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Learn the ins and outs of fall commencement

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Examining the pros of a December graduation

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Parade of Lights

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Thursday, December 11, 2025



Scenes from University of Georgia 2024 fall graduation at the fall Undergraduate Commencement ceremony at Stegeman Coliseum in Athens, Georgia, on Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

“WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS AFTER GRADUATION?”

It's the question everyone's asking you and now, you may win a prize with your answer!



Complete the Career Outcomes Survey and tell us all about the job, graduate program or internship you have lined up after graduation.





Scenes from the University of Georgia fall 2024 undergraduate commencement ceremony at Stegeman Coliseum in Athens, Georgia, on Friday, Dec. 13, 2024. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN



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Countdown to commencement

What to know for fall graduation

Clary Watson

The University of Georgia will honor thousands of graduating students during its fall 2025 commencement ceremonies on Friday, Dec. 12 at Stegeman Coliseum, marking the end of the semester and the beginning of new chapters for undergraduate and graduate students alike.

The Red & Black has compiled information on location, parking, times and more.

The undergraduate ceremony will begin at 10 a.m., with doors opening at 8 a.m. Graduate students will be recognized during a 2:30 p.m. ceremony, with doors opening at 1:30 p.m. Both events will be livestreamed on UGA's commencement website for families and friends unable to attend in person.

Tickets and entry requirements

Everyone attending the undergraduate ceremony — graduates and guests — will need a ticket. They were sent electronically on Nov. 19, and graduates are advised to pass them along to their guests before the big day. The graduate ceremony is open to all and doesn't require tickets.

All attendees must follow UGA's clear bag policy, which limits bag size and requires most items to be in transparent containers. Prohibited items include backpacks, alcohol, tobacco products, balloons, megaphones and wrapped gifts. Security personnel may inspect all items, and Stegeman Coliseum's weapons detection system will be used for both ceremonies.

Speakers and ceremony details

UGA alumnus and former Coca-Cola CEO Douglas Ivester will deliver the undergraduate commencement address.

Ivester, a 1969 accounting graduate, led The Coca-Cola Company from 1997 to 2000 and has remained connected to the university through philanthropy, mentorship programs and scholarship support. He will receive an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, one of UGA's highest recognitions, during the ceremony.

Undergraduate student speaker Reid McAdams, a Morehead Honors College student earning a business administration degree in finance, will also address graduates.

Ron Walcott, vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School, will speak at the graduate ceremony. Walcott, a professor of plant pathology, is recognized internationally for his research and mentorship and has secured more than \$5 million in external research funding.

Undergraduate students will sit with their schools and colleges on the coliseum floor, though there will be no processional. Graduates must arrive by 9:15 a.m. and remain in their seats throughout the ceremony. Unlike in the spring ceremony, undergraduates will not cross the stage individually.

Graduate students will assemble in the Stegeman Coliseum Training Facility and will cross the stage, with doctoral candidates hooded by their major professors.

Honors and programs

Undergraduates earning Latin honors will be recognized during the ceremony. Those distinctions — cum laude, magna cum laude and summa cum laude — are determined based on GPA ranges from 3.60 to 4.00. First Honor Graduates, who maintain a perfect 4.0 GPA across all coursework, will receive a fourragère and braided cord as

part of their regalia.

Digital programs for both ceremonies will be available online, with printed copies available by request through Jan. 9, 2026. Names appear in the program only for graduates who met the application deadlines and do not have active FERPA restrictions.

Assembly, accessibility and safety

Graduates are encouraged to plan ahead for parking, which is free but first-come, first-serve. Recommended lots include the South Campus Deck, Carlton Street Deck and Foley Field Lot. Disability parking is available in the Hoke Smith Annex Lot, with wheelchair-accessible entrances along Sanford Drive and Carlton Street. UGA does not provide on-site wheelchairs and guests who need mobility assistance are urged to bring their own equipment.

Inside the venue, disability seating is limited to designated spaces along the top row of the lower level and allows one companion per guest using a wheelchair. UGA will provide on-site first aid and ambulance services, with staff stationed behind Section L. Lost and found items will be managed by the University of Georgia Police Department.

