State's youth development work into Lexington through a partnership with BMW Academy at First Baptist Bracktown Church.

Administered through the University's Promising Youth Center for Excellence, the initiative will provide mentoring, academic support, leadership development, wellness education, STEM experiences, and family engagement for approximately 120 young people each year. Kentucky State students will help deliver the programming while gaining valuable experience in education, psychology, social work, youth development, and community service.

Together, these investments show how Kentucky State translates research, expertise, and partnerships into stronger communities and greater opportunity across the Commonwealth.



• KYSU ONLINE

A Kentucky State Education

Built Around Your Life

Earn your degree online, on a schedule that fits around your job, your family, and your goals, backed by the same faculty and academic standards as KYSU's campus programs.



KYSU Online Creates Flexible Pathways for Military-Connected Students

Through KYSU Online and Military & Veteran Affairs, veterans, active-duty service members, and military families are finding flexible pathways to pursue their goals wherever life and service take them. Through KYSU Online and the support of Military & Veteran Affairs, veterans, active-duty service members, and military families are finding flexible pathways to pursue their goals wherever life and service take them.

U.S. Air Force veteran Octavia Harper earned a 4.0 GPA while completing an MBA in Executive Leadership. After retiring as a master sergeant with more than 21 years of service, Harper used the program to prepare for new opportunities as an entrepreneur, educator, and business leader.

U.S. Army veteran Allen Claycomb is also maintaining a 4.0 GPA in the MBA program while balancing work as a transportation manager, entrepreneurship, nonprofit leadership, community service, and family responsibilities.

For active-duty Army student Juan Nava, online learning provided continuity through travel, changing schedules, and deployment. Completing his degree represented more than a personal achievement. As a first-generation American whose parents did not have the opportunity to finish high school, Nava described it as “the breaking of generational struggle.”

Military spouse Syndie Finn returned to college more than 35 years after beginning her degree. She is now studying liberal arts with a concentration in aquaculture and hopes to share that knowledge in her southern Kentucky community.

Mikaila Bell completed two bachelor's degrees and a master's degree before age 25, finishing her graduate studies from Japan while serving on active duty and managing a 14-hour time difference.

Together, their stories demonstrate how Kentucky State is expanding access without diminishing expectations, helping students translate military experience, perseverance, and purpose into academic and professional progress.





Kentucky State Brings Research, Education, and Opportunity to Communities

Kentucky State University's land-grant mission connects research and education with the needs of people and communities.

Inspiring Future Agricultural Leaders

Kentucky State also welcomed 98 high school students representing six 1890 land-grant universities for the 2026 Youth Innovators Empowering Agriculture Research and Extension Apprenticeship Program.

During the five-day residential experience, students explored agriculture, technology, research, leadership, and Cooperative Extension through hands-on activities across the University's main campus and research facilities.

Growing Knowledge in Lexington

In Lexington's Winburn neighborhood and at Whitney Young Park, Kentucky State students and researchers are working with community partners to create productive urban growing spaces. Participants grow vegetables and herbs, collect soil samples, and learn how food moves from the soil to the table.

The broader initiative reaches eight K–12 schools, 10 community gardens, and five nonprofit organizations, demonstrating how urban agriculture can improve access to fresh food, develop practical skills, and create economic opportunity.

Together, these initiatives bring University knowledge into communities while helping young people see themselves as future scientists, educators, entrepreneurs, and Extension leaders.



Research and Innovation

Innovation in Action

Kentucky State researchers and students are turning scientific discovery, emerging technology, and longstanding expertise into practical tools, products, and partnerships.

DARE-KY AGtech Symposium Builds Statewide Innovation Network

Supported by a \$7 million National Science Foundation award, DARE-KY hosted its first AgTech Symposium at the Harold R. Benson Research and Demonstration Farm. The event brought together researchers, students, educators, public-sector partners, community collaborators, and agtech companies to highlight soilless agriculture research, student training, workforce development, and pathways from discovery to commercialization. DARE-KY has engaged more than 100 students across partner institutions, including 69 in paid positions.



