

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Former Bosnian political refugee among graduates of MU High School

By [Jack Hayes](#)

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Soon-to-be graduates of MU High School wait for the start of the ceremony in Stotler Lounge at the Memorial Student Union on Saturday. The school is an accredited distance learning high school that opened in 1997. | [Quint Smith](#)



Diplomas are prepared to be handed out to graduates of MU High School in Stotler Lounge Saturday. Fifteen of the school's graduates attended the ceremony. | [Quint Smith](#)



Tyler Logan of Kansas City waits for his turn to walk and receive his diploma at the MU High School graduation ceremony on Saturday. | [Quint Smith](#)



Amir Dizdarevic of St. Louis attends his graduation from MU High School in Stotler Lounge on Saturday. | QUINT SMITH/Missourian



Angela Langford receives her diploma from MU High School Principal Kristi Smalley at the school's graduation ceremony in Stotler Lounge Saturday. | QUINT SMITH/Missourian

MU High School held its graduation at the Stotler Lounge at the Memorial Student Union on Saturday. The school is an accredited distance learning high school that opened in 1997. Fifteen of the school's graduates attended the ceremony.

; QUINT SMITH/Missourian

COLUMBIA — Amir Dizdarevic felt like a part of him was missing without his diploma.

After a childhood of political and military turmoil forced him and his family to leave his native Bosnia at age 13, he didn't see education as a major concern when he dropped out during his freshman year of high school.

"It's funny how immigrants come to this country; they tend to use their backs instead of their heads," Dizdarevic said.

"It was different being from a Third World country," he said. "It was a culture shock when I came here. I had no idea what America was and how diverse it was."

Dizdarevic, now 26, and his family settled in the south St. Louis area in 2001 after spending time in multiple political refugee camps. For the past 10 years he has worked at Lambert International Airport in St. Louis, most recently as a ramp supervisor and refueling specialist. However, Dizdarevic said his career aspirations in the aviation industry haven't panned out as he had hoped. This is one of the reasons he decided to finish high school.

Dizdarevic received his diploma from MU High School on Saturday afternoon at the school's 14th commencement ceremony. The ceremony was held in Stotler Lounge in Memorial Union in front of nearly 100 guests. The school is online only and geared toward providing distance learning options for students from around the world. This year's graduating class included 120 students from seven different countries. Fifteen of the graduates were on hand for the commencement. One flew in from Hawaii to attend.

The online, self-paced nature of MU High School course work was a perfect fit for Dizdarevic, who works full time. Despite the lack of one-on-one time in a classroom, Dizdarevic said he feels he has a great relationship with the faculty. Alicia Bixby, the counselor for MU High School, was a great resource for him, he said.

"She's been more than amazing. She's been very patient. I wish I could recommend her for an award," Dizdarevic said. "She was the key to this whole thing for me."

For Bixby, seeing Dizdarevic receive his diploma is what MU High School is all about. "That's the goal," she said in reference to helping students graduate. "It means a lot for me (to see Dizdarevic graduate) because I've been working with him for so many years."

"He's great. He's always been so nice and so patient," she said.

For Dizdarevic's family, it's emotional to see him finally receive his diploma. His younger sister

Emina, 19, graduated high school last spring, a year before her older brother.

"It's a great accomplishment for him. I know he appreciates his accomplishment more," Emina Dizdarevic said. She graduated from Soldan International Studies High School in St. Louis and is currently a student at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Supervising editor is [Zachary Matson](#).