Livestream and keepsakes

For anyone watching from home, both ceremonies will be livestreamed on the commencement home page starting five minutes before they begin. Graduates can also shop for diploma frames, apparel and other merchandise through the UGA Bookstore, Jostens and Balfour.

Afterward, graduate students can download their personalized slides and undergraduates will get a summary program at the ceremony. A full digital program will also be posted online.



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UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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[CAREER.UGA.EDU/CALENDAR/CAREER_FAIRS](https://career.uga.edu/calendar/career_fairs)





Kennedy Fulton, a senior advertising major at the University of Georgia, poses for a portrait in front of the Arch in Athens, Georgia, on Monday, Dec. 1, 2025. PHOTO/CAROLINE NEWBERN

UGA to NYC

Top dawg Kennedy Fulton turns the tassel

Caroline Newbern

After graduating high school, the game plan was simple: move up north to New York City. However, Kennedy Fulton, a senior advertising major, stayed in her home state four years longer than anticipated.

“I am the type of person [who doesn’t] believe that you should stay in the same spot for too long,” Fulton said. “I feel like you should always move and continue growing.”

Hailing from Savannah, Georgia, the University of Georgia was the only in-state school Fulton applied to and, given the costs of out-of-state tuition, “the best financial decision” she’s made. Affordability aside, she credits the university with giving her good friends and memories, namely, the back-to-back football national championship in 2022 during her freshman year. But her favorite part of her time at UGA?

“Definitely the late nights,” Fulton recalled.

And with her involvement on and off-campus, there have been too many to count.

Media meets community service

Fulton’s freshman year was defined by her start as a writer for InfUSion Magazine — “UGA’s first and only multicultural publication” — and volunteer work with Food2Kids, serving local families facing food insecurity.

She knew of impoverished food deserts in Savannah, areas without grocery stores that were reliant on mini marts or gas stations for sustenance. Considering food “the basis of life,” Fulton was unsettled by this deprivation.

Worlds collided when her passions for writing and advocacy culminated into a piece titled “Unsung Heroes,” her first story for InfUSion about service workers at UGA.

All the while, Fulton changed course from a journalism to advertising major, and would go on to pursue certificates in new media and urban and metropolitan studies.

“For me, it’s the balance of professionalism and creativity,” Fulton said.

With that balanced mindset during her sophomore year, she climbed the ranks at InfUSion, taking on the position of news director, becoming an initiate of Alpha Lambda Delta Honor Society and volunteering with Campus Kitchen.

Rise to the top

Though she achieved a lot as an underclassman, Fulton

aimed higher for her last two years. Guided by friends on the InfUSion executive board, she was encouraged to increase her involvement.

Her junior year, she became InfUSion’s event coordinator all while being a sister of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Incorporated, contributing to Talking Dog Agency and serving as a shift leader for Campus Kitchen at UGA.

Building on these experiences, her senior year has been equally ambitious. She now serves as a digital content coordinator at Troy Social, sits on the student council for TEDxUGA and is the current president and editor in chief of InfUSion.

As president, Fulton described her responsibilities as encompassing “everything” — from fine-tuning editions and social media posts to overseeing the newsletter, maintaining upkeep of their WordPress website and creating the theme for each issue.

The fall issue’s theme was defiance, inspired not only by the current political climate, but her lifelong allegiance to authenticity.

“Defiance is being true to yourself. Oftentimes, I feel like that does go against the normal expectations of society.”

KENNEDY FULTON | UGA SENIOR

Beyond the Arch

Though she won’t be leaving Athens until May, Fulton’s time at UGA comes to a close this December.

“[Graduating] UGA is like, it feels like a homegoing,” she said.

Though attending the university wasn’t part of the plan, it’s provided fertile land to sow the seeds of her future. Fulton referenced Kamala Harris’ viral coconut tree speech to convey the importance of cultivating culture.

“Culture is like a coconut tree; where you came from, where your family has come from ...to what you’re do-

ing now,” Fulton said, laughing. “But she was cooking right there.”

Now, on top of finishing coursework, Fulton is getting her ducks in a row as she prepares for her next chapter in New York with applications for jobs and fellowships.

