

Harvard Commencement Ticketing Balances Tradition, Security, and Efficiency

4 MIN READ



Keeping Tradition Alive, and Safe

“We’ve celebrated 371 [commencement ceremonies] over 388 years of existence – this is a tradition older than our country itself,” proudly explained Stephan D. Magro, Commencement Director of Harvard University, from a building on the campus in which George Washington once made himself an office. “By the 1860s, the event had grown to such a size that Harvard alumni formed the Committee for Happy Observance of Commencement – dubbed ‘the Happy Committee’, who still come to Harvard Yard annually to usher in the next group of alumni, dressed to the nines in top hats and tails.”

Each spring, Harvard’s Commencement ceremony is attended by over 32,000 graduates and guests, including members of the community, elected officials, and high-profile guest speakers, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, late Civil Rights leader and U.S. Representative John Lewis, and most recently, New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern.

Needless to say, this event is a big deal with many eyes on it. While security has always been an essential element to consider, safety became top priority following the events of the 2013 bombing at the Boston Marathon.

Like many long-standing traditions, simplicity is part of the appeal. Rather than compromise the historic beauty of the ceremony space or lose the charm of keepsake-worthy physical tickets, the staff at Harvard worked with AudienceView to implement a new ticketing strategy that allows them to get a clear, comprehensive scope of the event using [AudienceView Grad](#) software.

Scenes from [#Harvard22](#) Commencement ? pic.twitter.com/JTq3lnBtGu

— Harvard University (@Harvard) [May 26, 2022](#)

Enhancing Security and Efficiency

Attendee information is collected online, and then an individual barcode is assigned to each person. These barcodes are then printed onto physical tickets, which are scanned at the gate entrances, allowing the team to track who is in attendance. Not only did that mean safety officials would have access to important

information in the case of an emergency, but it also prevented unforeseen (and potentially nefarious) individuals from entering the event.

To ensure a successful event, Sarah Wellman, Senior Solution Expert at AudienceView, was on-site for the event. She explained, “Scanners are a huge part of a successful commencement. As parents, friends and loved ones stand in line, anxiously waiting to get the best seat in the venue, the last thing anyone wants is a hold in the line because the scanner is not working. My job is to ensure the scanners are charged, configured, tested, and that the scanner team is trained, in position, and knows how to get my help. By having a technical expert on-site, there is a sense of relief that allows the commencement team to focus on everything else.”

Despite the tremendous pressure (this was the first commencement ceremony in 3 years due to the pandemic), the AudienceView Grad team came through. Magro added, “Sarah deserves a tremendous shoutout – she helped us record the training module that we shared with our security team, covering the 11 gates. Lisa Stichnoth (Project Manager at AudienceView) was the glue; she investigated everything we asked about and she really delivered. Those two never felt like external vendors, but partners and colleagues.”