

Commencement

Commencement is the formal ceremony that is held to recognize and honor candidates for graduation. Commencement is the most significant academic event for students and the entire university community, as it is the culmination of years of hard work and personal and financial investment for students and families alike. These ceremonies celebrate the traditional observances that accompany one of the highest rewards of academic achievement.

Any students behaving inappropriately (e.g., students who are visibly intoxicated, disruptive, etc.) may be removed from commencement in the university's sole discretion.

Visit the Commencement website for information on Commencement ceremonies.

The Difference Between Graduation and Commencement

Commencement is not the same as graduation.

Graduation refers to actually receiving a degree or certificate of completion once Johnson & Wales University has verified a student has met all degree or certificate requirements. Upon verification, the degree or certificate is awarded and noted in the student information system so that it displays on the student's official transcript. A student's graduation date will reflect the last day of the semester in which the student completes their requirements, unless completion falls outside of a student's enrollment semester, in which case the graduation date will reflect the effective date of completion. Diplomas are printed and mailed after the degree or certificate verification process is complete, approximately six-to-eight business weeks after the end of the semester. A diploma verifies the student's awarded degree and graduation date.

Commencement is a ceremony. It is an opportunity for students, families, friends and the JWU community to celebrate their academic accomplishments. Participation in Commencement does not mean that students have graduated, and they will not receive their diploma on that day. Students must satisfy all graduation requirements before officially graduating and receiving a diploma.

Commencement Ceremony Eligibility

For participation in the May 2026 Commencement ceremony and inclusion in the Commencement program, degree-seeking students must fall into one of the following categories:

- The student is awarded a degree in the fall 2025 semester.
- The student is enrolled in the spring 2026 semester and, as of March 14, 2026, has an expected degree completion semester of spring 2026, summer 2026 or fall 2026.
- A student enrolled in an accelerated bachelor's/master's program must have completed their undergraduate degree as of the previous fall 2025 semester and be formally considered a graduate student as of the spring 2026 semester in order to be eligible for Graduate Commencement in the spring.
- A doctoral student is only permitted to walk at commencement once all degree requirements are complete, or at the discretion of the appropriate program director.

Names of eligible Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) and Occupational Therapy (OTD) candidates are submitted by the appropriate program director. Doctoral students are only permitted to walk at commencement once all degree requirements are complete, or at the discretion of the appropriate program director.

Participation

To participate in the May commencement ceremony, students must visit the Commencement website to review campus specific requirements.

The Commencement Program

The Commencement program contains the names of students meeting eligibility criteria. For publication purposes, the honors status of students completing remaining course requirements in or following the spring semester is determined by the cumulative GPA at the **fall semester** of the previous year. A student's final GPA will be used to record graduating honors, as applicable on the student's diploma and academic transcript.

Names appearing in the commencement program will match the name submitted with the student's graduation application. Students who wish to have a preferred name listed in the commencement program instead must submit the Graduation Name in Use form.

Note: Names that are printed in the Commencement program should not be used as an indicator of degree completion. Students must satisfy all graduation requirements before officially graduating and receiving a diploma. Students should review their degree audit to ensure they have met all graduation requirements.

Students Enrolled in Online Programs

Students enrolled in online programs will be invited to participate in Commencement ceremonies at the Providence or Charlotte Campus. Students are encouraged to refer to the Commencement website for information on Commencement ceremonies. Doctoral candidates may only participate in the Providence Campus ceremony.