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# Alumni, former mayor, journalist, state official and higher education administrator to speak at Fall 2020 Commencement ceremonies

December 9, 2020

Georgia Southern University has named five distinguished Georgians to serve as speakers for Georgia Southern University's Fall 2020 Commencement ceremonies on Dec. 13, 16 and 17.

Georgia Southern University will hold four commencement ceremonies for undergraduate students and one ceremony for graduate students from each of the University's 10 colleges.

The commencement ceremony on Dec. 13 will be held at the Savannah Convention Center at 2 p.m. for undergraduates from each of the University's three campuses who prefer to attend the ceremony in Savannah. The remaining four ceremonies will take place at Allen E. Paulson Stadium on the Statesboro Campus on Dec. 16 and Dec. 17 at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on both days.

Each ceremony will be livestreamed to the [commencement page on the University's website](#) and the [Georgia Southern Facebook page](#).

## **Sunday, Dec. 13, 2 p.m.**

*Undergraduate ceremony in Savannah*



*James "Jim" Thomas, Jr.*

Former City of Hinesville Mayor James "Jim" Thomas, Jr. will address graduates at Sunday's ceremony in Savannah. He was elected as the first African American mayor of Hinesville in 2007 and served two terms. A retired Green Beret Officer and a 40-year resident of Liberty County, Thomas has been an active member of the local community for more than 33 years. He is a former member of the Liberty County Hospital Authority and the Armstrong University Foundation Board and currently serves on the Hinesville Development Authority, Hinesville Military Affairs Committee and is a member of the NAACP, MENSA, INTERTEL, 11 Black Men of Liberty County, Manna House Board and several other local civic organizations.

Thomas' impressive career includes work as a former Department of Defense civil service employee, where he served as a liaison between Fort Stewart, Liberty County, city of Savannah and the city of Hinesville. He is a trained engineering project manager with related experience including the Joint Use Airport Committee, the construction of the "Warriors Walk" (a memorial to our fallen soldiers and civilians at Fort Stewart) and many other buildings and facilities at Fort Stewart and Hunter Army Airfield. He recently co-chaired the committee that completed the construction of the Veterans Memorial Walk in Hinesville.

Thomas obtained a bachelor's degree in business management and administration from Saint Leo University and completed graduate studies in business management at Central Michigan University and executive management training at the University of Maryland. He has been married to Claudia Elmore Thomas for 56 years and they have four children, four grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

**Wednesday, Dec. 16, 10 a.m.**

*Undergraduate ceremony in Statesboro for the College of Arts and Humanities, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health*



*Skyler Henry*

Emmy Award-winning journalist Skyler Henry ('11) will address graduating students from the College of Arts and Humanities, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health in the morning ceremony on Dec. 16.

Based in Washington, D.C., Henry is a correspondent for CBS Newspath, which is CBS News' 24/7 newsgathering service for CBS stations and broadcasters around the world. He's covered a variety of stories including the 2020 presidential race for the White House and politics across the country. His career has taken him from Los Angeles to the nation's capital where he's interviewed top city, state and federal officials and helped break and cover some of the country's

most talked about moments.

A native of Stone Mountain, Georgia, Henry earned a Bachelor of Science degree in multimedia information from Georgia Southern University. Henry strongly considers his time at Georgia Southern — from his work at campus radio station 91.9 'The Buzz' to projects with the Recreation Activity Center — to be some of the most influential in his life and setting the foundation for his career. While covering football at Georgia Southern, he was part of the team that won a 2012 National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Southeast Emmy for Outstanding Achievement in Television Student Production Excellence.

Henry is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Incorporated.

**Wednesday, Dec. 16, 3 p.m.**

*Undergraduate ceremony in Statesboro for the Waters College of Health Professions and Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing*



*Russell McMurry*

Russell McMurry, P.E. ('91) will speak to graduates from the Waters College of Health Professions and Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing in next Wednesday's afternoon ceremony.

McMurry serves as commissioner of the Georgia Department of Transportation, a \$3.6 billion, 4,000-employee state agency responsible for planning, designing, constructing, maintaining and operating Georgia's state-owned transportation system. Georgia has the 10th largest transportation system in the country. He began his career with the department in 1990 as an engineering trainee and has served in a variety of roles that include construction project manager, district engineer, director of engineering and chief engineer. He was then appointed by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal as the department's planning director before being appointed as commissioner by unanimous vote of the State Transportation Board in 2015.

