

GARDNER-WEBB

Volume 58, 2023

THE MAGAZINE



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GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

The mission of Gardner-Webb University is to prepare graduates for leadership and service in their professional careers and in their personal lives.

Rigorous and innovative degree programs, combined with distinctive experiential learning opportunities, shape students into thinkers, doers, and world-changers. Forged within a supportive and diverse Christian community, our students emerge ready to impact their chosen professions, equipped with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspired to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others.

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We are the Champions, My Friends

Greetings to all alumni and friends of Gardner-Webb University! We are so proud to share this latest issue of *Gardner-Webb: The Magazine* with you, and I hope you will enjoy reading about the impact our students, faculty, staff, and alumni have made throughout the past year. It's been a year of academic distinction, a year of athletic prowess, and a year of faithful service to our surrounding community. In keeping with this issue's theme, I will venture to say that it has been a year of successfully championing the values and mission of one of America's greatest universities. Bravo, GWU!

Champions. Yes, we celebrated a lot during these past months. A football championship (including a BBQ Bowl trophy!). A women's basketball championship. A men's tennis championship. Individual championship performances in wrestling as well as in Track and Field. Our Runnin' Bulldogs certainly came to play in every sport, and our fans supported them in big numbers both at home and on the road. These are thrills that you remember for a lifetime, and it has been an absolute joy to watch our student-athletes compete at the highest level.

While victories, win streaks, and championship rings have dominated the headlines, you will also read in these pages about the even bigger wins happening in our classrooms and labs. The University—your university—exists to inspire, educate, and prepare students to go off and make meaningful and lasting differences in their chosen professions and in their personal lives. We win championships each time a student in our College of Education gains a new skill in preparation for a career as a teacher or as a school administrator. We win championships each time a student in our famed Hunt School of Nursing learns a new technique for treating a patient. We win championships each time GWU

launches a new degree program, such as the Masters of Public Administration and our new program in Cybersecurity, that will help meet pressing demands in our region and throughout our society. We win championships each time someone hears a call to ministry and then answers that call by enrolling in one of the School of Divinity's signature programs. At Gardner-Webb, we win championships every day.

Every day we strive to live out a culture of continuous improvement. Some of these improvements are featured prominently in this magazine. Our recent #1 ranking as the safest college or university campus in North Carolina is clearly one point of pride. So, too, is the record-breaking success we had on this year's Double Dawg Day, when supporters from across the country and indeed around the globe came together during one frenzied 24-hour period to raise more than \$1 million for people and programs at GWU. We revel in the accomplishments of our dedicated faculty, whose awards and honors (Early Career Award, Faculty Service Award, Mentoring and Academic Advising Award, Rising Star Award) are highlighted in the sections ahead. While celebrating the existing members of our university community, we also welcome with great enthusiasm the newest additions to our family—new administrative leaders, new head coaches, a new University Chaplain, new faculty, and new staff. With each addition, Gardner-Webb elevates the quality of those services we have pledged to provide ... with each addition, Gardner-Webb accelerates our progress toward the goals that have been set for our institution.

Ours truly has become a Campus of Champions. Our Tucker and Ignite Excellence Scholarship recipients are living up to the expectations that accompanied their arrival in Boiling Springs. Our first-

generation students are excelling and taking on leadership positions in a variety of clubs and organizations, including the Student Government Association. Our former student-athletes are being called up for big-time opportunities with organizations such as the Big South Conference, the Oakland A's, and the New York Jets.

When you return to visit the Campus of Champions (as we hope you will), you should notice some big upgrades. We now have a BIG new bulldog statue outside the entrance to the LYCC and Paul Porter Arena. The size and imposing nature of that bulldog symbolizes how solid and strong our commitment is at Gardner-Webb. Our commitment to doing big and meaningful things is also evident at the construction site of the new Brinkley Amphitheater, slated to open on or around Homecoming '23. That outdoor performance venue will bring Gardner-Webb and the surrounding community together to enjoy music and to make memories ... it's going to be special! Already special is the recently opened Masters-Melton Indoor Baseball Facility located adjacent to John Henry Moss Stadium; equipped with everything our players need to get stronger, pitch faster, and hit more frequently, this training building improves the stature and quality of our NCAA Division I program. A Campus of Champions, indeed.

Friends, I hope you enjoy this issue of *Gardner-Webb: The Magazine*. We had fun putting it together ... more importantly, we had fun living it!

Thank you, as always, for everything you do to support GWU. See you in The Springs!

With warm regards,



Dr. William M. Downs
President



Campus of Champions

This year, Gardner-Webb University's campus community and supporters celebrated milestone after milestone. Athletics posted Big South Conference wins in football, women's basketball, men's tennis and track and field. Wrestling took individual titles in the Southern Conference. Gardner-Webb students and faculty achieved excellence in scholarship, and alumni made notable accomplishments.

The New York Times recognized GWU as the safest campus in North Carolina. Education, nursing and public administration had significant increases in enrollment. The Office of Christian Life and Service led 47 students, faculty and staff on national and international mission trips, where individuals received the gospel of Jesus Christ. Donors eclipsed all previous one-day giving records by contributing over \$1 million on Double Dawg Day.

These achievements didn't happen overnight. Becoming a champion in any field requires hours of work from individuals who seek only the reward of doing their best and inspiring their team.

This attitude also marks a "champion of faith," commented Vice President and University Chaplain for Christian Life and Service Dr. Josh Parrott. Paraphrasing Mark 12:30-31—the verse posted by the doors of every building on campus—he noted, "Champions direct our hearts toward God by encouraging us to love him with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength (and) direct our hands toward humanity by encouraging us to love our neighbor as ourselves."

To define the character of a champion, Mike Griffith, head coach of the men's tennis team and Big South Coach of the Year, singled out Johan Van Wijk and John Spring. When he took them off the starting list, they continued to train with enthusiasm and grit. "They pushed our starters and beat them a lot of times in practice," Griffith explained. "I believe they are the reason we won the conference championship."

The wins for the University's Office of Advancement are no different. Over the last few years, the number of people giving to Gardner-Webb has increased along with total giving. This year's record-breaking Double Dawg Day total would not have happened without teamwork. "Championship



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teams win because the team is working together,” declared Vice President for Advancement Nate Evans. “We’re winning because our donors are active members of the team. They might give \$10, \$100 or \$100,000, but everyone is putting forth effort that helps us become perennial champions.”

Alumna Sherika Montgomery, new commissioner of the Big South Conference, affirmed that champions put team above self. She was a member of the 2010 women’s basketball team that won a Big South Regular Season Championship. Those years at Gardner-Webb taught Montgomery that a championship is earned with hard work, perseverance, resilience and a commitment to practice in the off season. She asserted, “Those are the things that I still, to this day, apply to any effort—whether it’s a championship, a new initiative, a new community engagement opportunity, or something we are grappling with on the national level.”

When it comes to the GWU faculty, Dr. Robert Prickett, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, noted these champions of learning constantly seek new methods to inspire students. “They are out there, trying, learning from

every failure,” he described. “Whether that’s a performance in theater or an experiment in the lab or an authentic assessment in a class, they try, they learn, they adjust, they adapt, they grow—and then, do it one more time.”

Allyson Butts, 2019 Ignite Excellence Scholarship winner and current graduate student, agreed with Prickett’s assessment. She observed, “Being a champion is about how you live, not about what you achieve. A champion consistently pursues excellence, is willing to make personal sacrifices to love and support others, and lives for something greater than themselves. Maybe no one knows their names, but they touch the lives of people for the better. In my mind, that is the ultimate calling that we have as Christians.”

Within the pages of this magazine, you’ll find stories of students, student-athletes, faculty, alumni and donors who are champions living out the GWU motto in their communities: “Pro Deo et Humanitate – For God and Humanity.” They strive for excellence—not for trophies and titles—but for the people they’ve inspired to achieve their own greatness.

“The Tucker family has been caring and generous to me. They taught me to be generous to other people, to lead by example and show the love of God anywhere you go.”

Leah Carpenter, Gardner-Webb University’s first Tucker Scholar.



‘Love Your Neighbor as Yourself’

Inaugural Tucker Scholar Leah Carpenter Strives to Follow Life Altering Example in Nursing

Leah Carpenter’s smile is so genuine, people are compelled to return in kind and offer a greeting. “Her light and love radiate,” affirmed her youth pastor, Taylor Campbell, when he nominated her for the Tucker Scholarship.

At the scholarship presentation in 2020, members of the selection committee described her as a “ray of sunshine”—one of the many reasons why she was named Gardner-Webb

University’s first Tucker Scholar. Established by dedicated supporters, Carolyn and Robert Tucker, the Tucker Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength Scholarship is awarded to a student with exceptional academic achievement. Equally important, the individual also exemplifies the commands of Jesus found in Mark 12:29-31—“Love the Lord Your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.”

The formal scholarship presentation was made by the Tuckers’ daughter, Lisa, a 1989 alumna. “I was so impressed with you from the moment we met,” she told

Leah Carpenter’s Top Five Reasons to Love Gardner-Webb:

- 1.** The people. You feel at home, and welcomed.
- 2.** Faith-based campus. Professors take the time to pray before a test and when asked, share godly counsel.
- 3.** The sunsets. Nowhere else in the world has sunsets like this.
- 4.** The student-athletes. I’m a big sports fan, and I love the fact that you can get to know the people on campus who play sports.
- 5.** The smaller campus. Everybody says this, but it’s the truth. Being in a class with 10 students means you get to know them and your professor.

Carpenter. “Everything you stand for; it beams from you immediately.”

Carpenter applied for the eight-semester full-tuition, room and board scholarship but never thought she would win. “I remember clear as day when I got the call,” she related. “It was during school and I’m crying and sobbing and calling my mom and we were jumping for joy. I never thought I was going to get it, but I’m humbled that I did.”

She continued, “I’m extremely grateful for the opportunity to be here in the first place. The Tucker family has been caring and generous to me. They taught me to be generous to other people, to lead by example and show the love of God anywhere you go.”

Carpenter said the weight of being the first person to represent the Tucker name can be overwhelming, but she finds encouragement in that foundational scripture. “I remember when I got the award, and Carolyn Tucker gave me this plaque,” she reflected. “It had Mark 12:29-31 on there. She said the last thing is the most important part—to love your neighbor as yourself—and so I’ve really tried to instill that in my life at Gardner-Webb. I think the best way to represent the Tucker family is to be love and show the love on campus.”

One of the ways Carpenter shines on campus is by helping to lead a Bible study through the Delight Women’s Ministry. She also attends the student-led worship service, The Gathering. She’s a member of Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and Student Nurses Association (SNA). During the summer, she’s involved in Carolina Cross Connection, a ministry that uses volunteers to provide home repairs for people in need. She also helps with the homeless ministry at her church.

With her attitude and personality, it’s easy to see why Carpenter chose nursing as her major. “I wanted to be at the



“One of my instructors told me that, ‘A scared nurse is a good nurse,’ because you should never be overconfident where you cannot ask for help. You remind yourself that you’re not alone. There’s someone to guide you.”

Leah Carpenter

bedside every single day and make sure people were advocated for, and I could serve people well,” she explained. “You truly get that one-on-one time with your patients when you are a nurse.”

Now a GWU senior, Carpenter started clinical rotations when she was a sophomore. She’s observed intensive care and worked in obstetrics, medical-surgical, operating room, and behavioral health. One of her clinical instructors, adjunct Dominique Belgrave, applauded her development. “Both nurses and patients she encountered complimented Leah

on her teamwork, broad knowledge, impressive implementation and interpersonal skills,” Belgrave asserted. “Throughout the semester her confidence grew, and she learned how to use her clinical judgment when caring for her patients.”

After years of pursuing the goal of being a nurse, Carpenter described the first time she cared for patients as surreal. Filled with excitement, she also experienced wonder, doubt and joy. Getting over those initial fears requires a proper balance of caution and confidence. “One of my instructors told me that, ‘A scared nurse is a good nurse,’ because you should never be overconfident where you cannot ask for help,” she shared. “You remind yourself that you’re not alone. There’s someone to guide you.”

Carpenter concluded, “I’m excited but also have to remind myself of the responsibility I now have when it comes to caring for someone else. I love that I am learning so much in the hospital and going to clinicals has shown me just how tiring but rewarding nursing can be.”

During those first few days at Gardner-Webb, Elizalde made a decision that impacted the rest of his time on campus. It's also his advice to first-year college students: Step out of your comfort zone and get plugged into campus life.

Blake Elizalde, Gardner-Webb University 2022-23 SGA President



Pura Vida (Pure Life)

First Gen Student and 2022-23 SGA President Blake Elizalde Embraced Campus Life

When Blake Elizalde arrived at Gardner-Webb University in 2019, he had aspirations to become president of the United States. While that dream could happen someday, the May 2023 graduate can list three presidential jobs on his resume—freshman class president, GWU Student Body President and single-day president of Gardner-Webb.

A first-generation Hispanic student from Charlotte, N.C., Elizalde didn't understand the college application

process and neither did his parents. He missed all the deadlines from other schools, yet Gardner-Webb accepted him. He moved on campus even without getting a campus tour.

Elizalde wanted to major in political science, because growing up he listened to his parents play recordings of the U.S. Constitution over and over. His dad, a native of Mexico, was studying to become a U.S. citizen. They were so focused on his dad learning English and gaining citizenship that they didn't teach Elizalde Spanish, so that's why he chose to learn the language as his second major.

During those first few days at Gardner-Webb, Elizalde made a decision that

Blake Elizalde's Top Five Reasons to Love Gardner-Webb:

1. Student Government Association. I was involved all four years and it allowed me to grow as a person and a leader.
2. Campus ministries. I was able to grow spiritually, helping to lead worship at The Gathering and in Bible studies.
3. Student Engagement. Pancake Bingo—I won and not a lot of people can say that and one of my favorites was attending a prime-time game of the Carolina Panthers.
4. The classroom. I enjoyed the small classes. They started to feel like conversations instead of lectures and discussions, especially the political science ones.
5. The relationships. I became good friends with staff, with faculty, with administration and with other students. I will have these friendships to carry on with me through life.

impacted the rest of his time on campus. It's also his advice to first-year college students: Step out of your comfort zone and get plugged into campus life. At the Connect Fair (for GWU student clubs and organizations), he talked with representatives from many student clubs.

He was standing at the Student Government Association (SGA) table when another first-year student, Grace Nance, walked up. The SGA members said, "Run for office," so he and Nance decided to attend the SGA interest meeting. "I said I would go as long as she ran for (freshman) president and I would be vice president," Elizalde reflected.

However, at the meeting, Nance changed her mind and told Elizalde to run for freshman class president. Reluctantly, he agreed. "I was more reserved and introverted at the time, and so SGA allowed me to just step out of my shell, grow not only as a person but as a leader, and just get more comfortable with interacting with people and building relationships," he said. "I'm grateful for Grace and grateful for SGA for giving me that opportunity to become who I am today."

Two months later, a GWU administrator called him, because he was freshman president. The person asked if he knew anyone who might be interested in a marketing job with dining services. To find out more about the job, he went to meet with the chef and Suzanne Glasscock, the general manager. Wrapping up the discussion, they offered him the job. He was shocked, because he hadn't come for an interview. With no marketing experience, Elizalde took the job.

He was supposed to be a marketing intern but didn't have a supervisor. He became the marketing coordinator for dining services in October 2019 and held the job until May 2022. His hours were flexible so that he could work around his classes and other activities. "I was in charge of the event planning and the social media," Elizalde described. "We had 300 something followers on Instagram. I



Elizalde is prepared to follow with "Pura Vida," a common phrase in Costa Rica. He wears a bracelet inscribed with the words. "It means pure life, but it's more than just a phrase down there. It's a way of life," he related. "Just living life to the fullest and being in the moment. This bracelet reminds me of that every day."

Blake Elizalde

was able to get it up to about 1,300."

The job gave him more opportunities to develop his skills and connect with people. While working for dining services, Elizalde was also a resident advisor and Student Recruitment Ambassador. He participated in CrossFit and activities offered by Student Engagement. He played the drums for The Gathering Worship Team and attended Bible studies.

During his last year at Gardner-Webb, he served as student body president. His goal was to be available and accessible. Near the end of his term, he participated in the President Switch Day with GWU President Dr. William M. Downs. This gave him an inside look into what a college president does all day. "I learned that sometimes change can't happen immediately, even if you're a university president," Elizalde said. "Everything begins with a conversation and then you go from there. Getting feedback from many individuals about a decision or change is a must."