The hustle and bustle, rich personalities and history of the city call to her. She foresees a career as a cultural marketer, a cross section of her passions for advocacy, multiculturalism, inclusion and living life.

“Right now, I’m surviving until graduation, but I hope to live the rest of my life,” Fulton said.



Kennedy Fulton, a senior advertising major at the University of Georgia, poses for a portrait in front of the Arch in Athens, Georgia, on Monday, Dec. 1, 2025. PHOTO/CAROLINE NEWBERN



Douglas Ivester will deliver the undergraduate address at the upcoming fall commencement. PHOTO COURTESY/UGA MEDIA



Ron Walcott will deliver the graduate address at the upcoming fall commencement. PHOTO COURTESY/UGA MEDIA

Meet the speakers

Former Coca-Cola CEO, honors student and graduate school dean to give addresses

Sophia Eppley

Douglas Ivester

Douglas Ivester, former chairman and CEO of Coca-Cola, will give the fall undergraduate commencement address at the University of Georgia on Friday, Dec. 12 in Stegeman Coliseum. The ceremony will begin at 10 a.m.

Ivester joined Coca-Cola in 1979, 10 years after graduating from UGA with a degree in accounting. Before officially joining the company, he served as their outside accountant for over a decade. In 1981, he became the youngest vice president in the company’s history just two years after joining. Two years after that, he was named senior vice president of finance, and became the chief financial officer in 1985 at 37 years old. He was elected chairman of the board and CEO in 1997. He retired from the company in 2000.

Ivester is an emeritus trustee of the University of Georgia Foundation, a trustee of Brenau University and a director of the Melvin Douglas & Victoria Kay Ivester Foundation. Ivester and his wife, Kay Ivester, are longtime supporters of UGA and the Terry College of Business. In 2019, Ivester Hall at UGA’s Business Learning Community was dedicated in his honor. He also helped to fund and create the M. Douglas & V. Kay Ivester Institute for Business Analytics and Insights at Terry College in 2024.

The Ivesters also created the Deer Run Global Fellows program, which provides scholarships for Terry College students to complete international studies. This stemmed from their curiosity to establish Georgia Commitment Scholarships to support students from Hall County. For 14 years, the Ivesters invited students each fall and spring to be a part of the Deer Run Fellows Program, which featured a weekend of learning and team building at the Ivester

family properties in southwest Georgia. After that program ended, they endowed the Deer Run Global Fellows program. Douglas Ivester currently presides over Deer Run Investments LLC.

Ivester will be presented with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters at the undergraduate ceremony for his contributions to the university. The honorary degree is UGA’s highest recognition short of an earned doctorate and honors those whose achievements have had a lasting impact on the university.

Reid McAdams

Reid McAdams, a Morehead Honors College student who is earning a Bachelor of Business Administration in finance, will give the student address at the undergraduate ceremony. During his time at UGA, he studied international business in Cortona, Italy, and interned with Goldman Sachs as an investment banking analyst.

Ron Walcott

Ron Walcott, UGA’s inaugural vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School, will deliver the address at the graduate ceremony. The ceremony will be held at Stegeman Coliseum on Dec. 12 and will begin at 2:30 p.m.

Walcott earned his Ph.D. in plant pathology from UGA and his bachelor’s and master’s degrees, also in plant pathology, from Iowa State University. As a professor of plant pathology in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, his research focuses on pathogens that affect commercially important vegetables and has been funded by over \$5 million in external grants from government agencies and industry partners.

Walcott has collected nearly \$1 million in grant funding to enhance educational experiences for high school and undergraduate students through career awareness programs. He has mentored or served as an advisory committee member for more than 40 master’s and Ph.D. students, undergraduate students and a number of high school students through the CAES Young Scholars Internship Program.

Opinion

OPINION: Insights from a fall grad

Why graduation in
December can be
better than May

Owen McDaniel

For all the excitement around graduation at Sanford Stadium in May, the best time to finish college is not in the spring — it's December.

If you're willing to look past the allure of a May graduation, you'll see that the advantages to graduating in December far outweigh those of a May graduation. The main benefit to December graduation is the favorable position it puts you in for your job search. Because the vast majority of students graduate in May, December graduates generally compete against a much smaller pool of applicants for roughly the same number of job openings.

