



NEW JERSEY

# Association of State Colleges and Universities

150 West State Street, Trenton NJ 08608

Phone (609) 989-1100

**QuickTakes!**

## **Kean University Graduate College Commencement: Broadway's Leslie Odom Jr. to Deliver Address**

May 1, 2018

Tony Award-winner and author Leslie Odom, Jr., will be the featured speaker at the Kean University Nathan Weiss Graduate College Commencement at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, May 15 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) in Newark.

In 2016, Mr. Odom won the Tony for Best Leading Actor in a Musical and a Grammy Award for his portrayal of Aaron Burr in the Broadway blockbuster musical *Hamilton*. His book, *Failing Up: How to Take Risks, Aim Higher, and Never Stop Learning*, published this year, offers motivational stories from his life that have guided his career and inspired him to overcome obstacles to success.

*"Hamilton* is a cultural phenomenon, in no small part because of the outstanding performance of Leslie Odom, Jr.," said Dawood Farahi, PhD, Kean University president. "Throughout his career, in college and as an actor, Mr. Odom has demonstrated commitment, perseverance and excellence, qualities that Kean asks its students and graduates to bring to bear in all that they do."

Mr. Odom will deliver the commencement address and give a brief performance before nearly 700 Nathan Weiss Graduate College students and their guests. Also at the commencement, he will be awarded an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. Nathan Weiss Graduate College offers six doctoral degree programs and more than 60 options for graduate study leading to master's degrees, professional diplomas or certifications.

"Leslie Odom, Jr., is a unique talent, and there is no doubt that the lessons he has learned on his journey from a childhood in Philadelphia to international stardom will enlighten and encourage our graduates," said Ada Morell, chair of the Kean Board of Trustees.



---

[www.njascu.org](http://www.njascu.org)

*The College of New Jersey  
Kean University  
Montclair State University*

*New Jersey City University  
Ramapo College of New Jersey  
Rowan University*

*Stockton University  
Thomas Edison State University  
William Paterson University*

Mr. Odom made his Broadway debut at the age of 17 in another groundbreaking musical, *Rent*. He then attended Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama, graduating with honors. He has multiple acting credits, including Broadway's *Leap of Faith*, TV's *Smash* and *Law & Order: SVU*, and the 2017 movie remake of *Murder on the Orient Express*. As a recording artist, he has released a self-titled album and a holiday album, *Simply Christmas*.

Nearly 3,000 students will receive their bachelor's degrees at Kean's Undergraduate Commencement on Thursday, May 17 at Newark's Prudential Center. U.S. Senator Cory Booker, the former mayor of Newark, will be the featured speaker at that event.

---

### **About Kean University**

Founded in 1855, Kean University has become one of the largest metropolitan institutions of higher education in the region, with a richly diverse student, faculty and staff population. Kean continues to play a key role in the training of teachers and is a hub of educational, technological and cultural enrichment serving nearly 15,000 students. The University's five undergraduate colleges offer more than 50 undergraduate degrees over a full range of academic subjects. The Nathan Weiss Graduate College offers six doctoral degree programs and more than 60 options for graduate study leading to master's degrees, professional diplomas or certifications. With campuses in Union and Toms River, New Jersey, and Wenzhou, China, Kean University furthers its mission by providing an affordable and accessible world-class education. Visit [www.kean.edu](http://www.kean.edu).