After graduation, he participated in Gardner-Webb's summer immersion

experience in Costa Rica. Elizalde spent a month in the country attending Spanish classes. He didn't expect to grow spiritually while he was there, but he did through attending chapel, participating in a mission trip, playing percussion for worship, feeding the homeless, giving his first sermon, and working with missionaries to curb gang violence by developing relationships with the young people. He started seeking God and asking the question, "What is his plan for my life?"

Will he still pursue national politics at the highest level? At this time, Elizalde doesn't know for sure. He has accepted a position with Gardner-Webb as a career coach for the Godbold College of Business. In this new role and other opportunities that come his way, Elizalde is prepared to follow with "Pura Vida," a common phrase in Costa Rica. He wears a bracelet inscribed with the words. "It means pure life, but it's more than just a phrase down there. It's a way of life," he related. "Just living life to the fullest and being in the moment. This bracelet reminds me of that every day."

“That is something I really like about Gardner-Webb—the emphasis on being well-rounded thinkers. We want to be people who love learning.”

Allyson Butts, Ignite Excellence Scholarship winner



‘Life’s a Gift’

Ignite Scholar Seeks a Life of Adventurous Opportunities

Relecting on her four years at Gardner-Webb University, Allyson Butts of Concord, N.C., believes the most important lesson she’s learned is to invest more time in relationships. In 2019, her focus was primarily on academic achievement. She won Gardner-Webb’s Ignite Excellence Scholarship that covers full tuition, room and board. Maintaining the scholarship requires a cumulative GPA of 3.5, but Butts’ personal goal was 4.0.

“I think when I came into college, academics was everything, and good grades were what I had to do to feel like I was enough,” she assessed. “It’s been really sweet to see how over my time at college, my view has changed to where now, yes, academics is an area where I try to honor God and I strive for excellence, but at the same time, it’s not what’s most important. I would rather have relationships with the people around me where I love them well, and I would rather enjoy the gift of life that God has given me than to have perfect grades. I think it’s a testament to how

Allyson Butts’ Top Five Reasons to Love Gardner-Webb:

1. Seeing people in Tucker Student Center and engaging them in conversation.
2. Gardner-Webb’s community—the relationships with professors, staff, administration.
3. Numerous opportunities to get involved like CrossFit, pickleball, Bible study, etc.
4. The entire educational experience with professors who care about your development as a person.
5. The people. I just love the people here. I’m biased, but I think they’re the best.

transformational these four years have been for me.”

Butts credits Dr. Jeff Hartman and other professors in the Department of Exercise Science with modeling this work-life balance for students. “Dr. Hartman talks about the art of saying no to things so that you can say yes to better things,” she described. “He’s always been someone who has talked about faith and what it means to live excellently.”

Her study habits help her to be flexible and spontaneous. “I plan out how many days I like to study—normally three or four days—before a test,” Butts explained. “With a bigger test with more material, I’ll start further ahead of time. If I stay committed to planning well, it allows me to say yes to things in the moment and not have to worry that I’m going to fall behind.”

Hartman said Allyson has all the characteristics to be successful in the field. “Driven by faith, fueled by knowledge, and dedicated to healing, Allyson embodies academic excellence, compassion, and the skills needed to become an extraordinary physical therapist,” he assessed.

Butts’ interest in biology combined with her outgoing personality led her to consider physical therapy (PT). She liked the idea of getting to know her patients. “The physical therapist is the person who’s going to be one-on-one with the patient as they’re doing their rehab,” she observed. “Normally when you’re seeing patients, they are going to come in for maybe six, nine months, some even longer.”

She also likes the range of problems physical therapists treat, like helping an injured athlete get back to competing or assisting an older person with generalized pain who wants to get back to the activities of daily living. “The variety makes it interesting if you’re someone who likes problem-solving,” she stated.

Butts earned her bachelor’s degree in May 2023 and is currently pursuing her Master of Science in strength and conditioning at GWU. She works as



“I feel like each day is kind of unique and I like that about my college experience. There’s a sense of rhythm, but I feel like my days oftentimes have a lot of fun surprises where I end up running into someone or deciding last minute to do something fun.”

Allyson Butts

a physical therapy technician at Ivy Rehab in Shelby, N.C. The job allows her to see what PTs do on a daily basis and to apply what she’s learning in the classroom. “There’s so much from my master’s classes that transfers directly into what I see them doing and even techniques that I use,” she observed. “A lot of what I’ve learned about motivation (in class) are the things that I’ve been able to implement when I’m working with patients.”

While learning about her field, Butts has also acquired a liberal arts education at Gardner-Webb. As a member of Alpha Chi National Honor Society, she competed and won a national scholarship for her research on Sherlock Holmes. “I’ve

always thought of myself as someone who just enjoys learning in general, not just discipline specific,” she related. “That is something I really like about Gardner-Webb—the emphasis on being well-rounded thinkers. We want to be people who love learning.”

Additionally, Butts has gained leadership experience by participating in various clubs and jobs on campus. Her senior year, she served as president of Alpha Chi and won a national presentation prize for her research at the convention in Albuquerque, N.M. Her other roles include vice president of the CrossFit club, teacher assistant, writing fellow for exercise science and a peer tutor in the Writing Center. As a volunteer with Young Life in Cleveland County, a Christian discipleship ministry, she visits the middle school three to four times a week to present the gospel and build relationships with the kids there.

“I feel like each day is kind of unique and I like that about my college experience,” she mused. “There’s a sense of rhythm, but I feel like my days oftentimes have a lot of fun surprises where I end up running into someone or deciding last minute to do something fun.”



Embracing the Community of the Unexpected

Teaching Excellence Winner, Dr. Elizabeth Amato, Centers Learning Around Relationships

BY BRANDON RICHMOND,
GWU Communications Intern

Dr. Elizabeth Amato has been named the director of Undergraduate Research. As an associate professor in political science, Amato has served the Gardner-Webb community since 2014. She also received the Excellence in Teaching Award for 2021-22. The award recognizes academic rigor, effective course design and dedication to students. Amato's approach to teaching centers on fostering a strong relationship between students and the text they are reading.

"My goal is to help students carefully read some of the best thinkers on the persistent questions of how we live as individuals and in political communities," Amato said. "I want them to encounter the written words of a person from the past. These people are some of the best teachers available."

Amato also believes that humility and a spirit of discovery are important in the process of education. In addition, she feels humor and a coaching mentality are essential when teaching young minds. "Comedy helps hold people's interests and makes them wonder what is next," Amato stated.

She credits her parents for inspiring her love of teaching. She grew up in Baldwin, Ga., in a family of teachers,

with her father being a math teacher and her mother, a piano teacher. While she never took after her parents' skills of mathematics and music, she learned a lot from her professor, Peter Augustine Lawler, at Berry College in Rome, Ga., where she earned her bachelor's degree.

"He introduced me to a very different way of thinking about political science and literature," remarked Amato. "He took ideas seriously and did things in an unexpected way. He taught me to look for the unexpected within the text."

Through Lawler, Amato saw the value of political science and started to think through the question, "How do I want to live?" For Amato, political science is the "art of the possible" and a great way to bring ideas into the world using the

“I wanted to teach at a small liberal arts college. That was my ambition and dream—to know the name of my students and be able to mentor them.”

Dr. Elizabeth Amato

materials available to humanity. “Politics are an important aspect in the struggle to live as free beings,” she observed. “It is vital in understanding how to live with others.”

Thinking back to her time as a first-year college student, Amato said if she could go back and give herself advice, it would be to value friendship and community. This desire to build community and foster relationships can be seen in her style of teaching, such as her popular coffee and tea tasting class, in which students drink coffee and tea from all over the world. “The class brings back the wonder and excitement of learning,” she described.

The tasting class further promotes community and offers important aspects for professional development, where the student is enabled to navigate social situations and understand networking. Another purpose for the activity is to introduce the students to a wide number of coffees and teas to help them seem more cultured in social situations. They also learn about the economics and politics behind these drinks.

Amato recalls the first time she toured Gardner-Webb and seeing herself belonging on the campus. “I wanted to teach at a small liberal arts college,” she shared. “That was my ambition and dream—to know the name of my students and be able to mentor them.”

She appreciates the faculty mentors who helped her get accustomed to Gardner-Webb. She specifically cites Professor of History Dr. Timothy Vanderburg, former GWU professor Dr. Joseph Moore, and Associate Professor of Sociology Dr. Dianne Sykes, who have each helped her in different ways.

Before coming to Gardner-Webb, she taught at James Madison College at Michigan State University in East



Lansing. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in political science at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Amato wrote her dissertation on the role politics and literature play in understanding the pursuit of happiness. In 2018 she published this research into a book titled, “The Pursuit of Happiness and the American Regime: Political Theory in Literature.” In addition, Amato has authored multiple articles and chapters and served as a resource on elections for regional media and public events.

She is working on her next project, writing a book about moral education presented within the television series, “Cobra Kai.” Amato noted, “My hope with the book is to show how the ‘Cobra Kai’ navigates the thorny questions and trials

of young adults who both want to be good and to do good. I love looking at how writers, novelists, and directors depict the world. What are they trying to show and teach us?”

She is positive about her new position as director of Undergraduate Research. “I am excited for the opportunity to guide students towards high-impact and high-quality projects and undertakings,” she affirmed. “I believe it is through something like undergraduate research where students transition from students in the proper sense to experts.”

Brandon Richmond graduates in May 2024 with degrees in English and philosophy and theology.



Reaching Higher Ground

GWU Athletics Achieving Championships Throughout the Fields of Life

With its team championship wins in 2022-23, Gardner-Webb University became the only Division I university in North Carolina to earn titles in football, women's basketball and men's basketball since 2019. On their way to the championships, the programs and student-athletes set records as well.

GWU also earned a men's tennis Big

South co-championship for the regular season, and individual championships in Southern Conference wrestling, and Big South track and field.

"Intercollegiate athletics has seen more change in the past three years than in the last 30," shared Dr. Andrew T. Goodrich, vice president and director of GWU Athletics. "As a result of these changes,

the success of the most watched and visible collegiate sports of football, men's basketball, and women's basketball is more important now than it has ever been in our past, which is why our results, which are unmatched by any other D-I university in the state of North Carolina, should be celebrated and known throughout our community and across the nation."



The Dance to Remember

The first history-making win came on March 10, 2019, when the buzzer ended the Big South Conference Championship game. On that day, a celebration began as the Runnin' Bulldogs Men's Basketball Team realized, "We're going dancin'." The victory advanced Gardner-Webb to the NCAA Men's Tournament for the first time in program history. The team's win continued a rich basketball tradition at GWU—the Runnin' Bulldogs previously made national tournament appearances at the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) and NCAA Division II levels. The historical season also inspired the award-winning documentary "The Dancin' Bulldogs: A 16 Seed's Journey to the NCAA Tournament" and the CBS documentary short "Four Sides of the Story: March Madness Begins."

Gridiron Victories Offer NCAA Playoff Upset and Team Honors

Then, on Nov. 19, 2022, in Spangler Stadium, the Runnin' Bulldogs football team topped off a historic season by winning its first Big South conference title since 2003. In that game, the Runnin' Bulldogs ran for 240 yards and used a 21-point second quarter to roll to a 38-17 win over North Carolina A&T. The victory sent the team to its first-ever NCAA Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) playoffs, where they won a first-round game on the road against Eastern Kentucky University, 52-41.

During the playoffs, home teams were 20-2, and the Runnin' Bulldogs were one of only two road squads to earn a win. Additionally, Gardner-Webb dominated the Big South honors for 2022. Quarterback Bailey Fisher was Offensive Player of the Year, defensive lineman Ty French was named Defensive Player of the Year, linebacker Ty Anderson was the Defensive Freshman of the Year, linebacker William McRainey was voted the Football Scholar-Athlete of the Year by the league, and GW head coach Tre Lamb was selected Coach of the Year. The conference win in 2022 marked the Runnin' Bulldogs third overall Big South football title.



Women's Basketball Brings History Home

The Gardner-Webb Women's Basketball team took its place in the history books on March 5, 2023, by winning both the Big South Tournament and the Big South regular season. At the championship game, the women claimed their 21st consecutive victory to punch their ticket to the NCAA Tournament. They also finished 21-0 against Big South Competition, the best mark in the history of the league. And in that final game, forward Jhessyka Williams scored a season high 33 points, tying a championship game mark for most points scored by an individual.

Gardner-Webb Women's Basketball earned four spots on the All-Big South Conference team and secured three of the league's major awards.

Williams (Augusta, Ga.) was unanimously named Big South Player of the Year, forward Alasia Smith (Johnson City, Tenn.) was named Big South Defensive Player of the Year and head coach Alex Simmons was named Big South Coach of the Year.

Guards Lauren Bevis (High Point, N.C.) and Ki'Ari Cain (Sumter, S.C.) joined Williams and Smith on the All-Big South Conference team, with Bevis earning first-team honors and Cain earning an honorable mention selection. Bevis was also runner up for Big South Player of the Year.

Guard L'Mia Littlejohn (Shelby, N.C.) earned a spot on the Big South Conference All-Academic Team. Littlejohn is an exercise science major who carries a 3.75 cumulative GPA. She plans to pursue a career in physical therapy upon graduation. A top reserve, Littlejohn played in 28 games during the regular season and knocked down 40.5 percent from beyond the three-point arc.

Williams was the first Gardner-Webb standout to be named Player of the Year since Margaret Roundtree in 2010. The team finished the season with a 29-5 record.



Wrestlers Earned Individual Spots in the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships

Oklahoma City native R.J. Mosley became a three-time NCAA qualifier at 165 pounds and the first Gardner-Webb wrestler to ever win back-to-back Southern Conference titles. Mosley went 24-5 during his final regular season and was 7-1 in Southern Conference action.

Jha'Quan Anderson made his second appearance in the national championships after earning an at-large bid. The Conyers, Ga., native advanced all the way to the SoCon finals at 184 pounds before dropping a decision in the finals. Anderson went 22-13 overall and was 7-1 against SoCon foes during the 2022-23 regular season.

Gardner-Webb has now seen 33 wrestlers advance to the NCAA Division I Wrestling Championships since 2000.

Gardner-Webb Tennis Earns Regular Season Title and Individual Honors

GWU Head Tennis Coach Mike Griffith was named the Coach of the Year while Victor Putter was honored as Scholar-Athlete of the Year for the Big South, as the team earned a regular season co-championship as well.

Griffith was selected as the coach of the year for the Big South for the second time in his career. The first came in 2019, which was the only other time in school history that GWU has won the conference title. He guided the team to a 15-6 mark in the regular season and 4-1 record against league opponents. The 15 wins marked the most in a single season since the team joined the Big South Conference.

Putter became the first in GWU history to earn the title of Scholar-Athlete of the Year in Men's Tennis. He has compiled a 4.0 GPA in his four years at GWU while pursuing a degree in mathematics.



**Check out the companion story on Putter later in this section*

Track and Field Athletes Chase Titles

The Big South Outdoor Championship events were highlighted by Gardner-Webb's Cameron Donoghue and Amy Prugh's record-breaking finishes.

Donoghue, a Yarmouth Port, Mass., native, earned a first-place finish in the decathlon while also setting a GWU record and personal best for the event.

Prugh was named to the women's All-Academic Team, and her season was also highlighted by a first-place honor for the 3000m Steeplechase at the Big South Outdoor Championship. Prugh also set a new Gardner-Webb school record with the finish. Prugh posted a 3.94 GPA in economics/finance to earn the academic honors.



Gardner-Webb Pitcher Selected for Top Big South Honor

Gardner-Webb University hurler Bobby Alcock, from Lynn, Mass., was voted the 2023 Big South Baseball Pitcher of the Year. Alcock is the first-ever Runnin' Bulldog to be voted Big South Pitcher of the Year. He concluded the regular season as the Big South leader in strikeouts (99), ERA (2.20) and batting average allowed (.170). Alcock went 7-2 overall with three combined shutouts in 81.2 innings pitched, and permitted just seven extra base hits all season (five doubles, two home runs among 48 allowed) in his 13 appearances. Named to the College Baseball Foundation Pitcher of the Year Watch List, Alcock was a three-time Big South Pitcher of the Week honoree in 2023, and fanned at least 10 batters four times—including 12 in a 1-0 win over Longwood on March 18. In league games this season, he was tops in ERA (1.79), strikeouts per game (10.89), strikeouts (73), innings (60.1) and batting average against (.155) while going 5-2.

