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Graduates celebrate during the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith Spring 2025 commencement at the Stubblefield Center. The university will hold its Fall 2025 ceremonies on Dec. 13. COURTESY OF UA-FORT SMITH

Universities to honor more than 1,400 graduates

George "Clay" Mitchell
Fort Smith Southwest Times Record
USA TODAY NETWORK

Three Arkansas universities will celebrate the achievements of more than 1,400 graduates on Saturday, Dec. 13, as the University of Arkansas–Fort Smith, Arkansas Tech University, and the University of Arkansas–Fayetteville each host fall commencement ceremonies.

UAFS to confer more than 350 degrees

The University of Arkansas–Fort Smith will award degrees and certificates to more than 350 students during two ceremonies at the Stubblefield Center.

- **10 a.m. ceremony:** College of Business and Industry; College of Health, Education, and Human Sciences
- **1 p.m. ceremony:** College of Arts and Sciences

This year's graduating class includes students ranging from 18 to 72, and marks the first cohort of the relaunched Associate of Applied Science in Nursing program.

Degrees to be conferred include seven master's degrees, 287 bachelor's degrees, 54 associate degrees, and nine certificates. Both ceremonies will be livestreamed on the UAFS YouTube channel.

Two members of the UA Board of Trustees will serve as keynote speakers. Col. Nathaniel "Nate" Todd, a retired U.S. Army officer and former secretary of the Arkansas Department of Veterans Affairs, will speak at 10 a.m. Kelly Eichler, chair of the UA Board of Trustees and a longtime public servant and attorney, will address the 1 p.m. ceremony.

UAFS also will launch a new regalia drive, with Lion Leadership students collecting donated caps and gowns to

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Abrego Garcia released from facility

Michael Collins and Natalie Neysa Alund
USA TODAY

In a whiplash series of events, federal judge on Dec. 12 blocked an effort to have Kilmar Abrego Garcia returned to custody a day after his release from Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention.

On Dec. 11, District Judge Paula Xinis ordered the immediate release of Abrego Garcia, the Salvadoran migrant at the center of a case that has spotlighted President Donald Trump's hard-line immigration policies.

Xinis said the Trump administration had no legal basis to expel him from the country and misled her at a November hearing.

Abrego Garcia left the detention facility in Pennsylvania at 4:45 p.m. ET Dec. 11, said his attorney, Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg. He was en route to his family in Maryland.

However, an immigration judge then filed a new order saying Abrego Garcia must report back to ICE custody by 8 a.m. Dec. 12.

Abrego Garcia's lawyers asked the judge to issue a temporary restraining order to block the new detention order. Xinis did so, preventing immigration authorities from re-detaining Abrego Garcia.

It was the latest turn in a labyrinthine series of events for Abrego Garcia, a sheet metal worker who entered the United States illegally in 2012. He was living with his wife and three children in Beltsville, Maryland, when he was detained by ICE agents on March 15.

Abrego Garcia was deported even though an earlier order prevented him from being returned to his home country. In El Salvador, he was held in a notoriously violent prison, where he said he endured severe beatings and psychological torture.

The Justice Department blamed his deportation on an administrative error but insisted he was a member of the MS-13 gang, which he has denied.

In her Dec. 11 order, Xinis said it is "troubling" that the Justice Department continued to hold Abrego Garcia in custody for months on the grounds that it was going to expel him to another country – without taking any steps to actually remove him from the United States.

Sandoval-Moshenberg celebrated the release order, saying, "We remain hopeful that this marks a turning point for Mr. Abrego Garcia, who has

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