Most companies — with the exception of those that operate on a strict calendar like schools — hire on a rolling basis, so they need new employees in January as much as they need them in May or June. The hiring process will also typically go by more quickly because they have fewer applications to sift through. This makes the December window more attractive to graduates looking for a job.

On top of that, if you are hired for a job in the first few months of the new year, that gives you a head start over the swaths of May graduates that will be applying for similar jobs to yours. You'll have more time to settle into your career, and you can use that extra couple of months to advance further in your field, potentially getting closer to a promotion.

If you choose not to seek out a job right after graduation or if you're unable to find one, a December graduation gives you a few months of buffer to figure out your next steps before the May graduates begin applying. You can use those months to travel, complete an internship, start a graduate program or work on personal projects.

Additionally, if you are graduating a semester early in December, you can avoid paying for more academic expenses. Tuition fees on their own are expensive, and when you factor in the other costs like meal plans and parking passes,



GRAPHIC/RYLEE TOOLE

you can save yourself a lot of money by finishing college a few months early.

While that usually requires you to cram more classes into your final fall semester, I've found in my own experience that it's worth it. I took a full slate of classes, including two capstone courses, on top of my job, working out and other commitments this semester. At times it could feel overwhelming, but knowing that I was completely done in December was the ultimate motivator all semester long. It also taught me important lessons about work-life balance and forced me to diligently manage my time. I feel even more prepared to enter the workforce knowing that I can manage that workload.

Finally, the intimacy that a December graduation offers is easily overlooked, but it is a distinct benefit that a May graduation does not provide. The all-school commencement is in a much smaller setting, so families are able to get closer seating and better parking. With May graduation in Sanford Stadium, families are often sitting so far away from the graduates on the field that they can't easily locate the student they're there for, making it far less of an emotional moment.

The individual college convocations are also more intimate because of the smaller pool of graduates. Most students want their graduation to feel special, and the fewer graduates that are in your class, the more the spotlight shines on you.

Yes, May graduations come with bigger crowds, flashier ceremonies and Sanford Stadium fireworks. But when you weigh the less chaotic job market, the flexibility of the first few months of the new year and the less-crowded graduation ceremonies, walking across the stage in December simply works better for many students. It may not be the traditional path, but it's often the one that makes more sense.

Senior voices

Fall graduates reflect on their time at UGA

Elijah King

With the end of the semester fast approaching and everybody cramming for finals, University of Georgia fall graduates are preparing for the next chapter of their lives. For many, that step forward means taking on the challenges of the world outside of academia and taking their first steps into the professional world. For others, this may mean taking a few years off to find themselves.

The Red & Black spoke with some of this year's fall graduates whose years at UGA were shaped not only by coursework but by friendships, mentors, student organizations and personal challenges.



PHOTO COURTESY/SCOTT KUHN

Rylie Abernathy

COMMUNICATION STUDIES MAJOR

"I think my favorite class I've had at UGA was probably this class I just finished right now. It was called 'Communication Strategies in the Courtroom,' and I got to really learn about different strategies for communicating legally, as well as having a fun mock trial assignment," Abernathy said.



PHOTO COURTESY/LEAH BANKO

Emma Krdzalic

**POLITICAL SCIENCE, INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
AND RUSSIAN MAJOR**

"As a first [generation] student, it really means a lot. I'm the first in my family to go to UGA and to have majored in international affairs and things like that, and to do something a little different. And I think for my parents, I think they're just happy because I worked so hard to be able to get to where I am." Krdzalic said.



PHOTO COURTESY/ABI-ANANIAH PRUDENT

Lydia Prudent

POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR

"Really, those spontaneous late night conversations with friends — I know everyone has those — but those moments are the sweetest to look back on because you're just really getting to know someone and really getting to understand how their brain works. It's just a great experience to look back on," Prudent said.



PHOTO COURTESY/MADIE BECKUM

Anna Girzone

POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJOR

"I had a really great roommate freshman year," Girzone said. "One of my favorite memories with her was the 2022 National Championship — that was also her birthday — and it was the first day back from break. And so, we celebrated her birthday and celebrated the National Championship. And, that night was just one fun night of many, but emblematic of some really great times."