FluxDash Opens Environmental Data

Research associate Ife Familusi developed FluxDash, an open-source tool that helps researchers process, visualize, and interpret complex environmental data. The platform supports research examining the movement of carbon, water, and energy across agricultural and natural environments.



Shrimp Farming Symposium Extends Kentucky State's Global Reach

The 2026 Shrimp Farming Symposium brought more than 160 participants from 19 states and five countries to Kentucky State, with 22 additional participants joining virtually. The two-day event connected internationally recognized researchers with commercial producers, entrepreneurs, students, and industry representatives to examine advances in inland shrimp production. Attendees also toured the Aquatic Research Center and saw Kentucky State research being translated into working commercial systems.

AI-Forester Earns Statewide Recognition

Graduate student Nischal Sapkota received the \$15,000 KCV IMPACT Award for AI-Forester, which uses artificial intelligence and computer vision to identify tree species and support forest monitoring.

Pawpaw Ale-8 Returns for a Second Season

Pawpaw Ale-8 returned this summer with expanded distribution and festival appearances in Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana, bringing greater visibility to Kentucky State's nationally recognized pawpaw research program.



BUILDING FOR KENTUCKY STATE'S FUTURE



A Planned Health Sciences Center Will Advance Education, Research, and Patient Care

Kentucky State University is advancing \$183.25 million in legislative asset-preservation funding and planned capital investment from 2022 through 2028, strengthening the facilities where students live, learn, conduct research, compete, and build community.

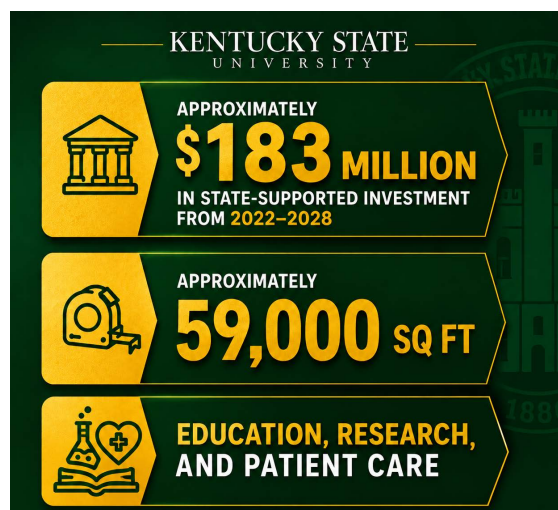
At the center of this transformation is a planned Health Sciences Center representing \$55 million in design and anticipated construction investment. The Kentucky State University Board of Regents has approved the design for the approximately 59,000-square-foot, three-story facility. Envisioned as a landmark at the eastern gateway to campus, the Center would unite the College of Nursing, advanced nutrition sciences research laboratories, and an outpatient health clinic.

Purpose-built classrooms, simulation suites, clinical training laboratories, collaborative study areas, and dedicated faculty spaces would create an integrated environment where education, research, and patient care intersect.

Students will gain expanded opportunities for hands-on preparation, while Kentucky State will be better positioned to respond to the growing need for

healthcare professionals and improved healthcare access across the Commonwealth. The Center's design reflects the University's commitment to creating modern learning environments that support academic growth, interdisciplinary collaboration, applied research, and service.

Serving as the forward-looking centerpiece of a broader campus transformation, the Health Sciences Center will complement extensive work to preserve, renew, and modernize Kentucky State's existing facilities.



