

# First doctoral candidates to graduate at SMWC

Four will participate in ceremony; five others in final program stages

By SUE LOUGHLIN  
TRIBUNE-STAR

Kourtney Barrett is among many Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods College students who will be celebrating commencement Saturday.

For Barrett, her pursuit of a graduate degree has taken her to Greece twice and she's participated in a Galapagos Islands virtual learning experience.

Barrett is among the first group of global leadership doctoral students – the college's first PhD program – to participate in commencement. She successfully defended her dissertation Thursday and will receive her doctor of philosophy degree.



**BARRETT**

"It was something that I had told myself I wanted to achieve and when the opportunity presented itself, for me it was kismet," or destiny, she said.

As a result of her experience in the doctoral program, "I've grown a deeper appreciation for global perspectives, but also a deeper appreciation of who I am, where I come from and my own identity," said Barrett, who with her husband operates a farm in Martinsville, Illinois.

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# SMWC

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She also works as a leadership program specialist at the Woods and is an adjunct faculty member in the division of business and leadership.

Her studies and research have "challenged my way of thinking, challenged my way of knowing, made me want to reassess my own values and beliefs at times," Barrett said.

Four doctoral candidates/graduates are participating in Saturday's 3 p.m. ceremony, while another five are in the final stages of the program.

The college began the doctor of philosophy program four years ago.

"Global leadership is everywhere," said Kimberly LaComba, PhD, director of the Global Leadership program.



LACOMBA

In the digital age, "The connection opportunity globally is significant and individuals will work with people from different cultures and backgrounds no matter what industry they are in," LaComba said.

As the first candidates/graduates prepare to cross the stage, "It's hard to find the words to express how incredibly proud and grateful I am of the students for their trust in taking the leap to go into a new to SMWC program, our first PhD program," LaComba said.

The Woods founder, Saint



Submitted photo

Karen Dyer, who will receive her PhD in global leadership Saturday, is shown in 2022 at the La Plaza de la Independencia, or the Grand Plaza, touring the historic Old Town in Ecuador's capital city of Quito. She was part of a delegation from SMWC to create a partnership with Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

Mother Theodore Guerin, was from France. "We have global roots," LaComba said. "Even our foundress back in 1840 was a global leader."

## ASPIRING GLOBAL LEADERS

But it's not just Barrett close to achieving this life milestone. She praised her peers who are in the final stages of the program.

Within the group are entrepreneurs, educators, non-profit professionals, a politician, and an analyst.

"Since August 2021, we completed 18 courses, traveled to Greece and India, engaged in a debate with a faculty member whether grades matter (they do)," and together they wrote a proposal for a sister city relationship between the city of Terre Haute and city of Zviahel, Ukraine, Barrett said.

Students must complete

three cultural immersions, at least one outside their own country, and they must have two publications that are peer reviewed.

"Together, we have endured health challenges, mourned the loss of family, celebrated marriage, welcomed new life, and weathered natural disasters," Barrett said. "With whatever came before us, we were there for each other, providing support, encouragement, or cheering them on."

Barrett has come a long way since high school in Clay County, when she didn't see the value of education and prioritized social activities and clubs over academics.

"My experiences in college completely reshaped how I value education," Barrett said. "I hope I can continue to use this degree from a global perspective, but also continue to give back to higher education."



Submitted photo

Kourtney Barrett, who will receive her PhD in global leadership Saturday at Saint Mary-of-the-Wood College, visited the Parthenon in Greece in 2022.

Post high school, "Higher education has been my life. I can't imagine not being in higher education," she said.

She intends to continue working at the Woods, including with the international population there.

## FIRST SMWC PhD

Karen Dyer, the college's former vice president for advancement and strategic initiatives, was the first student to complete all program requirements, including her dissertation. She will join Barrett in receiving a PhD Saturday.

Dyer is now executive

director of the Terre Haute Convention and Visitors Bureau (THCVB).

"I think there was something inside me that always wanted to prove that I could do a program such as this – a doctorate," she said.

She already had her master's in educational leadership.

Now that she's achieved her goal, "It is an amazing feeling to have that completed and to know you could do it," she said. But she's also happy to have it behind her and to move on to the next chapter of her life.

She had the opportunity



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Kourtney Barrett, who will receive her PhD in global leadership Saturday at Saint Mary-of-the-Wood College, stands at the Temple of Poseidon in Greece in 2022.

to travel to Ecuador and her study dealt with comparing tourism leaders in the U.S. with Ecuadorian tourism leaders.

"It opened new ways of thinking," particularly with her new role at THCVB, Dyer said. "Terre Haute tourism isn't just about Terre Haute. It's about all the people who might come to Terre Haute."

Having four colleges in the community helps draw a diverse group to the community, Dyer said.

Saturday's commencement at the college will be celebrated with two ceremonies, one for the campus program at 10 a.m. and another for Woods Online and graduate programs at 3 p.m. A total of 367 students will graduate.

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