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Cuenta regresiva para la graduación

Lo que debes saber para la ceremonia de otoño

Clary Watson, Traducción: Nathan Valles

La Universidad de Georgia celebrará a miles de estudiantes graduandos durante sus ceremonias de graduación de otoño de 2025 el viernes 12 de diciembre en el Coliseo Stegeman, marcando el fin del semestre y el comienzo de nuevos capítulos tanto para estudiantes de grado como de posgrado.

The Red & Black ha reunido información sobre ubicación, estacionamiento, horarios y más.

La ceremonia de estudiantes de grado comenzará a las 10 a.m., con apertura de puertas a las 8 a.m. Los estudiantes de posgrado serán reconocidos durante una ceremonia a las 2:30 p.m., con apertura de puertas a la 1:30 p.m. Ambos eventos se transmitirán en vivo en el sitio web de graduación de UGA para familiares y amigos que no puedan asistir en persona.

Boletos y requisitos de entrada

Todos los asistentes a la ceremonia de estudiantes de grado —tanto graduandos como invitados— necesitarán un boleto. Estos fueron enviados electrónicamente el 19 de noviembre, y se aconseja a los graduandos compartirlos con sus invitados antes del gran día. La ceremonia de posgrado está abierta al público y no requiere boletos.

Todos los asistentes deben cumplir con la política de bolsas transparentes de UGA, que limita el tamaño de los bolsos y exige que la mayoría de los artículos estén en contenedores transparentes. Los artículos prohibidos incluyen mochilas, alcohol, productos de tabaco, globos, megáfonos y regalos envueltos. El personal de seguridad podrá inspeccionar todos los objetos, y el sistema de detección de armas del Coliseo Stegeman se utilizará en ambas ceremonias.

Oradores y detalles de la ceremonia

El exalumno de UGA y exdirector ejecutivo de Coca-Cola, Douglas Ivester, ofrecerá el discurso de graduación para estudiantes de grado. Ivester, graduado en contabilidad en 1969, dirigió Coca-Cola de 1997 a 2000 y ha mantenido fuertes vínculos con la universidad mediante filantropía, programas de mentoría y becas. Durante la ceremonia, recibirá un Doctorado Honorario en Humanidades, uno de los máximos reconocimientos de UGA.

Reid McAdams, estudiante de Morehead Honors College que obtiene un título en administración de empresas con concentración en finanzas, también dirigirá un mensaje a los graduandos.

Ron Walcott, vicerrector de educación de posgrado y decano de la Escuela de Posgrado, hablará en la ceremonia de posgrado. Walcott, profesor de fitopatología, es reconocido internacionalmente por su investigación y mentoría, y ha obtenido más de 5 millones de dólares en financiamiento externo para investigación.

Los estudiantes de grado se sentarán con sus escuelas y facultades en el piso del coliseo, aunque no habrá procesión



Escenas de la graduación de otoño de 2024 de la Universidad de Georgia durante la ceremonia de graduación de pregrado en el Stegeman Coliseum en Athens, Georgia, el viernes 13 de diciembre de 2024. FOTO/LANEY MARTIN

formal. Los graduandos deben llegar antes de las 9:15 a.m. y permanecer en sus asientos durante toda la ceremonia. A diferencia de la ceremonia de primavera, los estudiantes de grado no cruzarán el escenario individualmente.

Los estudiantes de posgrado se reunirán en el Stegeman Coliseum Training Facility y si cruzarán el escenario, con los candidatos a doctorado siendo investidos por sus profesores principales.

Honores y programas

Los estudiantes de grado que obtengan honores latinos serán reconocidos durante la ceremonia. Estas distinciones —cum laude, magna cum laude y summa cum laude— se determinan según rangos de GPA del 3.60 al 4.00. Los First Honor Graduates, quienes mantienen un GPA perfecto de 4.0 en todo su trabajo académico, recibirán un fourragère y un cordón trenzado como parte de su vestimenta.

