



Loran Smith
Columnist

Wayne Brantley

This is overdue, and I regret having to pay tribute to a good friend belatedly. When I heard the news that my long-time friend Wayne Brantley had passed away a few weeks ago, I made plans to drive down from Athens to Vidalia for his final service.

Since then, I have spent considerable time recalling Wayne's days in Athens, when he was a small guard (5-11, 195 lb.), but an over-achiever who performed much bigger than his stature. Wayne was a fierce competitor and imbued with a deep and abiding commitment to enjoying his campus days as a student-athlete.

While he loved the game, Wayne also knew a degree would enhance his career when his college days were over. That meant it was just as important for him to make good grades in the classroom as it was to create a hole in the defense for Georgia running backs. Some athletes are good at one but not the other. Wayne excelled at both. In addition, he was a good teammate, exhibiting the intangibles that become the glue that bonds a team.

Wayne had a flair for drawing, so he enrolled in Industrial Arts when he entered UGA. Following graduation, he coached high school football in Greenwood, S.C., before returning to Vidalia to take over the family business.

Everywhere he went, Wayne easily made friends. With an engaging personality and constant smile, he became known in high school as "Smiley." If anybody ever deserved such a nickname, it was Wayne. Longtime friends say they never saw him frown.

Wayne was awarded a football scholarship by UGA late in 1961, and he became a regular at guard in 1962 with the freshman team. By 1963 he was a co-regular with the varsity squad. Vince Dooley was hired in late December that year, and Wayne set about accruing more playing time with the new staff in 1964. Dooley's first season, which turned out to be serendipitous.

The Bulldogs won six games that year, including the Georgia Tech rivalry game, and against Texas Tech in the Sun Bowl at El Paso, one of the most memorable years for many Bulldog partisans. There was such

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PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED/Anna Gay Leavitt



Professor of Music Dr. David Johnson composed an original processional march for the GCSU commencement ceremonies this spring.



GCSU President Cathy Cox poses for a post-commencement selfie with a graduate.

More than 1,400 students become the newest alumni of Georgia College & State University

Amanda Respass
Georgia College Communications

More than 1,400 students participated in Georgia College & State University's commencement ceremonies May 13-14. GCSU hosted four ceremonies — one for each of the university's academic colleges — to confer undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees on the class of 2026.

A unique addition to this year's ceremonies was an original processional march composed by Dr. David Johnson, professor of music at GCSU. Johnson's original compositions have been performed by numerous orchestras, including the Macon Symphony Orchestra.

The class of 2026 includes 23 valedictorians — undergraduates who earned a perfect 4.0 grade point average upon graduation. GCSU President Cathy Cox enumerated the outstanding accomplishments of the graduating class, including extensive community volunteer hours logged by the graduating seniors and a range of transformative experiences such as undergraduate research, study abroad and internships.

College of Health Sciences

Some 300 students were graduates of the College of Health Sciences, including those earning Bachelor of Science degrees in nursing, exercise science and public health. Additional degrees were conferred for Master of Science, Master of Arts and Doctor of Nursing Practice candidates. The College of Health Sciences keynote speaker was Dr. Keisha Reneé Callins, an OB/Gyn who serves as faculty in the Mercer University School of Medicine, and is a member of the College of Health Sciences Leadership Board. The ceremony student speaker was exercise science major Alexis Walker from Jefferson.

College of Education

The John H. Lounsbury College of Education recognized another 300 students on the evening of May 13, earning their Bachelor of Science, Master of Education, Master of Arts in Teaching and Specialist degrees, in addition to one Doctor of Education candidate. The College of Education keynote speaker was 2025 Georgia Teacher of the Year and GCSU alumna Holly Witcher '01. The student speaker was KeShawn Hurst of Dublin, Georgia, who earned his master's in Curriculum and Instruction.

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GCSU

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College of Business & Technology

The third commencement ceremony took place Thursday morning, May 14, for the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business & Technology and featured keynote speaker and GCSU alumnus

Dilanka Seimon, chief commercial officer at BKV Corporation. Seimon serves on the Georgia College & State University Foundation board. The student speaker was Lauren Decker, an Economics major from Suwannee, Georgia.

Degrees awarded to approximately 400 students by the College of Business & Technology included numerous master's programs, such as GCSU's award-winning MBA, and one of the

university's most popular undergraduate degrees, a Bachelor of Science in Finance.

College of Arts & Sciences

The fourth and final ceremony was for the College of Arts & Sciences, which recognized more than 400 students across the sciences, humanities, arts and communications. The keynote speaker was Dr. Laurie Peebles,

associate professor of Music Therapy, who is also an accomplished flutist. The student speaker for the ceremony was Serena Semere of Canton, outgoing president of the GCSU Student Government Association. The College of Arts & Sciences ceremony included the conferral of numerous master's degrees, including the MFA in Creative Writing and popular Master of Science in Criminal Justice, in addition to several hundred bachelor's degrees.