Total Legislative

Asset Preservation and Planned
Capital Investment, 2022-2028

\$183M

\$55M

Health Science
Building

**\$50M Next year*

\$48M

Chandler Hall
Combs Hall
Hunter Hall
Kentucky Hall
McCullin Hall

\$6M

ASB Roof / Windows
Door Access Control
Sidewalk / Paving

\$22M

Bell Gym
Bradford Hall
Exum Center
Hume Hall
Shauntee Hall
Student Center

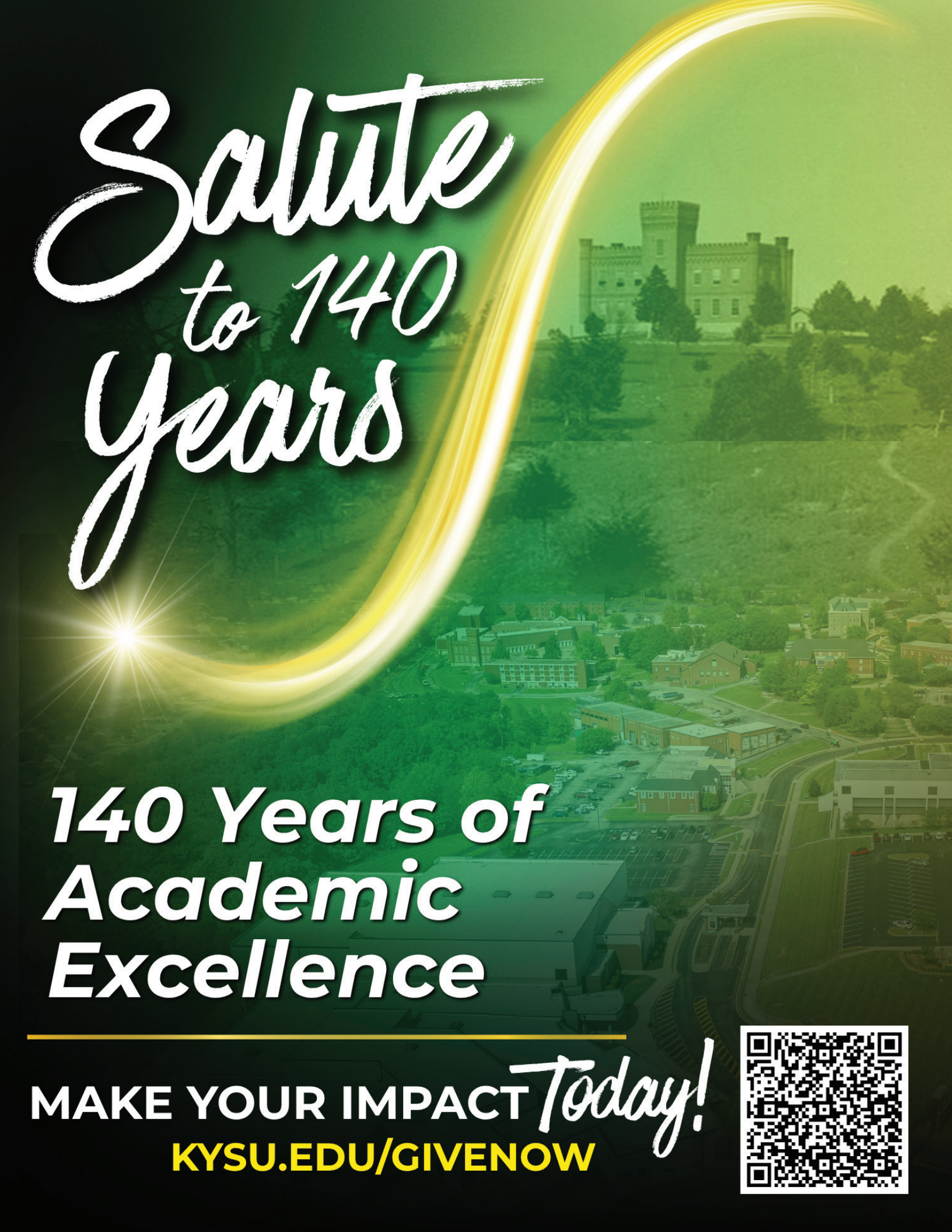
New Projects \$45M

Carver Hall Phase 1
The Halls Phase 2

\$7M

Other Projects

Thank You, Kentucky Legislators!



*Salute
to 140
Years*

**140 Years of
Academic
Excellence**

MAKE YOUR IMPACT *Today!*
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