Alcock was also named to the Collegiate Baseball Newspaper Division I All-America Second Team and the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA) NCAA Division I All-Region Second Team in the Atlantic Region.

"With all of these championships and individual honors, Gardner-Webb Athletics has built a culture of competitive excellence. Our past, present, and future students will be inspired to become champions in competition, in the classroom and in our community."

*- Dr. Andrew T. Goodrich,
vice president and director of Athletics*

Big South Conference Honors Acknowledge Academic Excellence and Graduate Fellowships

Victor Putter, GWU Men's Tennis, and Samuel Ritner, GWU Soccer Honored



Victor Putter of the Gardner-Webb University men's tennis team was named as the Big South Conference Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year for the 2023 season, only the second Runnin' Bulldog to earn this honor in the award's history. He was also one of eight student-athletes awarded the Conference's prestigious George A. Christenberry Award for Academic Excellence. He majored in mathematics at Gardner-Webb and completed his undergraduate degree with a perfect 4.0 GPA.

Putter (Pretoria, South Africa) is a three-time Men's Tennis All-Academic Team honoree and a two-time Big South Player of the Week honoree. During his time at Gardner-Webb, he excelled in doubles competitions as he finished his career at 32-23 and 9-3 against league opponents pairing with six different teammates. In singles play, he collected 27 victories, including a semifinal win in the Big South Tournament; this win helped earn GWU its first ever finals appearance.

Big South member institutions nominate one male and one female undergraduate student-athlete for the annual Christenberry Award, or multiple student-athletes that tie for the highest GPA on their respective campus. The award is given to the male and female student-athlete who attain the highest GPA during their undergraduate collegiate careers. It is the seventh consecutive year at least eight GWU student-athletes have been honored.

The honor is named for George A. Christenberry, the former President of Augusta College (now Augusta University) and one of the founders of the Big South Conference. A member of the Big South Hall of Fame, Christenberry served as the league's first President from 1983-86.

Gardner-Webb men's soccer player **Samuel Ritner** was awarded the annual Bob McCloskey Insurance Big South Conference Graduate Fellowship.

The Big South Conference Graduate Fellowship Program was established by the league in the Fall of 2005 as a means of recognizing the academic excellence of Big South Conference student-athletes who intend to pursue postgraduate studies upon graduation from a Big South Conference institution.

Ritner appeared in 14 games last season with 11 starts, and 979 minutes; all of which were career highs. In Gardner-Webb's 4-0 victory over VMI on Sept. 10, Ritner registered his first career assist. In 35 career matches, he has accumulated 2,159 minutes and 24 starts. He graduated GWU with a bachelor's degree in Exercise Science, and is pursuing his master's in Strength and Conditioning at Gardner-Webb.

Nominations for the Graduate Fellowship are made by the faculty athletics representative or the chief academic officer at a Big South member institution, and are limited to one male and one female at each school. Eligibility requirements include outstanding academic achievement, superior character and leadership, and demonstration of personal and intellectual development through participation of athletics and community service.



Q&A

Champions of Giving

Achieving new records in gifts to Gardner-Webb University does not happen without everybody working together. Led by the Office

of University Advancement and Vice President Nate Evans, total donations and the number of individual donors are at new highs. In the following Q&A, Evans

shares his thoughts about the individuals and organizations who give to champion the cause of Christian Higher Education at Gardner-Webb.

GW Magazine: Who are the champion donors of Gardner-Webb University?

Nate Evans: They are parents, friends, and alumni—like C.J. Brown who created a football endowment—who believe in the University’s mission. They believe in the impact their philanthropy can have, and they believe their dollar will go further here. Donors like the Brinkleys, the Withrows, the Tuckers, and many others, past and present, are caring investors who cherish the mission of Gardner-Webb and want to make a lasting difference.

GW Magazine: What is your message to the person who doesn’t have much to give?

Nate Evans: It’s not about how much you give; it’s that you care and you participate. If 10 people give \$10, that \$100 will go a long way at Gardner-Webb. I encourage people to think about what they can give and find something they are passionate about at the University and then invest in it.

GW Magazine: Why does the dollar go further at Gardner-Webb?

Nate Evans: Gardner-Webb is a place that runs very efficiently. We believe we are blessed with the resources we do have, and with that

we have developed a sort of “blue-collar mentality.” For example, coaches and players often do some of the work to offset some of the costs, such as the baseball team painting their own dugouts.

GW Magazine: What motivates someone to give to Gardner-Webb who doesn’t have ties to the University?

Nate Evans: They have a passion or an interest and want to invest in the GWU community. Maybe it’s our championship sports programs or our championship academic programs. If you care about health care, if you care about divinity, if you care about Christian Service, there is a philanthropic need here. If you support the arts, you can help the GWU Concert Choir travel to France in 2024 to perform for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day.

GW Magazine: Final thoughts?

Nate Evans: Our donors care about our students, and the impact their investment will have as these students become leaders in the community. Our donors believe they can have a lasting and positive impact at Gardner-Webb. We appreciate every person and organization that chooses to support us. Let’s meet a few of them on the following pages.

► **SAVE THE DATE**
April 11, 2024

DOUBLE DAWG DAY

Doubledawgday.gardner-webb.edu



\$1M+
TOTAL RAISED



39
STATES GAVE



1,100+
NUMBER OF GIFTS



2008
TOP ALUMNI CLASS

Double Dawg Day Blitzes Record with Over \$1 Million Raised

Gardner-Webb University Receives Over 1,100 Gifts to Support Every Aspect of Campus Life

For the eighth year in a row, giving on Double Dawg Day, April 20, eclipsed the previous record with a one-day giving total of over \$1 million.

Whether funding scholarships, athletic facilities and training, or enhancing classrooms and labs, each of the 1,153 gifts has a direct and lasting impact on the success of Gardner-Webb University and its students.

With overwhelming support from North Carolina donors, gifts also came from 39 states and as far away as Australia, France, Poland, Germany, Canada, Bangladesh and South Korea.

“Great teams win championships, and this year our Advancement team did an outstanding job mobilizing friends and loyal supporters to raise an unprecedented \$1 million,” praised Gardner-Webb President Dr. William M. Downs. “That record-setting collection of gifts will be dedicated to enhancing student success at GWU, and the advancement of our institutional mission just took a huge leap forward thanks to this wildly successful day of giving.”

Donors displayed school spirit by investing generously in the areas that mean the most to them. These included

scholarship and program support for academics and matching gifts for many of the sport programs, the Christian Service Organization, and contributions to virtually every aspect of campus life.

According to Nate Evans, vice president for Advancement at GW, this exceptional year is a testament to the dedication and effort of many individuals, as well as the incredible generosity of the University’s donors. “We are thrilled by the outpouring of support from our alumni and friends in the past 24 hours,” he emphasized. “It is heartening to witness so many people rallying behind our mission and helping us achieve our goals. Without their contributions, we could not have achieved this level of success. We are proud to say that the Bulldog Nation truly rose to the occasion this year!”

Kanisha Fowler, assistant director of Annual Giving at GWU, echoed the energy and success of the day. “It was incredible to watch our alumni, friends, faculty, and staff come together to make this day so successful,” she asserted. “We deeply appreciate the love expressed for Gardner-Webb by everyone who supported throughout the day.”

Double Dawg Day Leaderboard Spotlights



Gardner-Webb wrestling and swimming teams had the highest participation among athletic programs.



The College of Health Sciences and College of Arts and Sciences raised the most funds for academic program support.



The Searight Professional and Continuing Education (PACE) program raised more than \$100,000 for scholarships and program enhancement.



The GWU Wrestling Program had the most donors with 307 and received the first gift of the day.



Shea Mattingly won the Ambassador Challenge by recruiting 57 donors.



Marilyn Withrow Donates Gift to Purchase Chemistry and Microbiology Equipment

Advanced Microscopes and Instruments Improve Lab Research

A lumna Marilyn Withrow, '71, made a generous gift to enhance the Gardner-Webb University chemistry and microbiology programs. This multi-year commitment provides advanced equipment and protects the investment by including funds for maintenance and upkeep.

Susan Manahan, assistant professor of biology, said the donation of 22 microscopes for the microbiology laboratory replaces all of the old microscopes and will greatly enhance the viewing experience of the students in lab activities. Students in Microbiology for the Health Sciences, General

Microbiology, Genetics, Cell Biology, and Immunology will use the microscopes to focus on a variety of samples.

"In addition, we were able to purchase and equip a teaching microscope with a camera that will be connected to the new monitor to show students what to search for and focus on when viewing their own microscope slides," Manahan explained. "With the software that comes with the camera, we will be able to take photographs of images on slides and even make short videos."

The chemistry department acquired Thermo Scientific UV-Vis (ultraviolet-visible) Spectrophotometers, which

identify the presence of chemical compounds and measure their concentration. Dr. Stefka Eddins, professor of chemistry, shared that the new equipment replaced two aging, soon-to-be-defunct, instruments.

The purchase allows the department to continue to meet the needs of students in classes, such as General Chemistry II, Analytical Chemistry I and II, Physical Chemistry I and II, Biochemistry, and Inorganic Chemistry. "These classes are taken by biology, chemistry, biochemistry, and exercise science majors," Eddins offered. "Our hands-on approach to teaching our students how

“Our hands-on approach to teaching our students how to use chemical instruments, including the two new spectrophotometers, sets us apart in that our students acquire real, hands-on, laboratory experience and are not just mere observers.”

Dr. Stefka Eddins, professor of chemistry

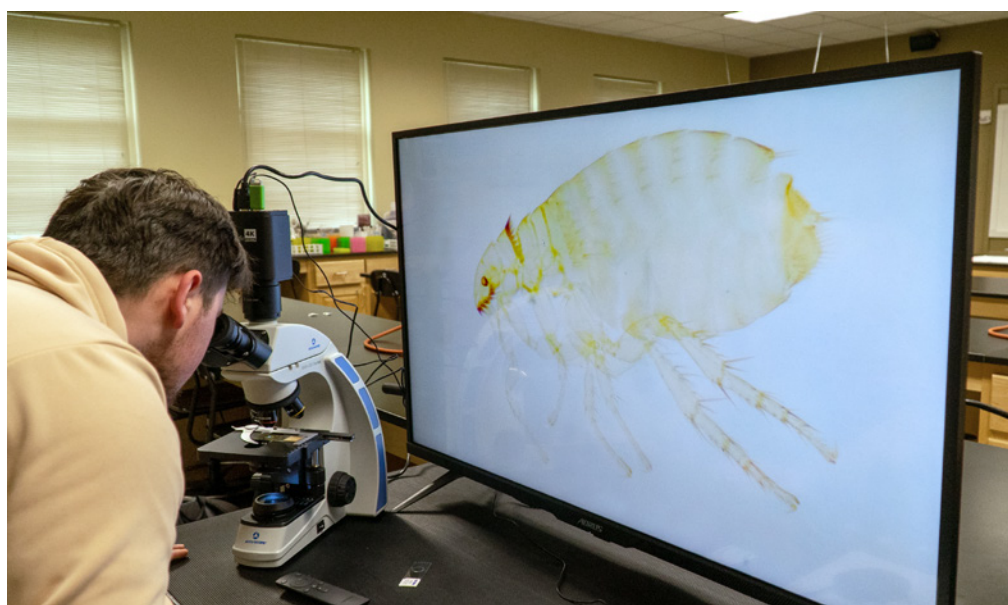
to use chemical instruments, including the two new spectrophotometers, sets us apart in that our students acquire real, hands-on, laboratory experience and are not just mere observers.”

In addition to the instruments, the department also purchased accessories for automated spectrophotometric analysis, as well as an explosion-proof refrigerator. These pieces of equipment will expand the ability to perform chemical analyses efficiently and store various reagents safely.

Marilyn and her husband, David, '72, are longtime supporters of their alma mater, and Marilyn is a former trustee. When David passed away in 2020, the family established the David E. Withrow Endowed Athletic Scholarship to support student-athletes. In addition, David's relatives supported the construction of the Withrow Science Building. This building was dedicated in 1966 and named in honor of GWU trustee and benefactor, A.T. Withrow of Charlotte, N.C.

As students were introduced to the new microscopes, they were excited to see sharper images and smaller details of the microorganisms. One of those students is senior Helena Berczes, who is double majoring in biology with a concentration in biomedical sciences and American Sign Language with a minor in interpreting. A laboratory associate, who assists other students in the microbiology lab, Berczes expressed her thanks for the gift and explained how the donation affects everyone in the Department of Natural Sciences.

“I'm excited for people coming through the department to use the new equipment and be able to see everything so much more clearly,” Berczes noted. “Even the older scopes that we had on the



(microbiology) side of the department, were moved over to general biology. I heard one of the professors say that those scopes are better than the ones they had, so actually it has benefited the entire department even if they are not using the brand new ones.”

Blake Henkel, a junior who is also majoring in biology with a concentration

in biomedical sciences, admired the innovative features available on the new microscopes. He wants to be a dentist and said learning to recognize microorganisms prepares him for dental school. “Not only does it help us identify what we need to identify, but also to retain and recall what these organisms look like,” Henkel explained.

Gardner-Webb Concert Choir Invited to Participate in Concert for 80th Anniversary of D-Day

Musicians will Travel to France in June 2024 for Performance in Abbaye-aux-Hommes

The Gardner-Webb University Concert Choir and professors have been invited to participate in next year's 80th anniversary of D-Day. They will join the historic observance in France by performing a memorial concert as one of the lead ensembles in an international choir.

"We are very excited about this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity our students will have to perform in France for such a momentous occasion," observed Dr. Aaron M. Rice, associate professor and chair of the Department of Music. "This will likely be one of the final major anniversaries where veterans of the D-Day invasion will be present for the commemoration."

Scheduled for June 9-18, 2024, the experience also includes educational opportunities in Paris and Caen, France. One of the most significant moments will be a visit to the Normandy coast and the beaches where Americans and other Allied forces gave their lives for the cause of freedom on D-Day. The trip culminates with a mass choir performance of Maurice Duruflé's Requiem in the Abbaye-aux-Hommes in Caen. Participants in this memorial performance will be from the United States, United Kingdom, and many countries across Europe.

Rice noted the importance of the location, "The Abbaye was built in the 11th century and is one of the oldest in the region of Normandy. It was not



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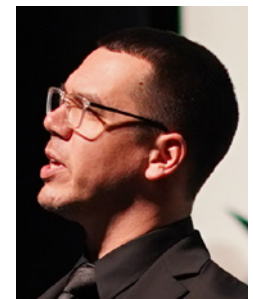
significantly harmed during WWII and it served as a hospital for those wounded during the Allied Invasion."

Dr. Jamie Meaders, founder of Vox Anima, an organization that arranges international performing opportunities in France and the UK, invited the GWU choir to perform. Meaders and Dr. Joshua Cheney, GWU's director of Choral Activities, have been professionally connected for years. "Meaders recognized the development and growth in the GWU Concert Choir and wanted the group to be one of the foundational ensembles for the mass choir," Rice explained.

Rice and Cheney will lead the group of students. Generous donors, including



Dr. Aaron Rice



Dr. Joshua Cheney

some who gave on Double Dawg Day, have already started raising money to fund the trip. If you would like to learn more about how you can help make this learning opportunity a reality, please contact Nate Evans, vice president for Advancement at njevans@gardner-webb.edu.



GWU Alumnus, Two-time Big South Champion, Creates Endowment

C.J. Brown Establishes Legacy Football Endowment to Provide Operations Assistance

From 2001 to 2005, C.J. Brown was an offensive lineman on back-to-back Big South Championship Football teams (2002 and 2003). The life-changing experience provided the skills he needed to build his career, and he wants to ensure that future student-athletes have the same chance to succeed.

“The institution of Gardner-Webb football prepared me for life’s hard lessons, fostered a can-do work ethic, and most of all gave me a rock-solid foundation of brotherhood and friendships that I cherish very deeply,” Brown asserted. “My hope is that through the Legacy Football Endowment, and future contributions from myself and others, that we can help elevate the experience for all who are lucky enough to get the opportunity to join this football family.”

He continued, “Dr. Downs has breathed new life into all of Gardner-Webb’s athletics, and with Coach (Tre) Lamb’s energy, there are great things in the future at GWU Football.”