McMurry is also the secretary/treasurer of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) as well as the chair of the Council on Highways and Streets and a member of the Strategic Management Committee. He is a member of the national AASHTO-AGC-ARTBA Joint Policy Committee and is a board member for the Atlanta Transit Link Authority (ATL), Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority

(MARTA), State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA), the State Depository Board and the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. His service extends to higher education in Georgia as a member of the College of Engineering and Computing Corporate Advisory Committee at Georgia Southern University and the University of Georgia College of Engineering Advisory Board.

He has received numerous accolades and recognitions, including being named Georgia Trend's 2018 Georgian of the Year, and is consistently included in its list of the 100 Most Influential Georgians. He was also named one of Atlanta's most powerful leaders in Atlanta Magazine's "Atlanta 500" and named as one of James Magazine's 2017 and 2019 Most Influential Georgians. He was recognized as the 2017 College of Engineering and Information Technology Alumnus of the Year by Georgia Southern University for outstanding achievements in his field.

McMurry graduated cum laude from Georgia Southern University with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering technology and is a registered professional engineer in the state of Georgia.

**Thursday, Dec. 17, 10 a.m.**

*Undergraduate ceremony in Statesboro for the Parker College of Business, College of Education and College of Science and Mathematics*



*Kain Weaver*

Alumnus Kain Weaver ('14) will kick off the ceremonies on Dec. 17 as he addresses graduates from Parker College of Business, College of Education and College of Science and Mathematics. A native of Ringgold, Georgia, he is currently a second year resident physician at Atrium Health in Charlotte, North Carolina, where he is specializing in the field of psychiatry. He graduated summa cum laude from Georgia Southern University where he studied biology with an emphasis in the pre-medical sciences, as well as modern languages: Spanish. He received his doctorate in medicine from the Mercer University School of Medicine in Savannah.

**Thursday, Dec. 17, 3 p.m.**

*Graduate ceremony in Statesboro for the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate*

*Studies*



*Teresa MacCartney*

Teresa MacCartney ('99, '01) will serve as the speaker for the final ceremony on Dec. 17 for graduate students in the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies.

MacCartney currently serves as the executive vice chancellor of administration at the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. MacCartney began her career at the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) in 2001. She held various leadership positions within state government, including senior policy advisor at the Georgia Student Finance Commission, deputy director at OPB and deputy superintendent at the Georgia Department of Education. MacCartney was appointed as the chief financial officer for the State of Georgia and director of OPB by Governor Deal in October 2012 and held the position for more than six years.

She currently serves as the chair of the Georgia Higher Education Facilities Authority Board, board member of the Georgia Lottery Corporation, board director of the Jekyll Island

Foundation, board director of the Augusta University Health SPC and a member of the board of trustees for the Leadership Georgia Foundation.

MacCartney was named to the 2014 “40 Under 40” list and the 2017 Alumna of the Year by the Georgia Southern Alumni Association.

She earned both a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Public Administration degree from Georgia Southern University. She and her two children reside in Marietta, Georgia.

Each Fall 2020 Commencement ceremony will be held according to CDC and Georgia Department of Health requirements. Attendance at each ceremony will be limited to no more than 25% of the facility’s full capacity to allow for appropriate social distancing within the facility’s main seating areas. Each visitor is required to have a ticket to attend the ceremonies and tickets will be distributed in seating clusters with at least six feet of distance between clusters. Graduates, visitors, and Georgia Southern students and personnel will be required to wear an appropriate face covering while attending commencement ceremonies and for the entirety of the event. In addition, hand sanitizing stations will be available throughout the facilities. Extensive signage throughout the venues and trained staff will help ensure face coverings are worn and social distancing is maintained.

For more information on Georgia Southern’s Fall 2020 Commencement ceremonies visit:

[GeorgiaSouthern.edu/commencement](https://GeorgiaSouthern.edu/commencement).

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 140 different degree programs serving almost 27,000 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities. Visit [GeorgiaSouthern.edu](https://GeorgiaSouthern.edu).

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