Los programas digitales para ambas ceremonias estarán disponibles en línea, y copias impresas podrán solicitarse hasta el 9 de enero de 2026. Los nombres aparecen en el programa únicamente para los estudiantes que cumplieron con las fechas límite de solicitud y no tienen restricciones activas de FERPA.

Ensamblaje, accesibilidad y seguridad

Se recomienda a los graduandos planificar con anticipación para el estacionamiento, que será gratuito pero por orden de llegada. Los estacionamientos recomendados incluyen South Campus Deck, Carlton Street Deck y Foley Field Lot. El estacionamiento para personas con discapacidades está disponible en el Hoke Smith Annex Lot, con entradas accesibles para sillas de ruedas en Sanford Drive y Carlton Street. UGA no proporciona sillas de ruedas en el lugar, por lo que se insta a los invitados que necesiten asistencia de movilidad a traer su propio equipo.

Dentro del recinto, los asientos accesibles están limitados a espacios designados en la fila superior del nivel inferior y permiten un acompañante por invitado que use



Escenas de la graduación de otoño de 2024 de la Universidad de Georgia durante la ceremonia de graduación de pregrado en el Stegeman Coliseum en Athens, Georgia, el viernes 13 de diciembre de 2024. FOTO/LANEY MARTIN

silla de ruedas. UGA proporcionará servicios de primeros auxilios y ambulancia, con personal ubicado detrás de la Sección L. Los artículos perdidos serán gestionados por el Departamento de Policía de la Universidad de Georgia.

Transmisión y recuerdos

Para quienes vean desde casa, ambas ceremonias se transmitirán en vivo en la página principal de graduación, comenzando cinco minutos antes del inicio. Los graduandos también podrán comprar marcos para diplomas, ropa y otros artículos a través de la Librería de UGA, Jostens y Balfour.

Después de la ceremonia, los estudiantes de posgrado podrán descargar sus diapositivas personalizadas, y los estudiantes de grado recibirán un programa resumido durante el evento. Un programa digital completo también se publicará en línea.

REBECCA SCHILINGER

Congratulations



We are incredibly proud of our, daughter, Rebecca earning her degree in Journalism and a minor in American Sign Language from the University of Georgia. She strives to excel expectations, earns scholarships to pay for college, juggles life's challenges with grace and continually proves herself to be a compassionate, determined and truly exceptional young woman, every single day.

We love you, Becca!

Thursday Crossword - Answer Online FRIDAY Dec. 12

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ACROSS

- Pantry container
- "By yesterday!"
- Kind of sax
- "I see!"
- Partake at a feast
- Combine, as resources
- Anti-prohibitionist
- Intensified
- Common sense?
- Wine adjective
- Takes one's pick
- More than just ache
- Pencil filler
- Capital of France?
- Flock member
- Desktop pictures
- Highland boy
- Non-alkali
- Ferociously
- Journalists, collectively
- Proof goof
- Club appearance
- Hunt illegally
- Praiseworthy
- Pride partner

- Debatable, as a point
- Grandstand section
- Matterhorn, for one
- Chapel fixtures
- Many millennia
- Abbr. on a road map

DOWN

- Benchley classic
- "Could I interrupt?"
- Figure of interest?
- Long Island university
- Bro's sibling, maybe
- Mandela's org.
- Child's ammo
- Certain helicopter
- Filming locale
- It tests the water
- Worn out
- Court call
- Take a bough?
- Little spasms
- Brown ermine
- Referee's guideline
- Administered with a spoon, say

- Soul mate
- Dieter's measure
- Heat, at times
- In the center of
- A deadly sin
- Military trench diggers
- You can count on them
- Baby syllable
- Make known
- Golden ____ Bridge
- A bit cracked
- Revolver innovator
- Hoopla
- Band aid
- Forest female
- Do some yard work
- Life story, in brief
- Novelist Deighton

A toast to grads

Where to celebrate your graduation dinner in Athens

Sidney Josephs

Celebrations come in many forms — parties, family gatherings, a hug from a friend — but food is often the centerpiece. A meal can bring people together, spark conversations and mark milestones in a memorable way. With fall graduation around the corner, choosing the right place to celebrate should go beyond what’s on the plate.