Raised in historic Edgefield County, S.C., Brown graduated from Gardner-Webb in 2005 with a bachelor’s degree in business and in 2007 with his MBA. He met his wife, Megan, while at the University, and they have two children. Family is important to him, as well as passing on the traditions of the outdoor lifestyle and conservation.

“Football is a hard game,” Brown shared. “I was an offensive lineman, and in the trenches there’s a battle every snap. Like so many who play the game, I had to fight to win a starting spot, fight to get healthy from injuries, learn how to play through pain, adhere to a strict schedule, follow orders, accept when you’re not the best and learn from those who are better



C.J. Brown

than you. Football teaches you a get-right-back-up mentality. You learn how to deal with failure and success pretty quickly, or you just don’t make it. I’ve failed far more times in business than I’ve succeeded.”

He noted that his professors and courses in the Godbold School of Business gave him the basic foundation he needed to try—new ideas, concepts and opportunities. After graduating with his bachelor’s degree,

he earned a graduate assistant position in the GWU Operations Department. “That was an absolutely wonderful experience,” he reflected. “I learned so much about the inner workings of the school, and the people were fabulous. The staff there treated me like family and I’m so thankful they gave me a shot.”

With his background in conservation and business education, Brown established a real estate company that specializes in the sale and marketing of land, plantations, estates, timberlands, and high-quality recreational properties. “My father taught me best practices of land stewardship at an early age, and I grew up shadowing his national efforts for wildlife conservation,” Brown said. “My foundation gave me a deep connection and love of land and wildlife, and of the stewards that take care of it.”

The Legacy Football Endowment will provide operations assistance to the Gardner-Webb University football program. For more information about the endowment, contact Wes Cogdill at wcogdill@gardner-webb.edu.

Big Steps for the Big South

Alumna Sherika Montgomery Chosen to Lead Conference

For Gardner-Webb University alumna and former-student-athlete Sherika Montgomery, the Big South Conference has been intrinsically connected to her personal and professional path. Now, as Montgomery takes on the role of commissioner of the Big South, she looks forward to giving back to a community that invested in her during her time as a student-athlete.

“Having the opportunity to serve as commissioner and to continue to work alongside our constituencies and lead that forward progress is tremendous,” Montgomery said.

Stepping into the position formerly held by Kyle Kallander as he retired after 27 years, Montgomery is the fourth commissioner of the league, which was founded in 1983. She previously worked for the Big South from 2010-17 in various positions, including assistant commissioner for compliance and senior woman administrator. During that time, Montgomery was a two-time chair of the NCAA Committee on Women’s Athletics, as well as an inaugural member of the NCAA Board of Governors Ad Hoc Committee to Promote Cultural Diversity and Equity. Additionally, she was honored on the Top 25 Women in Higher Education and Beyond list by Diverse Education in 2016. Montgomery also spent time with the Summit League as associate commissioner for governance and compliance in 2018-19. In 2021, she began a stint with the Missouri Valley Conference as associate commissioner and senior woman administrator, ultimately being appointed deputy commissioner last year.

Kallander voiced his support for Montgomery as she stepped into the post of commissioner. “Sherika Montgomery is an amazing talent and will be outstanding in leading the



Conference into the future,” Kallander said. “She has tremendous people skills, wonderful insight and integrity, and has the intangibles that are often overlooked in great leaders. She just gets it. Plus, to have an alum of the Big South return to take the reins is truly special.”

Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs also expressed his faith in Montgomery. “Having served on the search committee and as a member of the group of Big South Conference CEOs that selected our new commissioner, I can confirm that Sherika Montgomery rose to the top of an outstanding pool of candidates,” Downs said. “She brings energy, vision, and significant experience to this leadership position at a critical time for college athletics. I am confident that she is the right person at the right time for our conference, and I am eager to see our competitiveness and our brand strengthen in the years ahead.”

Montgomery played basketball at Gardner-Webb, and was a member of the 2010 Big South Conference regular season championship team that finished with a record of 28-5. She graduated from Gardner-Webb with a bachelor’s degree in sport management and a minor in recreation in 2009, and returned to earn her master’s in sport science/pedagogy in 2011.

Montgomery noted the significant lessons of resilience and discipline she learned as a student-athlete and the perseverance she harvested on and off the court are traits she continues to apply to every effort. “You will ultimately attain that goal or come really, really close based on some of those key characteristics that started during my time at Gardner-Webb University as a student-athlete,” Montgomery said.

In the ever-evolving landscape of collegiate athletics, Montgomery mentions the importance of taking the time to listen and gain an understanding of the needs of community leaders and stakeholders on campuses. She says that it is through the understanding of others that her decision-making as a leader of



the conference and advocate for each school is enhanced.

Championing for a holistic focus on the student-athletes of the Big South and keeping a pulse on all facets of their

health (in the classroom and on the fields of play), Montgomery aims to display an intentionality in her approach to leadership. She wants student-athletes to gain the most out of their experiences, which she understands firsthand to be moments that will impact the rest of their lives and careers. “I bring what I call that level of relatability, and being able to resonate with so many different constituencies because of those experiences ... I think that’s going to serve me tremendously,” Montgomery said. “When it comes to being Big South made, I’m a testament to that.”

**The Big South Conference has 10 full-time member institutions, and six associate members located in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia.*

Written by Thomas Manning '22

“I had been subject to and witnessed so many injustices, and I thought I don’t know what kind of impact I can make as a computer programmer, but I can make a better impact as a lawyer.”

Doug Armstrong, '88

Clear Vision

Alumnus Doug Armstrong Sees Past His Blindness to Make a Difference

Doug Armstrong, a 1988 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, is blind, but he sees better than most. He graduated cum laude with two degrees in mathematics and computer science and a minor in political science. He viewed running as great exercise and with the help of a guide, broke three U.S. records in the 1984 Paralympic Games, then known as the International Games for the Disabled, in New York City.

He looked into his future and instead of pursuing a job in software engineering and development, he became a lawyer and used his analytical and problem-solving skills to protect people and their rights.

A revelation from his family history inspired him to pursue a law degree. His hometown of McGehee is located in the Arkansas Delta region, which is one of the poorest areas in the state. When he was a junior at GWU, Armstrong



discovered that his stepdad’s grandfather, a black farmer, was swindled out of his land. That’s when he vowed to make a difference. “I had been subject to and witnessed so many injustices, and I thought I don’t know what kind of impact I can make as a computer programmer, but I can make a better impact as a lawyer,” Armstrong reflected.

He was drawn to Gardner-Webb, because his high school wrestling coach and counselor had discovered that GWU offered a specialized program for the blind and visually impaired. Armstrong applied and received a presidential scholarship. With the program’s help

and support, such as braille chapters of textbooks, student readers and recordings for the blind, he excelled in academics. “The biggest thing was the attitude of the professors,” Armstrong affirmed. “They weren’t going along because they had to, they genuinely wanted to help.”

One professor in particular, Paul Jolley, was explaining a calculus problem in class and could tell by the look on Armstrong’s face that he didn’t understand. In desperation, Jolley asked the person sitting behind Armstrong to trace the problem on Armstrong’s back. The tactic worked, and Armstrong used it in other classes.

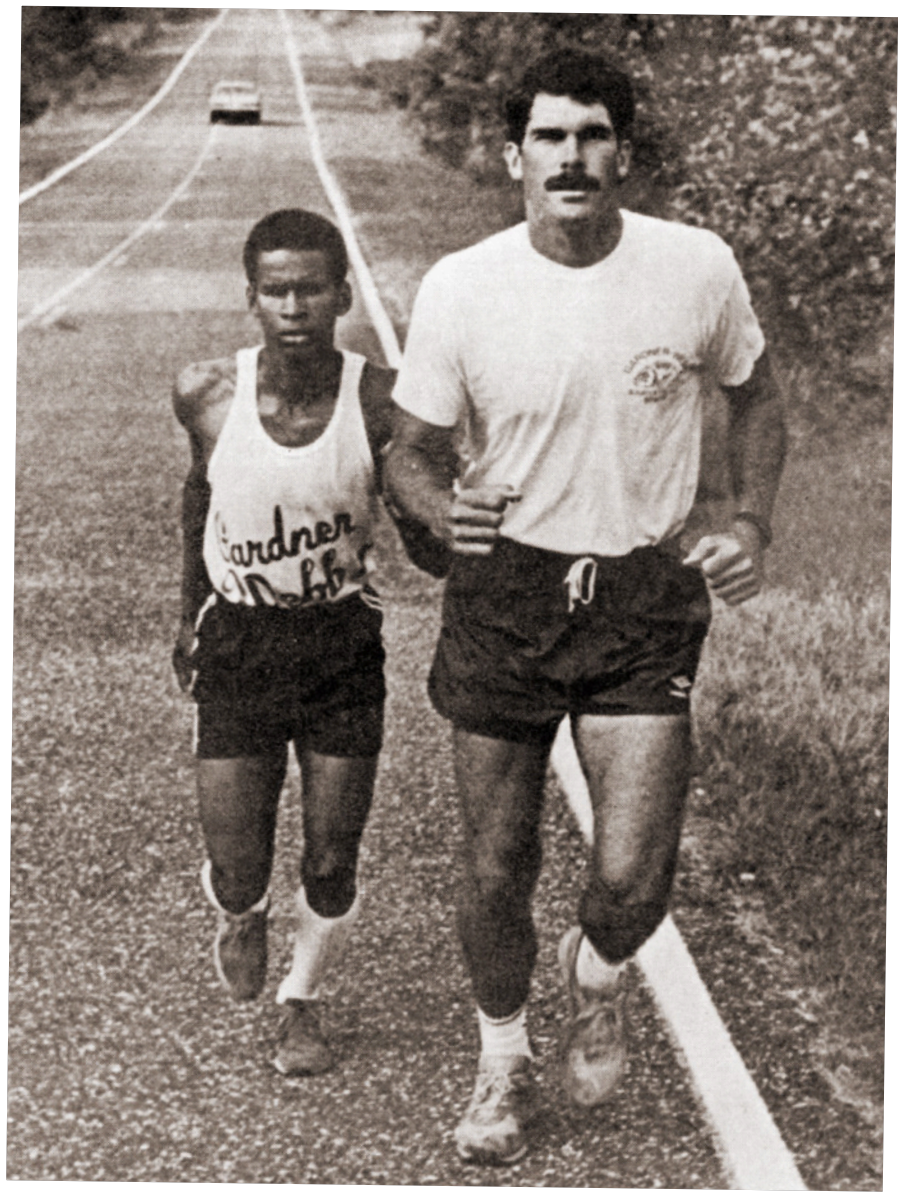


Armstrong received awards in political science and computer science and was recognized with the Huggins Citizenship Award for his scholarship and participation in college activities. Armstrong played the alto saxophone and served as president of the band. He lettered in cross country and track, winning the Most Valuable Cross Country Runner Award. He ran with a guide runner, who was assistant basketball coach John Haskins.

Armstrong also served as a senator to the Student Government Association, as a Big Brother, and as president of his class. He was president of the Math Club and vice president of both the Social Science Club and the Association of Computing Machinery.

Because of the support he received from everyone at Gardner-Webb, Armstrong has served on the advisory board for the University's Noel Center for Disability Resources since 1989. "It's a way of giving back when so much was given to me," he affirmed, "And, it's another way for me to remain connected to Gardner-Webb."

After graduating from Wake Forest University School of Law in 1992, he passed the North Carolina Bar Exam and was offered a job with the Legal Aid Society of North Carolina Inc. in Winston-Salem, N.C. He specialized in housing, employment and consumer law. Gardner-



Webb recognized him for his work as Young Alumnus of the Year in 1995.

Armstrong met his wife, Jackie, while working in Winston-Salem through a mutual friend who worked with her at Sarah Lee Knit Products. She received a promotion and the couple moved to Cincinnati for 14 years, and he continued to work in legal aid and private practice there. They moved back to the Concord area in 2012, when Jackie took a job with the American Red Cross. They have one daughter, Jennifer.

As a student of the law and history, Armstrong seeks to follow in the footsteps of the Black Americans who cleared the way for others with their

contributions and sacrifices. His heroes encompass all of his interests. "I have so many—Thurgood Marshall is my most favorite. He was the first black supreme court justice and he argued *Brown vs. Board of Education*," Armstrong related. "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is another. He handled everything with non-violence. And Jackie Robinson; I'm a big sports fan. With all of these people, the thing that sticks out is the dignity and professionalism with which they conducted themselves."

He concluded, "When you look at how Blacks have changed the world before us, it lets us know that we can make an impact as well. It serves as inspiration."



‘A Remarkable Life’

100-year-old Alumna Offers Wit, Wisdom, and Humor Worldwide

When one first meets Miss Gladys, laughter is not far behind. Armed with a dry sense of humor, she finds a way to catch everyone off guard and break the ice. She has a brilliant mind; she’s fueled with energy, and she can carry on a dialogue with anyone.

Gladys Brooks Boroughs, who turned 100 on Dec. 28, 2022, has dedicated her life to living out the Gardner-Webb University mission. She is a former GWU trustee, and she and her husband established a scholarship through the Christian Service Organization. In 2003,

she was honored as a Gardner-Webb Distinguished Alumna.

Her daughter, Elaine Boroughs McRae, emphasizes that her mother is a lifelong learner, living every day to the fullest. As an example, Boroughs and her friend, Maida Green Scruggs, are planning a Zoom call so they can catch up and reminisce. Incidentally, Scruggs is the wife of the late Horace Scruggs, brother of bluegrass pioneer Earl Scruggs, who are Boroughs’ first cousins. Horace, who died in 2007, worked in GWU plant operations for 29 years. Boroughs received some of the musical talent and plays piano by ear.

“A finer role model I couldn’t have!” McRae praised. “Her wit and wisdom continue, and I’m so blessed to call this saint, ‘Mom.’ She’s had a remarkable life and made an impact on numerous people both in the church and the (Baptist) association.”

Born in 1922 in Cleveland County, N.C., Boroughs was the middle child with six older and six younger siblings. A child of the depression, her family lost two farms, yet somehow managed to provide a college education to many of their children. Boroughs described one way the family made ends meet, “I remember

there was a company in Shelby that sold flour in 100-pound sacks. Mommy would make our dresses out of that.”

Boroughs graduated as valedictorian of her high school class and was also first in her class when she graduated from Gardner-Webb in 1942. While at Gardner-Webb, she lived with her cousins, because their house was closer to the college.

When her grandfather died, Boroughs stayed at home and ran two miles back to Gardner-Webb the next morning to take a test. “The teacher was so understanding,” Boroughs shared. “She said, ‘You don’t have to take the test,’ but I insisted on taking it.”

She majored in English, and after graduating, decided to move to Washington, D.C., because her older sister, Reba, lived there. Boroughs took a job at the Five and Dime until she was hired by the FBI to edit documents during World War II, serving under the FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Even after all these years, Boroughs won’t risk sharing the classified information in the files, but described her work as “defense reviewing.” She saw Hoover a couple of times, but never talked to him. She told a story about a co-worker who was on the elevator when Hoover was about to get on. Without thinking, the co-worker reached in his coat for his handkerchief. Hoover’s bodyguards immediately pulled their guns on him.

While in Washington, D.C., she met the love of her life, Lewis Boroughs, also a North Carolinian, from Seagrove. He was a professor at George Washington University. After Lewis took the bar exam, he joined Burlington Industries as a lawyer and the couple relocated to Greensboro, N.C., where Boroughs still lives. She managed the household while her husband was away on business in New York City.

The couple had three children, Elaine, Miriam and Kenneth. When the girls were teenagers, Kenneth was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor and passed away. “That is when you really saw the strength of family and faith,” McRae



observed. “Their faith never wavered.”

Boroughs is known for her involvement at First Baptist Church of Greensboro. Through the decades, she held about every position: Deacon chair, Women’s Missionary Union, Sunday school teacher, and chair of many other committees. When her husband retired, the couple traveled the world, often in the capacity of serving a Baptist mission. In Temuco, Chile, they helped teams from First

Baptist Church construct an orphanage. On several occasions, Boroughs preached at the Sunday morning worship service and led Bible studies for the women.

She and her husband were also instrumental in forming the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) in North Carolina. Groups from across the state often met at the Boroughs’ house to discuss the impact CBF could have on outreach and ministry.

Boroughs was also a devoted member of The General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) and founding member of Sedgefield Woman’s Club. In 1987, she became North Carolina State President of GFWC.

“To this day, her devotionals are still being printed and sold at GFWC conventions,” McRae shared. “What a legacy this little Brooks’ (Boroughs) girl, the truly middle child of 13, is leaving for posterity.”

