

MC set for virtual December 12 graduation

Special to The Clinton Courier

Mississippi College leaders will honor about 1,400 graduates at virtual commencement on December 12.

Ceremonies will be 10 a.m. that Saturday to salute May 2020 graduates. There will be a 2 p.m. ceremony to recognize August and December grads.

Serving as guest speaker at both programs will be Steve Price, the university's 2020 Distinguished Professor of the Year. Dr. Price is an English professor and director of the MC Writing Center.

Like many institutions around the U.S., Mississippi College is hosting virtual commencement ceremonies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's among a series of health protocols in place at MC to mitigate the spread of the coronavirus.

MC's COVID-19 coordinator Beth Stapleton says the virtual graduation "is a must for the students and the rest of the campus. Even though we all struggle with the way our lives have changed, this ceremony serves as a pivotal point for many students...life after graduation."

Each student, says the Spanish professor, "will take many lessons learned from the pandemic and apply it to their future. I think it will speak to their resilience and hard work to be able to finish."

An MC graduate, Dr. Stapleton also serves as executive director of the Edward McMillan Center for Education Abroad.

Portions of Dr. Price's commencement speeches will touch on challenges facing the Mississippi College community in the midst of a health emergency.

Social distancing, mask wearing, frequent temperature checks, COVID-19 testing and loads of hand sanitizer stations are part of the landscape at the university's main campus in Clinton. The same is true at MC Law School in Jackson.

"My speech will explore strength and courage and the ways I saw my students carrying out those goals," Price said. "We have plenty to celebrate, both

the graduates themselves and the ways they negotiated the pandemic as MC students."

Due to the pandemic, faculty and students pivoted to online classes for the final two months of the spring semester.

At the virtual graduation, Mississippi College senior Shem McConnell will deliver one of the prayers. He's finishing his senior year one semester early. He's then headed to Washington to attend graduate school at Georgetown University. Shem may also work on Capitol Hill.

Former Student Government Association President Aaron Feazelle will return to present a prayer for the Class of 2020 as well at commencement. Growing up on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, playing MC Choctaws football and serving as an MC student leader were wonderful experiences.

Now, Feazelle feels blessed to be a graduate assistant at the University of Oklahoma's Athletic Department. He reports directly to the department's CFO on the Norman campus. "I have already learned so much from everyone and am excited to see where God continues to lead me."

Being invited to return to his alma mater is quite a thrill. "I'm excited to start giving back to MC! My time there shaped me into the man I am now, so I could not be more excited about giving the invocation!"

During the summer, President Blake Thompson announced that "Strong and Courageous" would serve as the focus for the university's 195th academic year. It is inspired by the words in the Book of Joshua 1:9, as the Baptist-affiliated university wraps up its fall semester prior to Thanksgiving.

In a series of messages to the Blue & Gold family, Dr. Thompson and others thanked university stakeholders for the way they responded to the health crisis. But the hard work continues in 2021 with spring classes to begin January 19.

People seeking to watch the virtual graduation ceremonies can go to mc.edu/commencement and honor MC's Class of 2020.



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