Athens is known for its diverse culinary scene, so picking a graduation dinner spot can feel overwhelming. Whether you want something relaxed or an intimate dining experience, the Classic City offers restaurants for any scenario.

Five & Ten

For graduates looking for a special occasion meal, Five & Ten offers an elevated dining experience that is sure to please. The restaurant, located in a historic home, has been serving seasonal new American dishes to the community for the past 25 years.

Five & Ten owner Peter Dale said that, since the restaurant is on the pricier side, he mostly sees students when they come in with their parents.

“We love celebrating the achievements of students, being right on Milledge and Five Points ... the university is like our neighbor,” Dale said. “I think it just feels special, because it’s probably a place that students don’t go to all the time.”

Beyond the celebratory feel of the space, Dale said the frequently changing menu makes the experience even more memorable.

“I would probably recommend a graduate to splurge. It’s a great time to treat yourself because you’ve just achieved something really significant.”

PETER DALE | OWNER OF FIVE & TEN

“Even if people have come several times while they’ve been in school, they’re going to have something new and different,” Dale said.

If Dale were celebrating his own graduation, he said he’d



Ryan and Shae Sims pose for a portrait at ZZ & Simone's in Athens, Georgia, on Wednesday, Oct. 8, 2025. PHOTO/HOSANNA WORKU

start with oysters and champagne before choosing the night’s fish special or a steak, ending the meal with one of the restaurant’s desserts.

“I would probably recommend a graduate to splurge,” Dale said. “It’s a great time to treat yourself because you’ve just achieved something really significant.”

Dale said the “coolest thing” about his job is witnessing so many celebratory moments. He loves hearing stories of people who have had memorable experiences at Five & Ten.

“Generally you’re not coming to celebrate something bad happening,” Dale said “People are coming for some good reasons, and if they’re in a bad mood, hopefully we can turn it around for them.”

Bar Bruno

For graduates who want a celebration without a reservation, Bar Bruno offers a lively atmosphere. The Italian-style wine bar is known for its small plates, extensive wine menu and scenery that feels like you took a flight to Italy.

“The patio is really nice,” co-owner Ryan Sims said. “It kind of feels like you’re in Europe. It’s pretty transportive, which is fun.”

Sims said a graduation dinner at Bar Bruno should begin with the house cocktail list and a unique wine chosen by the bartender, since the selection changes consistently. He’d build his meal out of communal small plates like the meatballs, arancini and steamed artichoke.

“Part of what [Bar Bruno is] built for is to be able to talk about wine and pick out a really fun, unique bottle,” Sims said.

While Bar Bruno may not be a typical first pick for a graduation dinner, the informal, fast-paced setting has its perks.

“Bar Bruno is so much more casual, and it’s only walk-ins, it’s a place that isn’t going to be completely booked up,” Sims said. “It’s actually really good for celebrations, because you can kind of come and go [and order] lots of different small plates.”

ZZ & Simone's

Italian food is a classic for celebrations, and ZZ & Simone’s brings both the cuisine and atmosphere to the table. Sims, who also owns ZZ & Simone’s, said the restaurant was built with these moments in mind.

“Graduation is one of those once in a lifetime milestones. I think that ZZ’s is a great fit, because we specialize in celebratory dinners,” Sims said. “We’re very crowd please-y so your foodie dad, your kind of kooky uncle from out of town and your picky grandmother are all going to feel very at home at our place.”

Sims plans on having a specialized cocktail menu as well as “premium cuts of steak” to help graduates celebrate.

“This dinner is about the person graduating, so it kind of takes a lot of pressure off, because we’re going to handle all the details,” Sims said.

Sims said it has been meaningful to have people actively seeking out ZZ & Simone’s for their celebratory moments.

“It’s probably the biggest compliment I can get in my career, I don’t take it for granted even a little bit,” Sims said. “They get one chance at a graduation dinner ... and for them to trust us to deliver is a big, big compliment.”

A shared meal is always a great way to toast to your achievements. Whether you’re looking for a fast, casual bite, a glass of champagne or a full fine-dining experience, Athens is sure to deliver.



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Highlights from 2025 Downtown Parade of Lights



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