When asked to expound of a secret to long living, Boroughs noted that “laughter and appreciating humor” provide a prescription that you can get “without a doctor’s note.”

"I want to think that I'm making room or opening doors for the ones coming behind me."

Karyn Latorre, '15

BELIEVE

Karyn Latorre Combines Lifelong Love of Fútbol with Desire to Heal

For Gardner-Webb University alumna Karyn Latorre, '15, the path to her current position as assistant athletic trainer for Charlotte FC (Football Club) has taken her in many unique directions. Born and raised in Colombia to a fútbol loving family, Latorre found an interest in the sport in her early years, even though there were certain roadblocks.

"It wasn't easy to love it," Latorre said. "It wasn't seen well for girls to play soccer, so it was definitely a challenge at times." She began seriously playing soccer in fifth grade, and by the time she was 17 years old, she was a member of the Colombian national team. Growing up, her passion for playing the sport also ran parallel with her fascination for the study of sports medicine. "My oldest brother was always playing on the weekends," Latorre said. "[He] came back with bruises or an ankle sprain, and I was just playing like, 'Oh, let me heal you, let me cure you.' I think it started there."

Enrolling at Gardner-Webb in 2011, Latorre originally planned to study physical therapy. However, as a student-athlete on the soccer team, she gained a new perspective from her athletic trainer. "She really showed me the profession," Latorre said. "She was so passionate about it." Also speaking candidly about

how difficult it was to find the balance between playing Division I soccer and studying athletic training, Latorre said it was the hardest thing she's ever done. "The career I picked, it was already hard enough for non-athletes," she said. "Yet for student-athletes, you have to make your coach happy. Afternoon training, early morning lifts, team events. And then on the other side, you have your professors."

Additionally, Latorre was learning English during this period. Her mentors encouraged her to challenge herself with her language skills, which has been very beneficial to her professional career.

"Especially in soccer, when it's such a global sport ... Being bilingual was not just helpful to communicate, but really to connect with the player, with the athlete," Latorre said. "When you really know the language, the connection is different. The understanding of what they're feeling, or what they're going through is better."

After graduating from Gardner-Webb in 2015 with her Bachelor of Science, Latorre gained experience with multiple Major League Soccer (MLS) organizations as an athletic trainer. She had stints with the Academy* teams for Orlando City SC (Soccer Club) in Florida and Philadelphia Union in Pennsylvania, and in 2020, she





joined the staff of Charlotte FC Academy as head athletic trainer. Latorre was promoted to the first team for Charlotte in 2022 as assistant athletic trainer, where she is only one of 10 female athletic trainers in the league. She feels that things are moving in the right direction in this regard. Once again discussing the struggles she faced growing up as a young girl playing soccer in Colombia, Latorre talks about her gratitude for those that broke down barriers before her. “I’m sure that some others had it even harder than me back then,” she said. “They changed the mentality, and my generation was able to have more opportunities to play.”

Latorre hopes that she can be an inspiration to the next generation of women in athletics. “I want to think that I’m making room or opening doors for the ones coming behind me,” she said. “But I think it will also be cool to just make it a normal thing. And we’re going in that direction.”

When asked what advice she would give to young women looking to follow a similar path, Latorre said, “There are going to be a lot of moments when people will bring you down. But girls find a way to move on, to really prove that we’re capable of being in that position as well.”

Charlotte FC is an American professional men’s soccer club based in Charlotte, N.C. The team is one of 29 squads in Major League Soccer (MLS) throughout the United States and Canada. They were awarded the expansion franchise on Dec. 17, 2019 and have continued to be ranked as a top-3 attendance draw for MLS in 2022 and 2023.

*MLS Academy teams are development programs for younger players.

Written by Thomas Manning ’22

"I cannot separate my faith from who I am ... It is infused in every part of me. My faith ... it teaches me to humble myself. Every day I realize how small I am and really how grateful I am to have God's grace."

Donnie Thurman Jr., '04

Angel Heart

Donnie Thurman Jr. a Champion For the Differently Abled

Born and raised in Shelby, N.C., Donnie Thurman Jr. has become a staple in the Gardner-Webb University and Cleveland County community over the course of his life. A student-athlete from 2001-2004 and two-time Big South football champion, Thurman earned his Bachelor of Science in human services at Gardner-Webb. His career path has taken him in multiple directions, including ministry, education, and motivational speaking. Now, he serves as the executive vice president and chief operating officer of Holy Angels, a nonprofit in Belmont, N.C., which provides care and opportunities to those with developmental disabilities. Thurman is truly passionate about the organization's mission of "love, learn and live for the differently abled."

Looking back to his time growing up in the Shelby area, Thurman said that a pivotal moment came in his junior year at Crest High School when he attended a football game on Gardner-Webb's campus. The athletic and academic prowess he saw on display inspired him, and he enrolled a couple years later. Thurman was a high-achieving student in high school, and he mentioned the healthy challenges of transitioning to life as a college student. "I had to learn that you just can't go into the classroom and not study and be ready



for a test like you sometimes were able to pull off in high school,” Thurman said. “So, Gardner-Webb certainly challenged me academically, and as a human being to grow—to put more time into my studies, and to balance my social life, my sports life, and also my academic life.”

Also speaking to the Christian principles of Gardner-Webb, Thurman appreciated the spiritual side of life on campus. “The Christian overtones and experiences we have at Gardner-Webb are really unparalleled, and I’m so glad that I was able to go to a university that had that,” he asserted. As Thurman has continued into a life of service, his faith remains central to his identity. “I cannot separate my faith from who I am ... It is infused in every part of me,” he emphasized. “My faith ... it teaches me to humble myself. Every day I realize how small I am and really how grateful I am to have God’s grace.”

Making note of mentors like Dr. Tracy Jessup, former GWU vice president of Christian Life and Service, Thurman took to heart many of the qualities demonstrated by leaders at Gardner-Webb. “You were born to stand out, don’t fit in,” Thurman said. “Those things were the lessons that I took in my life, and really what I’ve done now is try to exemplify what I was taught there on campus and throughout my childhood. How am I giving back to the community? How am I serving? I’ve done that in various capacities and have been blessed to do it. But it’s been because other people have modeled it for me.”

Thurman has been an ordained minister since 2012, and currently serves as the youth and assistant pastor at Palmer Grove Baptist Church in Kingstown, N.C. And in 2013, he became the youngest person in the history of Cleveland County to be elected to the school board. He said that his experiences at Gardner-Webb prepared him for those moments long before he ever ran for office. “It was a non-partisan race and it gave me an opportunity to get up there and share my



Check out
the audio
interview
with Donnie
Thurman Jr.
here:



ideas and my thoughts,” Thurman said. “I’ll never forget that process and learning who the people of the county were, but more importantly keeping the focus on the kids.” He finished his tenure on the school board in 2017, but continues to volunteer with Cleveland County Schools on a regular basis.

In February 2017, Thurman joined the staff of Holy Angels. This organization is a sponsored ministry of Sisters of Mercy South Central Community. Holy Angels employs more than 300 individuals and is backed by four businesses in Belmont and McAdenville, N.C., including the Bliss Gallery, Cherubs Cafe, the Cotton Candy Factory, and Spruced Goose Station. “We specialize in caring for those who struggle, and we are a niche organization because we provide compassionate, dependable care, heavy medical support that other organizations frankly aren’t able to do—and we’re blessed to be able to do that,” Thurman said.

In January 2023, Thurman was named executive vice president and chief operating officer of Holy Angels, where he supervises daily operations, in addition to leading the Chaplain Program. Working with Holy Angels is a

cause near and dear to Thurman’s heart. “My cousin has Down syndrome, and I saw the fights that he’s had over his life, and how he has truly persevered,” Thurman said. “And he’s an example for me, he inspires me every single day.”

Thurman also encourages people in the Gardner-Webb community and beyond to seek out volunteer opportunities with Holy Angels. “If you want to make a difference, if you want to be inspired and help others, Holy Angels is truly a place to come and volunteer because you will get more than you give. That’s guaranteed,” he affirmed. For more information on the nonprofit, visit Holyangelsnc.org.

Reflecting more on the influence of Gardner-Webb throughout his life, Thurman said how important it is to honor the formative experiences that shaped him. “I’m really blessed to live the life where I had a chance to be a student at Gardner-Webb University,” he said. “I’m a proud Bulldog for life ... Just very proud to have been a part of what is one of the greatest universities, and I’m so glad to see the growth, and I cannot wait to see what happens in the future.”

Written by Thomas Manning ’22

"Our community deserves a thriving public education system—a system that leads with excellence without exception."

Dr. Crystal L. Hill, '08



Leading with Excellence

Dr. Crystal L. Hill, GWU Alumna, Named Superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Dr. Crystal L. Hill, an alumna of Gardner-Webb University, was named superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS), N.C., on May 19, 2023. She was hired after a national search, during which Hill served as the system's interim superintendent.

As the first Black female superintendent in the district's history, Hill told the Charlotte Observer that she is grateful for all the other Black women leaders who have gone before her, and she wants to be a role model for students.

In her first press conference, Hill listed some of her accomplishments and then

said, "None of those things happened because of me, because it's not about me. It's because I prioritize God in my life in everything I do. I'm grounded in my 'why,' which is students. They're the number one important thing and my focus."

She continued, explaining her goal for students, "Our community deserves a thriving public education system—a system that leads with excellence without exception. Excellence in academics, which is our core business, making sure all of our students graduate employable, graduate enlisted, graduate enrolled or employed and

they demonstrate excellent character and leadership."

In an interview with WSOC-TV, Hill explained that she didn't apply for the job until the last day. Ultimately, what made her hit send on her application was her love for Charlotte and the job. She told the reporter, "The more I did this work, the more I fell in love with the job. I'm excited about the opportunity to make a bigger impact for our students and for our entire community."

Hill has 25 years of experience in education, which includes earning her Doctor of Education in Educational



Leadership from GWU. As superintendent of CMS, she will lead the second largest school district in North Carolina and 17th largest in the country according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Her decisions will impact more than 140,406 students in kindergarten through 12th grade in 181 schools.

She chose to earn her doctorate at Gardner-Webb for several reasons. “The most appealing factor was the program was heavily focused on the work of the practitioner while being deeply rooted in evidenced-based and research-based practices,” she asserted. “The design of the program allowed for immediate application which allowed me to experience immediate success. GWU also values collaboration and coursework and was intentional in developing relationships with those in my cohort and learning from each other.”

Gardner-Webb’s College of Education Dean Dr. Prince H. Bull congratulated Hill. “We know that Dr. Crystal Hill will be transformative, innovative, and visionary in her new role with Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools,” Bull

praised. “In the College of Education at Gardner-Webb University, excellence is our minimum standard. Through our conceptual framework, we prepare our doctoral graduates to be catalysts for positive sustainable change.”

Dr. Bruce Boyles, GWU associate provost for Professional and Graduate Studies, knew Hill when she was starting her administrative career. “Dr. Crystal Hill is an excellent choice to lead the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools,” Boyles affirmed. “We had the opportunity to work together in Mooresville when I was superintendent there and she was a principal. It was obvious early in her career that she would continue to serve in positions of increasing responsibility. I am especially pleased that one of our College of Education doctoral graduates will be leading one of the largest districts in the nation.”

Before being tapped as CMS interim superintendent in January 2023, Hill served as CMS Chief of Staff, working closely with the superintendent, his cabinet and the Board of Education. When the announcement was made, Hill stated that her goal as interim was

to carry out the plans for growth and achievement that she helped to develop.

Hill received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro, N.C., and began her career as a first-grade teacher in Guilford County Schools, N.C. Next, she served various roles, including assistant principal, principal, and executive director of elementary education and federal programs in Mooresville Graded School District, N.C.; then, as curriculum coordinator in Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, N.C. In 2020, she co-chaired the North Carolina State Board of Education Literacy Task Force.

Before coming to CMS in May 2022, Hill was assistant superintendent and chief academic officer for Cabarrus County Schools, N.C., where she led the district in achieving the highest level of academic performance in history. She also currently serves on the Leading on Opportunity Council, an entity of the Foundation For The Carolinas, that uses strategy, policy and data to help its partners across Charlotte-Mecklenburg improve economic mobility for all.



Discovering the Wonders of Biomedical Science

Damian Hutchins, '19, Conducts Doctoral Research on Innovative Cancer Therapy

Damian Hutchins is fascinated by the intricacies of immune cells—the body’s security guards. These agents fight off disease, germs and cancer. However, researchers have found that the body’s immune system can weaken or attack the wrong cells. That’s the area of biomedical science where Hutchins hopes to make a difference.

The 2019 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University is a doctoral research fellow in the Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine (WFIRM), a unit within the Wake Forest University

School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C. The Institute’s physicians and scientists were the first in the world to engineer laboratory-grown organs that were successfully implanted into humans. Hutchins explained how these organs are grown on microfluidic chips that have micro-channels to allow fluids to pass through. “We take human tissue and grow it out of the body in this system that mimics the body’s natural physiology,” Hutchins elaborated.

He works with Dr. Shay Soker, professor of regenerative medicine,

and Dr. Konstantinos Votanopoulos, a surgical oncologist. Once a week, Hutchins observes Votanopoulos performing surgical biopsies in the operating room. “After the surgery, I’ll actually make an immune system on a chip where I can take the patient’s white blood cells and train them to respond to and attack the tumor,” Hutchins related.

The most fascinating aspect of the research is its simplicity and low cost. Hutchins described how current cancer treatments involve genetically modified T cells, which target specific cancers

and have been successful in treating leukemia and lymphoma. “But they’re very expensive, \$500,000 per treatment,” he described. “By using the body’s own mechanisms, we could improve healthcare. So, I don’t need to genetically modify anything, the immune system’s just doing what it already knows how to do.”

The research is promising, but Hutchins said it usually takes about 14 years for a new discovery to gain approval. His hope is that by using the organ on a chip system, researchers could shorten the testing period for new therapies.

Hutchins’ interest in medicine and curiosity about cell biology came from all the time he spent in the hospital as a child. He was born with panhypopituitarism, which means

he doesn’t have a pituitary gland. His mom grew in her faith as she trusted God to take care of her son, and he also connected with God.

When he came to Gardner-Webb, his goal was to major in biology to prepare for Physician Assistant (PA) studies. He also pursued his musical talent by singing in the chorale. “Music was kind of a way in my early life that I connected with others,” Hutchins related. “I got to know both the faculty of the music department and the natural sciences department.”

While music and science might seem like an odd combination, Hutchins said knowing rhythms and harmonies enhances his ability to solve problems and examine details from a different perspective.

He was a student in the Honors program, a member of the Quiz Bowl

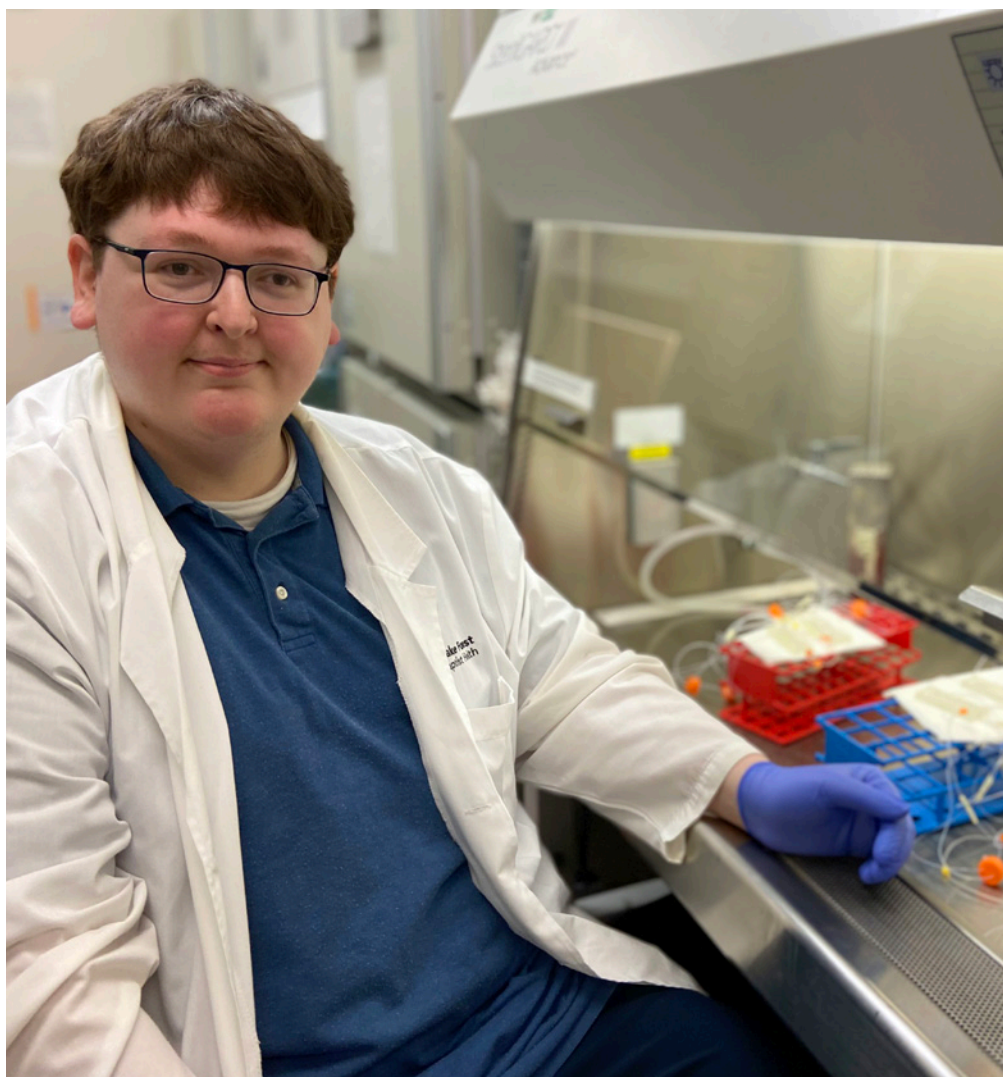
team and active in several honor societies. As a member of Alpha Chi, Hutchins and a team from Gardner-Webb won a first-place prize for their project, “The Psychology of Oceanic Climate Change.” In 2023, as an Alpha Chi alumnus, he received the highest honor given by Alpha Chi, the \$6,000 Pryor Fellowship, for his work on cancer research.

Hutchins was widely known across the GWU campus not only for his academic pursuits but also for his willingness to serve at various events, such as ushering at commencement and helping with activities for children. Because of his involvement in so many different areas, Hutchins was voted Most Outstanding Male Graduate in 2019.

Two professors were instrumental in his decision to change his career focus from PA studies to medical research. Both Dr. Meredith Rowe, associate professor of biology, and Dr. Venita Totten, professor of chemistry, predicted that he would obtain a Ph.D. in research.

Rowe became his mentor in the Summer Undergraduate Research Program. Conducting the project was the spark that ignited Hutchins’ passion for examining the smallest details. “I was able to do my own research on growth hormone and how it affects the body,” he asserted. “In doing that, I was like, ‘This is so cool, and there are people who do this for a living. I want to be the person that makes new treatments,’ and that’s what led to what I’m currently doing today.”

Having that undergraduate experience gave him confidence in graduate school to choose the master’s program at Wake Forest that matched his interests. “Gardner-Webb is a fantastic place to pursue knowledge,” Hutchins stated. “The faculty give you the foundation and the interconnectedness that other universities just don’t have. I find that every faculty member at Gardner-Webb, and even individuals who aren’t faculty, care about your success and what you will do for God and humanity.”





Becoming American

GWU Alumnus Dr. Mamadi Corra Examines African Immigration

Dr. Mamadi Corra, a 1993 and 1995 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, has published his first book, “African Immigrants in the United States: The Gendering Significance of Race through International Migration?” Corra is a professor of sociology at East Carolina University (ECU), where he has worked for 20 years.

A native of The Gambia, West Africa, Corra immigrated to America in 1987 to attend the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon, Ga. He was slowly losing his sight from congenital glaucoma, a condition in which high fluid pressure in the eyes damages the optic nerve.

While at the academy, he learned about the excellent reputation of the Blind and Visually Impaired Program at Gardner-Webb University and enrolled in 1989 before losing his sight completely in 1991.

In the more than three decades that followed, Corra said he’s been blessed with many mentors and encouragers. Through the support of the Gardner-Webb Program, Corra said he is the first blind native Gambian to earn a Bachelor of Science, double majoring in business administration and sociology, and an MBA from Gardner-Webb. He obtained his Ph.D. in sociology from the University

of South Carolina in Columbia.

“It is a good thing that it all started at Gardner-Webb, where a combination of a supportive and loving environment made it possible to continue,” Corra affirmed. “It is befitting to note that two individuals immediately come to mind: the late Dr. Glenn Bottoms and the late Mrs. Barbara Kale (Noel Center secretary). Suffice it to say that it is folks like these two and the many others that became part of my life at GWU that made it possible.”

Moreover, Sharon Jennings, who was program director at the time, was responsible for securing financial

assistance to bring him to GWU and keep him here. “The solid academic background I received at Gardner-Webb continues to serve me well in my professional career,” he stated. “Moreover, the moral and ethical compass embodied in our motto ‘Pro Deo et Humanitate’ (For God and Humanity) continues to be a guiding principle.”

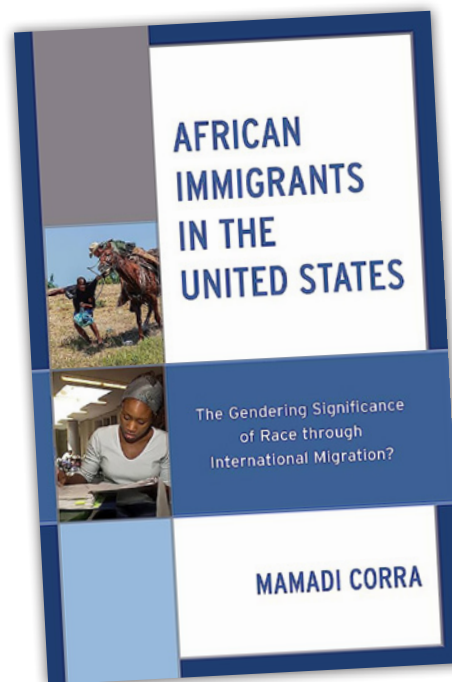
Corra is the graduate director for the sociology Master of Arts program at ECU and is also affiliate faculty with the ECU African and African American Studies Program. He received the Departmental Teaching Excellence Award for Lower Division Courses in 2019-20, 2015-16 and 2013-14.

His book, available through Barnes and Noble and Rowman & Littlefield, takes a closer look at the growth of African immigration to the United States in recent decades, as well as implications of this growth. Corra highlights several resulting sociodemographic processes underway, including the changing composition of the foreign-born and U.S. Black populations. Corra also takes a closer look at sociodemographic profiles of these new African Americans or new Americans, highlighting the increasing diversity, yet also the racialized portrait of this group of immigrants.

“While I am not able to necessarily identify myself among the many African immigrants whose labor market experiences are chronicled in the book; it is, in many respects, a chronicle of my own experience,” Corra noted.

The book has been well-received by leading scholars in the field, who describe it as a clearly written, fine-grained analysis. Guillermina Jasso of New York University, gives the following summation, “Corra is an insightful guide to a new chapter in the story of U.S. immigration, as newcomers build their lives and, in the process, help build a new country.”

Corra is a frequent presenter at scholarly conferences and contributor to academic journals. He is an



associate editor of Migration and Society, a specialty section of Frontiers in Sociology, and co-guest editor of the 2021 special issue, “The Status of Black Sociologists in the 21st Century,” published in the Journal of Economics, Race, and Policy.

He has served on numerous committees at ECU, across the state

and nation, and he enjoys serving as a mentor for graduate students conducting research. “Many have directly touched upon my own life with such activities,” Corra related. “So, it is just returning the same. As my old professor, the late Dr. Bottoms used to remind us before every test he gave, ‘It is blessed to give than receive!’”

In April 2023, he was one of two individuals awarded the Five-Year Achievement for Excellence in Research and Creative Activity at ECU. His many other honors include receiving a grant from the National Science Foundation to fund his dissertation: “The Gatekeeper: An Investigation of Ordering as a Structural Power Condition.” In 2018-19, Corra was fellow in residence for the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Judicial Branch Science and Technology Policy (Science and Law) at the Federal Judicial Center in Washington, D.C. He was honored in 2001 as the GWU Young Alumnus of the Year and continues to serve on the Noel Center for Disability Resources Advisory Board.

CLASSACTS

Gardner-Webb University alumnus, **Dr. Jerret Fite** was named chair of the Division of Religious and Ministry Studies for Clinton College, Rock Hill, S.C. Fite most recently served as a professor of religion and serves as chair of the faculty council. He was also named Faculty of the Year in 2021. He brings practical experience to the role of division chair, having over two decades of experience within the church. Fite currently serves as the pastor of Robinson A.M.E. Zion Church in Cheraw, S.C., where he continues to move ministry in a positive direction.

He serves in his community, including the NAACP, the Balm in Gilead, and Habitat for Humanity.

Fite graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in political science and a minor in History from North Carolina Central University, Durham, N.C. While there, he was the recipient of the prestigious Chancellor's Leadership Award which is granted to outstanding seniors who exhibit a commitment to excellence in the classroom and the community. In 2015, Fite earned a Master of Divinity from Gardner-Webb University and in 2018 he earned a Doctorate of Ministry from Hood Theological Seminary, Salisbury, N.C.



Brian Gwyn, an alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, was named president of Mercy Health – Cincinnati. Gwyn has over two decades of health care experience. Hospital officials believe Gwyn will “further the health care provider’s mission to ‘extend the compassionate ministry of Jesus.’” Gwyn leads an

organization as it strives to “improve the health and well-being of its communities and bring help to those in need.”

In this role, Gwyn is responsible for all Mercy Health operations in the Cincinnati market, including oversight of Mercy Health – Cincinnati’s leadership team.

Previously, Gwyn worked for Atrium Health, where he served for nearly 15 years in a variety of leadership roles. Most recently, he was senior vice president and market president for Atrium’s west market with oversight of six facilities that provided care across seven counties, serving more than half-a-million residents. Before that, Gwyn was president of Atrium Health Cleveland and Atrium Health Kings Mountain facilities.

Gwyn earned his bachelor’s degree, as well as a master’s degree in family and consumer services, from Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. He earned his master’s degree in business administration in health care in 2003 from Gardner-Webb University.

“Brian is a proven servant leader with a track record of driving operational growth and establishing strong work cultures and community partnerships,” said Don Kline, Mercy Health chief operating officer. “I am pleased Brian has chosen to join Mercy Health and the Cincinnati community. We will benefit greatly from his knowledge, passion for health care and the energy he will bring to advancing our mission as well as our strategic and operational goals.”



Molly Law, left, poses with her friends, Wendi Nunnery, center, author of “Good Enough”, and Peyton Garland, her coworker and editor of iBelieve.com, at the Atlanta Writers Conference in Georgia.

At Gardner-Webb University, 2014 alumna **Molly Law** discovered her writing talent and her interest in a scholarly examination of the Bible. Now, as editor of Christianity.com, she recalls topics discussed in her religion classes to propose article ideas or to occasionally write articles and devotions for the website.

Law, who lives in Staunton, Va., majored in English with a professional writing concentration, and minored in biblical studies. She added the minor for two reasons. “I became fascinated by the scholarly side of the Bible—when all my life, I only knew the spiritual side,” Law explained. “Most of my friends were also religious majors and minors, which was another incentive for me to minor in biblical studies.”

When the opportunity came to join Christianity.com in 2019, she accepted the position because she wanted to gain more experience in digital media publishing and was intrigued by the ability to integrate her career and faith. She assigns article topics to about 30 freelancers and also works with a handful of authors who pitch their own topics.

“As the editor of Christianity.com, my minor in biblical studies has provided me with extra background and knowledge of the topics I am able to write and pitch to my writers, expanding the site than what originally existed before I was hired,” Law affirmed.

After completing her degree at GWU, she pursued her master’s in publishing studies at the University of Stirling in Scotland and graduated in 2016. Her first job in publishing was working as a senior editor for a non-profit organization.

To find out more about Law’s work visit molly-law.com.

**A long-form version of this story can be found at gardner-webb.edu/news.*

Gardner-Webb University Football alumnus and former receiver **T.J. Luther** signed a rookie free agent deal with the New York Jets in April 2023.

Luther, from Arcadia, Fla., earned FCS All-America honors from Phil Steele College Football following a terrific senior season with the Runnin’ Bulldogs.

The 6-foot, 185-pound standout led Gardner-Webb with a career-high 63 catches for 1,166 yards and eight touchdowns in 2022, sparking the Dawgs to seven wins, an undefeated Big South Conference season, and a first-round win at Eastern Kentucky in the FCS Playoffs.

Luther was the Big South Conference’s yardage leader and had seven games with at least 100 yards receiving. In addition to All-America honors, Luther was a first-team All-Big South Conference selection following the season.

In his two seasons at Gardner-Webb, Luther caught 84 passes for 1,550 yards and 12 touchdowns in 20 games. Luther was Gardner-Webb’s 89th FCS/Division I-AA All-America selection and the 122nd All-America selection in the program’s senior college history (since 1970).

He is the first receiver prospect to sign a free agent deal with an NFL team since All-America Kenny Cook did so with the Kansas City Chiefs in 2015. Gardner-Webb has seen 19 of its student-athletes signed or drafted by the NFL since 1973. Linebacker Lee Thompson signed with the Houston Oilers in 1973, spearheading that group.



When **Tyra Montour** left Gardner-Webb University in 2016 with her bachelor's degree in communication and media studies, she began working for a public relations firm in Atlanta, Ga. Through this work and interactions with the community, she became interested in issues of disparity and equity within public health.

Not one to stay on the sidelines—as a student or a member of the GWU volleyball team—Montour applied and was accepted into the Master of Public Health program at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) in Atlanta.

“I decided to get my Master of Public Health degree after learning about the impact public health had on our communities, and the field calls for the greater good,” Montour shared. “Through my research and matriculation at MSM, I had the opportunity to be on the ground working with communities that had limited resources and inequitable opportunities, so I have grown a passion for wanting to help people live healthier lives and have access to necessary resources.”

She graduated from MSM in 2020 and entered Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, to pursue her



Doctor of Philosophy in health education. She became a graduate assistant in the Community Health Evaluation & Systems Science lab and the Transdisciplinary Center for Health Equity Research (TCHER pronounced TEACHER). The Center's goal is to improve quality of life across the lifespan among at-risk populations globally.

“Following graduation, I want to work in the public health industry as a health communications specialist and advocate for improving the lives and communications with vulnerable populations,” noted Montour.

The majority of her research is on health disparities, health communications, or socio-economic factors that influence health literacy, knowledge, and awareness in vulnerable or immigrant populations. She has shared presentations at the American Public Health Association annual meeting and the Society for Public Health Education.

“Black people are not monolithic and through my work I'd like to serve those communities, Black immigrants, Black women, and those who are experiencing worse health outcomes and health inequities,” she asserted.

Gardner-Webb University alumnus **Evans P. Whitaker** was awarded South Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Palmetto, on Feb. 22, 2023. The presentation was made during an event that honored his 20-year tenure in higher education as a college president.

The Order of the Palmetto was established in 1971 by Gov. John West. The remarks and resolutions are both honors written by government officials to highlight an individual's accomplishments or event's significance in the lives of local citizens.

Whitaker joined Anderson University in November 2002 as president. A native



of Shelby, N.C., Whitaker earned a Bachelor of Science degree in business administration in 1983 from Gardner-Webb. In 1986, he earned a Master of Education degree from Vanderbilt Peabody College of Education and Human Development, and in 1999 he earned a Ph.D. degree from the Vanderbilt University Graduate School, Nashville, Tenn. His dissertation on organizational commitment was published in 1999 and won two international awards from the Council for

Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) as the best dissertation of the year.

Because of his extensive work in the discipline of organizational science, he has had faculty appointments in the Jack C. Massey Graduate School of Business at Belmont University in Nashville, and the College of Business at Anderson University.

Whitaker also serves as a professor of management, leadership and organizations at Anderson, while his wife Diane works as an admission counselor and serves on the boards of Greater Anderson Musical Arts, the Salvation Army and the United Way.

Source: Greenville Journal & Anderson University

NEWS & NOTES

New York Times Ranks Gardner-Webb No. 1 in Campus Safety and No. 7 in N.C. for Economic Mobility

The editors of The New York Times ranked Gardner-Webb University No. 1 in campus safety among all North Carolina colleges, No. 2 in affordability and No. 7 for economic mobility among private colleges in North Carolina.

Gardner-Webb also ranks No. 2 among private colleges in North Carolina when applying equal importance to the characteristics of economic mobility, affordability, and academic profile.

Gardner-Webb's ranking on economic

mobility is higher than several public institutions including Appalachian State University, UNC-Asheville, UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. State and UNC-Wilmington. GWU is also listed higher than Davidson College, Duke University, Elon University, Meredith College, Queens University, and Wake Forest University.

The New York Times tool allows students to see how schools rank on 10 different criteria. The student rates each factor on the characteristics that are

most important to them. Students can also filter schools according to size, type and location.

The list included 883 U.S. colleges; only those schools that graduate more than 50 percent of their students were admitted to the study.

The Times used data from these public sources: the National Center for Education Statistics, the College Scorecard, Niche.com and Opportunity Insights.

The New York Times “What Matters Most” College Rankings GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY

1 Campus Safety*
Among All
North Carolina
Colleges

2 Affordability
Among Private
Colleges in
North Carolina
*combines Low Sticker Price
and Low Net Price

7 Economic Mobility
Among Private
Colleges in
North Carolina
*post-graduation higher
income potential

8 Racially Diverse
Among Private
Colleges in
North Carolina

10 Academic Profile
Among Private
Colleges in
North Carolina

The interactive tool ranks 883 U.S. Colleges, 26 in North Carolina. The colleges are ranked on 10 criteria. Only colleges that graduate more than 50 percent of their students are included. The Times used data from these public sources: The National Center for Education Statistics, the College Scorecard, Niche.com and Opportunity Insights. *April 2023

Gardner-Webb Ranked Nationally by Washington Monthly

In its 2022 National University Rankings, Washington Monthly placed Gardner-Webb University in the top five among private colleges in North Carolina. On the national level, GWU was ranked above Liberty University, Va., Tulane University, La., Robert Morris University, Penn., Baylor University, Texas, and Southern Methodist University, Texas. This distinctive honor recognizes Gardner-Webb for excellence in three areas: social mobility, research and promoting public service.

Recognition as a National University places Gardner-Webb within Washington Monthly's highest tier of U.S. colleges, which includes schools awarding a significant number of doctoral degrees.

With its designation as a National University, Gardner-Webb is ranked in a higher tier than several other private schools in the Carolinas, including: Anderson University, S.C., Converse College, S.C., Davidson College, N.C., Furman University, S.C., Lenoir Rhyne University, N.C., Meredith College, N.C., Methodist University, N.C., and Wofford College, S.C.

Founded in 2005, Washington Monthly's College Guide and Rankings evaluates schools based on student and graduate outcomes and opportunities. Scores are determined by using the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. Schools are evaluated based on their contribution to the public good in three broad categories: social mobility, research, and promoting public service.



GWU Library Dean and Archivist Leads Preservation of 1967 Mural in Dover Center

A 33-foot mural depicting the history of textiles—familiar to generations of Gardner-Webb University students—will soon find a new home. It was removed from the Hoyt Bailey Dining Room in Gardner-Webb's Dover Campus Center and plans are to reinstall it later in the University's new Welcome and Admissions Center.

The painter, Sidney King, was a nationally known artist from Milford, Va., who painted the largest mural in North America (400 feet long x 75 feet tall) in the rotunda of the Mormon Information Center in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The mural was dedicated on Jan. 28, 1967, and the *Shelby Star* reported that over 20 North Carolina textile firms gathered to view and take part in the dedication. The painting symbolizes the history of textiles from around 5000 B.C. to what was then the future, the year 2000. The article said King used a new synthetic type of paint, acrylic, and worked on the project for 35 days.

To ensure this historic artwork was removed carefully and without damage to the canvas on which it was painted,



the University received expert guidance. Support came from Jeff Futch of The North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and Craig Crawford of Crawford Conservation in Charleston, S.C.

MPA Program Exceeds Expectations



Dr. Bobbie Cox

The affordability and flexibility of Gardner-Webb University Online 10-month Master of Public Administration (MPA) degree attracted more students than initially expected, and the interest continues to grow. The successful program launched in January 2023 with two cohorts to meet the demand.

The MPA is offered in eight-week terms with new classes beginning every eight weeks.

Available 100 percent online with competitive tuition, the MPA is geared toward working professionals and prepares public servants for successful leadership careers in local, state, federal, and nonprofit agencies. In addition, through the First Responder's Grant, eligible students receive a discount on tuition, which

is renewable through the completion of their program.

Professor and Chair of the Department of Public Service Dr. Bobbie Cox developed the program with an emphasis on real-world ethical applications of content. "The skills and knowledge that students learn should be something they can use," Cox stipulated.

The faculty teach from the practical experience they gained while working in public administrations for state and local governments and nonprofit agencies. They stay current on trends by networking with people in the profession and joining professional organizations to learn about new legislation and other relative topics.

Gardner-Webb Physician Assistant Department and Johnson C. Smith University Announce Partnership

The Gardner-Webb University Department of Physician Assistant (PA) Medicine has announced a partnership with Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU). Through this new agreement, JCSU graduates who are interested in a career as a certified PA can apply for a Reserve Applicant spot with the Gardner-Webb PA program.

Two Reserve Applicant spots will be available each year to JCSU graduates who meet criteria for admission to GWU's PA program. "We are extremely honored and excited for the opportunity to work with JCSU and their graduates," stated Ashley Kernicky, GWU interim PA program director. "Gardner-Webb aims to build accessible, high-quality academic programs. Our PA program continues to strive in developing knowledgeable and caring PAs from diverse backgrounds."

Johnson C. Smith Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Melita Pope Mitchell noted that Gardner-Webb has a similar close-knit environment to JCSU. "We are excited about the



possibilities this partnership opens up for our students interested in PA careers," Mitchell affirmed. "I am confident that with the strong foundation they

receive at JCSU, they will continue to soar at GWU. This partnership will help diversify the field with competent and caring professionals."

Webb in Washington Scholar Moryah Snype Discovers the World

Gardner-Webb University senior Moryah Snype applied to Webb in Washington in 2022 because as a political science and international affairs major, she wanted to engage more closely with other cultures and those with worldwide life experiences. Her living and learning experience in the nation's capital met her goal, providing her with many fruitful opportunities.

Snype believes she is better prepared academically for graduate school and for international relations. "What I enjoyed the most was hearing thoughts from other people from different countries like France and Germany," observed Snype, who is from Charleston, S.C. "One of my roommates was from the UK, the other one from Japan."

Snype took applicable classes and completed an internship with



mEducation Alliance. She explored the city for a semester with the other students and participated in events sponsored by international embassies. Snype has already benefitted from participating with Webb in Washington; this experience helped her gain admission into graduate school at Seton Hall University in

South Orange, N.J. Her goal is to work for the United Nations human rights department.

Webb in Washington is a partnership with American University and was launched with an initial donation from Gardner-Webb alumnus, Chris Meekins, and his wife, Amanda, who live and work in the D.C. area.



Meet Rachel Gaura: Gardner-Webb's Newest Tucker Scholar

Gardner-Webb University's 2022 Tucker Scholar, Rachel Gaura of Springfield High School in Chapin, S.C., is known for her caring spirit and humble nature, and as a servant leader in church, school and community.

"Being a Tucker Scholar will allow me opportunities to grow in my faith, be challenged academically, and develop skills to fulfill my purpose," Gaura observed. "The programs at Gardner-Webb are exactly what I need; the campus and student life are unmatched. I am looking forward to finding my place in the Gardner-Webb community."

Established in 2019 by Carolyn and Robert Tucker, the scholarship is based on Mark 12:29-31. The recipient of the annual award receives an eight-semester full-tuition, room and board scholarship.

Gaura is thankful for her parents, extended family, church leaders and teachers, whose steadfast faith influenced her character. Their examples of service and her own volunteer opportunities have ignited her interest to major in psychology at Gardner-Webb.

Gaura served as president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), vice president of hospitality for Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), vice president of Students in Action, a youth ministry leader, and a volunteer with the Special Olympics. As an accomplished dancer, she has also mentored young dancers.

Gardner-Webb's Online Degree in Elementary Education Achieves Rapid Growth

In 2019, Gardner-Webb University's College of Education launched the Teacher Assistant (TA) to Teacher Program in response to meeting the critical teacher shortage in North Carolina. Since then, enrollment in the online degree program in elementary education has grown from 71 in 2019 to 172 students in spring 2023.

Several factors contribute to the program's popularity, noted College of Education Dean and Professor Dr. Prince Bull. Offered fully online, the bachelor's program includes a support system for students. In addition to instructors, students have access to mentors, program assessors and other advisors.



Dr. Prince Bull

Also contributing to the program's growth is the development of partnerships with area school systems. Dr. Lane Wesson, GWU professor of education and coordinator of teacher education, noted, "The College of Education has a strong relationship with Gaston County Schools and has provided an avenue for their current TA and residency candidates to attend virtual classes in the evenings. We hope to develop similar partnerships with other public-school systems who want to support their TAs and hire them in local schools."

Bull shared that Gardner-Webb's program receives high marks from teacher candidates as reported on the North Carolina Department of Instruction's Educator Preparation Program Dashboard. "GWU ranks as the #2 ... in overall employer satisfaction," Bull praised.



Gardner-Webb Doctoral and Accelerated Bachelor's Nursing Programs Surge in Enrollment

Gardner-Webb University is home to one of North Carolina's most comprehensive nursing programs that includes associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. Students who desire to enter the field of nursing or those who want to further their careers are choosing the GWU Hunt School of Nursing. Enrollment in the Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program has grown from 14 to 73 in recent years, and the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program has increased from 47 in 2019 to 96 in spring 2023.

Hunt School of Nursing Director Dr. Tracy Arnold noted that Gardner-Webb's ABSN program plays a critical role in addressing the current nationwide nursing shortage because it allows the nursing faculty to prepare entry-level practitioners to enter the workforce in 15 months.

"Our Accelerated BSN students are highly qualified individuals, with bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in other fields," Arnold praised. "Our program attracts students from all over the east coast, with some students commuting up to two hours, one way, which speaks to the reputation of our faculty, staff, and curriculum. Our Hunt School of Nursing motto, 'A Bulldog Nurse CARES,' demonstrates the characteristics both our students and faculty demonstrate. As a Bulldog nurse, we are Courageous, we are Advocates, we are Respectful, we are Empathetic, and we are Servant leaders."

The Hunt School of Nursing gained media attention for these efforts from Spectrum News and was featured in a segment that was aired statewide in North Carolina.

GWU Rolls Out Branded Food Truck 'Sup Dawgs

'Sup Dawgs—the new Aramark food truck on the Gardner-Webb University campus has been unveiled—providing a regular game day menu of specialty burgers, hot dogs, and Philly cheesesteaks, along with specialty sides and beverages. Seasonal and other select items are added for spotlight events, and the truck is available by request for community functions. The University branded 'Sup Dawgs, complete with artistic renderings of the GWU live mascot, Bo, makes a splash whenever it arrives on location.

“One of the benefits of having a food truck is the opportunity to utilize 'Sup Dawgs for community engagement as well as to provide additional food options at sporting events and special events on campus for employees, students, and visitors,” observed Brittany Cook, senior district marketing manager with Aramark. “You can always keep up with



'Sup Dawgs events and menu options on our Instagram, @dawgdining, or on our website at gardnerwebb.campusdish.com.”
The 'Sup Dawgs food truck has been a

successful staple at numerous events and gatherings throughout the University community including the WebbStock Music Fest.



GWU School of Nursing Partners with CaroMont Health to Help Students Finish Education

A partnership between CaroMont Health and Gardner-Webb University's Hunt School of Nursing addresses the nursing shortage while helping students complete requirements for licensure. Through this initiative, CaroMont Health offers senior nursing students \$7,500 in tuition assistance and the opportunity to complete their required practicum hours at the hospital. In return, the students agree to work as a Registered Nurse (RN) for CaroMont Health for two years after graduation. For the spring 2023 semester, eight GWU students received assistance.

Hunt School of Nursing Director Dr. Tracy Arnold said the agreement is not only a win for the two institutions but also for the community. “Securing a partnership with CaroMont Health that supports both the educational needs of our students and the workforce needs of Gaston County reinforces the shared commitment both GWU and CaroMont Health have to meeting the needs of our communities,” Arnold affirmed. “This partnership addresses the challenges that both higher education and health care organizations have in preparing nurses to enter a complex health care environment.”

CaroMont Health offers the tuition assistance program to all senior nursing students, both in the Associate of Science in Nursing and Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree programs.



WebbStock '23 a Success

Gardner-Webb University and the Town of Boiling Springs hosted five bands at Webbstock '23. The annual event continues to grow in regional name recognition, attendance, and vendor participation. Main Street, Boiling Springs, was closed to vehicle traffic, and live music, local artisans, food trucks and a kids' zone complemented the picture-perfect day.

Plans are already underway for next year's event. Follow Gardner-Webb on social media or check out gardner-webb.edu/news for upcoming events and activities like this.



Scan this QR code to view the video of WebbStock '23

Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs Elected to Lead Big South Executive Committee

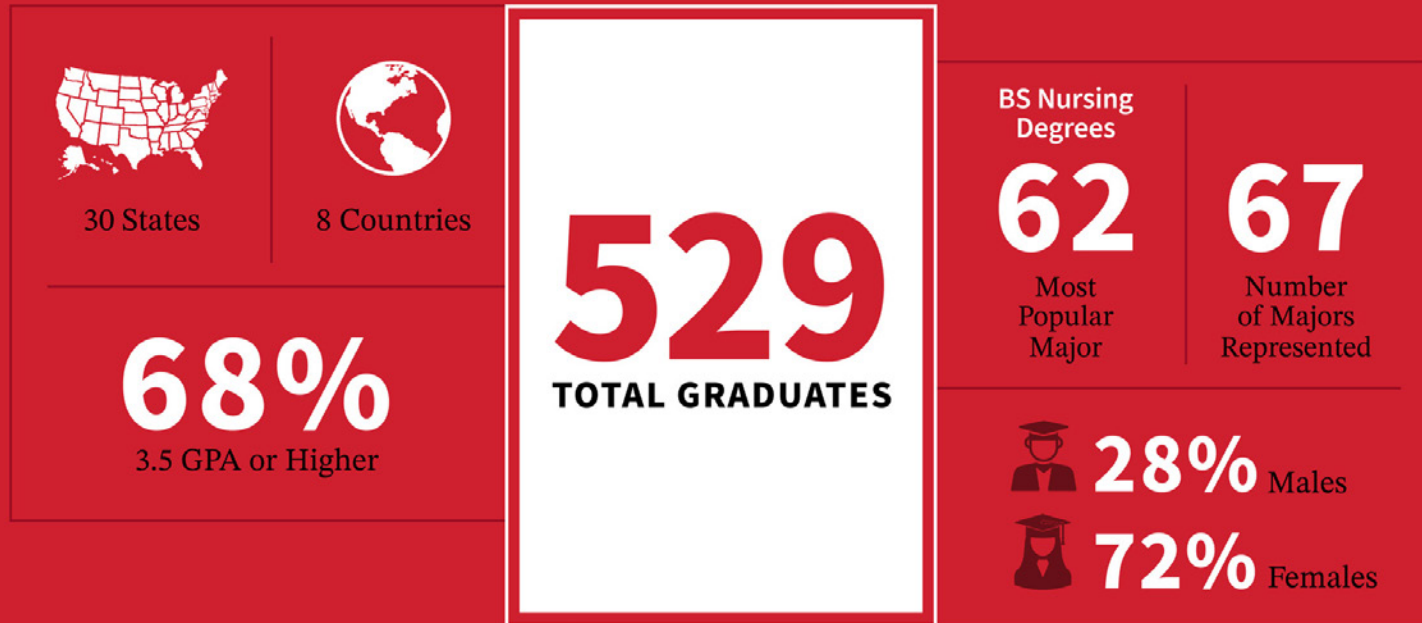
The Big South Conference Council of Chief Executive Officers unanimously approved the league's Executive Committee for the next two academic years. With this action, Gardner-Webb University President Dr. William M. Downs has been elevated to Big South President for 2023-24 and 2024-25.

"This is truly an exciting time of renewal and opportunity for the Big South Conference," Downs observed. "As we welcome our new commissioner, Sherika Montgomery, we are energized to strengthen our conference brand, to elevate the level of competition across all sports at all member institutions, and to keep our ultimate focus on the student-athletes and on the quality of their collegiate experience. The Big South President has the privilege of working alongside an outstanding group of CEOs, and I'm eager to see all that we can accomplish together in the coming years."

Downs has served the Big South's Executive Committee as vice president and as an at-large member since 2021. He is the second Gardner-Webb president elected to serve as Big South Conference President, as GWU's Dr. Frank Bonner held the office four years from 2013-17.

The Big South Conference Executive Committee has the authority to make decisions, when necessary, for the Big South Council of Chief Executive Officers. Additionally, the Executive Committee hears any appeals regarding penalties imposed by the Commissioner.

GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY '23 SPRING GRADUATES



GWU Welcomes Over 800 New Alumni with Commencement Celebrations

Gardner-Webb University celebrated with over 800 graduates at the University's formal commencement events in December and May. Former N.C. Secretary of Commerce Sharon Decker was the guest speaker for the spring commencement, while Dr. A. Hope Williams, president of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU), served as the featured speaker for December.

Two students were recognized with the Most Outstanding Graduate Medals. The awards recognized outstanding leadership, citizenship, and academic excellence. Gabrielle Martin, of Statesville, N.C., who received a Bachelor of Arts in music, was honored with the Most Outstanding Female Graduate Medal. Martin has participated in the Opera Theatre at GWU as well as several music ensembles, including Concert Choir, Old Time Ensemble and Treble Chorale.



Micah Zehnder, of Boiling Springs, N.C., who earned a Bachelor of Arts in art, received the Most Outstanding Male Graduate Medal. A potter, Zehnder's specialty is making ceramic musical instruments. During his career at Gardner-Webb, he's also received academic awards in art history and German.

Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs challenged graduates to "Be unapologetic in sharing the values that you hold dear. Be bold in your humility. Be brave in your defense of what is good, what is right, and what is noble in this world. Do these things and you will successfully carry out the mission you have been blessed to receive."



Brian Baker



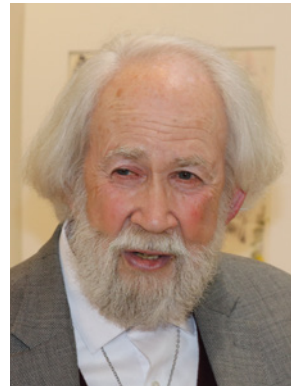
Chuck Burch



Franki Burch



Marc Rabb



Joseph Webb

Gardner-Webb Awards Faculty Emeritus Status and Long-time Faculty/Staff Retire

Several Gardner-Webb University faculty and staff members were recognized with retirement. Two were honored with emeriti titles: Dr. Franki Burch, professor emeritus of education, and Chuck Burch, athletic director emeritus. The retirees are:

Brian Baker

22 years of service, head coach for track and field and cross country. Baker was a former Atlantic Sun coach of the year.

Chuck Burch

Over 25 years of service as vice president and director of athletics. Burch's final stint at GWU was focused on athletics' fundraising for advancement.

Franki Burch

Retired as professor in the College of Education after 24 years of service. She also worked several years as the Associate Provost for Professional and Graduate Studies.

Alison Kernicky

20 years of service and retired as administrative assistant to the vice president for Athletics.

Cynthia Moore

14 years of service and retired as operations coordinator for technology services.

Deirdre Pettis

16 years of service and retired as coordinator of tutoring and testing.

Marc Rabb

25 years of service in sports information, marketing and athletics' media relations. Rabb left as Assistant Athletic Director for Media Relations.

Joseph Webb

15 years of service and retired as professor of Communication Studies. Webb was honored with the 2015 Excellence in Teaching Award from GWU.

Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky Thunder w/ Special Guest Will Jones
 Saturday, October 28, 2023 | Doors Open at 5:00 PM
 General Admission

Faculty Recognized for Service and Teaching

Gardner-Webb University President Dr. William Downs announced numerous honors for faculty over the course of the 2021-22 academic year. Honors recognized service, mentoring, excellence in teaching, emerging leadership and others. Below are some of those recipients.



Dr. Elizabeth Amato

Dr. Elizabeth Amato received Gardner-Webb's Excellence in Teaching Award. This honor is presented annually, and recognizes academic rigor, effective course design, and dedication to students. Amato is associate professor of political science and international relations in the Department of Social Sciences. Amato has rewritten the curriculum for political science, developed a Political Science Club and a Pre-Law Society. She is also a champion for student research.



Tara Hayes

Dr. Erin Cook received the President's Early Career Award. Cook, assistant professor and program coordinator for human services, was selected for the honor based on her productivity in scholarship, creative discovery, service, and instruction that exceeds expectations.



Dr. Erin Cook

Dr. Stefka Eddins was honored with the Faculty Service Award. Eddins, a professor of chemistry, is the former department and faculty chair. She serves on various university committees, and provided guidance and wisdom in the creation of the bio-chemistry major. She is a department leader and collaborates across departments, and she volunteers at her church and with the Prospora Ministry.



Dr. Eric Johnson

Tara Hayes was named as the Mentoring and Academic Advising Award recipient. Hayes, instructor and Registered Nurse-Bachelor of Science in nursing (RN-BSN) program coordinator in the Hunt School of Nursing, was honored for excellence in mentoring, advising, out-of-class support, encouragement, and collaboration on student research projects.



Dr. Stefka Eddins

Dr. Eric Johnson was selected for the Rising Star Award. Johnson is an assistant professor of Music Education. This award is given to a full-time faculty member employed five or fewer years at GWU who demonstrates standards of excellence in scholarship, teaching, and service.

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◀ This is the officially licensed Gardner-Webb bobblehead mascot and it is available at bobbleheadhall.com



Dr. Natalie Edwards Bishop Promoted to Dean of Gardner-Webb's Dover Library

Bishop came to Gardner-Webb University in 2007 as instruction librarian and began serving as University archivist in 2010.

In this position, she has helped leverage the archive collection for teaching, scholarship, and fundraising. A key focus of her preservation strategy is digitization projects, such as the Fay Webb Gardner Collection and Kings Mountain Baptist Association Collection, which allow the library to expose historic collections to a broader audience. Through partnerships and collaborative exhibits with local museums, Dover Library is utilizing its collections for education and outreach in an innovative way.

Bishop earned a Doctor of Education in curriculum and instruction from GWU, a Master of Library and Information Science from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and a Bachelor of Arts in history from Wingate University, N.C.



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Alumnus Selected as VP and University Chaplain for Christian Life and Service

Dr. Josh Parrott was named to helm the Christian Life and Services arm of Gardner-Webb University. Parrott, a 2003 alumnus of GWU, has over 21 years of experience in the church



and in higher education. Parrott received his Master of Divinity in pastoral ministry with biblical languages notation in 2006 from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C. He earned his Master of Theology in biblical studies with a concentration in New Testament in 2007, also from Southeastern.

From 2007 to 2020, Parrott was associate professor of religion at Louisburg College, a private school in North Carolina. In addition to teaching a full-time course load, he served as the chaplain for the men's basketball team.

In July 2020, Parrott became a certified chaplain with Corporate Chaplains of America. He has also served as the pastor for churches in North and South Carolina.

Sharon Hammonds Named as AVP for Human Resources

Sharon Hammonds has 18 years of experience in Human Resources (HR) in corporate and higher education settings. Prior to coming to Gardner-Webb University, Hammonds



was the HR manager for Walmart Supply Chain and Logistics in Laurens, S.C. She previously served as the chief of staff and operations for Meeting Street Schools in Spartanburg, S.C. In this position, she led HR functions for compliance, engagement and retention, hiring, and employee development. She also advised the leadership team, managed budgets,

and conducted investigations to facilitate resolutions for employee grievances.

She has also managed HR for Venture Measurement (A Fortive Company), Vision to Destiny (V2D), Spartanburg Community College, Limestone College, and Proaxis Therapy.

Gardner-Webb President Announces New Vice President for Enrollment Management

Dean T. Clark brings 20 years of experience working at private faith-based liberal arts institutions. Previously, Clark



was executive vice president of Southwestern College in Winfield, Kan., and a member of the president's core cabinet. Under his leadership, Southwestern enrolled the first-, second-, third- and fifth-largest freshmen classes in school history. He also revamped the entire admissions process, including updating technology, to help drive enrollment.

Clark supervised the vice presidents for main campus and professional studies enrollment, the vice president for student success, and the directors of financial aid and athletics. Before that, he served as Southwestern's vice president for enrollment.

Scott Merritt Named as Women's Basketball Head Coach



Merritt comes to Gardner-Webb University from the University of Wisconsin, where he has served as associate head coach. In 2022-23,

Merritt helped the Badgers to their highest Big Ten win total since 2010-11 and the program's highest Big Ten finish in 11 seasons.

Merritt was also an assistant coach at Illinois for two seasons and spent six seasons as an assistant coach at Marquette University.

During his time coaching at Marquette, he helped the Golden Eagles earn three Big East titles, four consecutive 20-win seasons, and three NCAA Tournament appearances.

As a player, the 6-foot-10 center at Marquette, Merritt finished his career with 1,049 points, 697 rebounds and 113 blocks—all which rank among the school's best.

Merritt was the program's all-time leader playing 126 career games and helped the team earn a Final Four appearance in 2003—averaging 10.1 points and 6.6 rebounds per game in a lineup that included future NBA superstar Dwayne Wade.

Gardner-Webb Names New Head Soccer Coach

Scott Wells, a Coventry, England, native, comes to Gardner-Webb University after building national recognition for UNC-Greensboro as associate head coach and lead recruiter.

Wells helped engineer a Southern Conference regular season and conference title in 2022 for UNCG and advanced to the NCAA Elite Eight with tournament wins over Ohio State and Stanford. The Spartans earned its highest ever ranking in the final national polls, coming in at No. 5 in the United Soccer Coaches poll.

He came to UNCG after two years as the top assistant at the University of Charleston, W.Va. He helped guide



the team to a pair of NCAA Sweet 16 appearances and the 2017 NCAA Division II National Championship.

He began as a graduate assistant coach at the University of Rio Grande, Ohio, helping the RedStorm to a No. 1

national ranking in 2014 and a 2015 NAIA National Championship.

Wells played collegiately at Limestone University in nearby Gaffney, S.C., and was team captain for two seasons.

Ron Newcomb Named as Chief of Police for Gardner-Webb



Ron Newcomb brings over three decades of law enforcement to the role as chief of police; he has served as Gardner-Webb University assistant chief since 2020. He succeeds Chief Barry Johnson, who retired in September 2022 after 26 years of service to the University.

Newcomb served as an infantryman in the Army, rising to the rank of sergeant. He served in the Middle East during Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. He earned the Expert Infantry Badge, Army Achievement Award, Airborne Wings, and Army Commendation Medal, among other awards. Newcomb joined the Cleveland County Sheriff's Office in the 1990s. During his tenure there, he held several leadership positions.

He has additional training in firearms instruction, physical fitness, rapid deployment, and other Advanced Law Enforcement Certificates from the N.C. Sheriffs' Educational Training and Standards Commission, as well as the N.C. Criminal Educational Training and Standards Commission.

Dr. Robert G. Prickett Named New Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Prickett previously served as associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C., a position he held for seven years. Prickett worked at Winthrop in various administrative and teaching roles since 2010.

Prickett holds advanced degrees from Ball State University in Muncie, Ind., and Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. His specialties include English, journalism, secondary education, curriculum and instruction, and news-editorial.

Before working at Winthrop, Prickett served as assistant professor in the Department of Education at Centenary College of Louisiana in Shreveport.

During his career, Prickett

has held three department chair positions in education, English, and interdisciplinary studies at his two previous institutions. Prickett's vast experience also includes co-leadership in the development of a dual enrollment program for Winthrop University.



Mike Whiteman Named New Vice President for Finance and Administration

Whiteman is the new vice president for Finance and Administration at Gardner-Webb University. He has 15 years of experience in higher education and his background includes work in public accounting, insurance and non-profit industries.

Whiteman serves as GWU's Chief Financial Officer and a member of the President's Cabinet. He is responsible for the fiscal integrity of the University. He works closely with the University's leadership to strategically and operationally advance Gardner-Webb's financial and administrative position and functions.



Previously, Whiteman served as vice president for Finance and Administrative Services at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C. He managed annual fiscal resources totaling \$225 million from several revenue streams.

IN MEMORIAM

Gardner-Webb Remembers Former Board of Trustee Member, Rodney Allison

Alumnus Supported the University's Goals to Serve Students and the Community

A former member of the Gardner-Webb University Board of Trustees, Rodney Brian Allison, 63, passed away on Friday, June 9, 2023, at his home. Born in Durham, N.C., Allison was a 1982 alumnus of GWU, earning his Bachelor of Science in business administration.

As a trustee, Allison enjoyed his time advising the University on many goals and achievements to help serve the Gardner-Webb community. He was also a member of the Presidential Search Committee in 2018-19 that chose GWU President Dr. William M. Downs as the University's next leader.

"I remember meeting Rodney Allison for the first time back during the presidential search process," Downs reflected. "He had this big, booming voice that was full of both authority and positivity... you could just hear it in that voice how much Rodney loved his alma mater. We're going to make Gardner-Webb 'one of the greatest universities in the Southeast,' Rodney would tell me."

Downs continued, "He was enthusiastic and supportive of GWU, and I'm so grateful for the many occasions on which he took the time to be friendly and generous to my family. Upon hearing the news of his passing, I went back to read our last text messages to each other ... he had written to wish Kim (President Downs' wife) a happy Mother's Day. Always thinking and doing for others ... that was Rodney Allison. We shall certainly miss him."

A successful commercial realtor in the Durham area, he spent the



majority of his professional life with Property Advisory Services. He served as president of the firm for at least 30 years. Allison supported the Godbold School of Business and Center for Ethics and Entrepreneurship by participating in educational programs. During one event, he and Walter Dalton, former N.C. lieutenant governor, led a discussion

on entrepreneurship.

Allison was also an active member of The Summit Church-North Durham Campus. He was a member of the Building Search Committee for the North Durham Campus.

He is survived by his wife of 38 years, Kim Vaughan Allison, two daughters and two grandchildren.

Dr. Glenn Bottoms, Professor Emeritus of Economics and Management, Passes Away at 76

Longtime Professor Respected his Students and Passionate About Helping Them Succeed

Dr. Glenn Bottoms, professor emeritus of economics and management, passed away on May 12, 2023. He retired from Gardner-Webb University in 2018 after more than three decades as a professor of economics and management information systems. Before accepting the position at GWU and moving to Boiling Springs, N.C., in 1985, Bottoms taught in Canada, Georgia, and Cullowhee, N.C.

Friend and colleague, Dr. Sandy van der Poel, associate professor of accounting, knew Bottoms for many years. “Prior to working at GWU, I knew him from church, and later as a professor in my MBA program here at GWU,” van der Poel reflected. “As a student, I remember that he enjoyed his job immensely, cared deeply for each of his students, and had a passion for his chosen discipline in business and economics. As a colleague, I remember him as a good friend with a big heart for others, and someone that loved to laugh and enjoy life.”

Dr. Anthony Negbenebor, professor of economics and international business,



also praised “my good friend, Glenn—he was one of the most prolific faculty members I have worked with in many years. He cared for all students. He was the first to donate a vehicle to assist international students who needed rides to Shelby and the Charlotte airport. He and his wife hosted students regularly in their home. He was also a teacher’s teacher and taught with passion.”

Coming from a family of educators, Bottoms often discussed his passion for teaching. He believed that teaching individuals was the most important aspect of his job. His wife, Dr. Nancy Rogers Bottoms, said Glenn remembered his students by name, the year they graduated, and what they did after graduating.

Bottoms attended his hometown university, Emory, where he met Nancy and they married when they finished in 1969. The couple taught middle school for two years and then moved to Pukatawagan, Manitoba, in response to a newspaper ad to teach at a Federal Reserve school.

He completed his Master of Arts in economics at the University of Ottawa, Canada. In 1976, the couple returned to Atlanta, Ga., and Bottoms obtained his Ph.D. in economics from Georgia State University. During his doctoral studies, he taught at both Western Carolina University and West Georgia University in Carrollton as an assistant professor of economics.

Longtime Sociology Professor Dr. Robert Munoz Remembered for Calming Spirit

Dr. Robert “Rob” Munoz, 69, passed away on May 26, 2023, in Shelby, N.C. He retired in 2019 from Gardner-Webb University as a professor of sociology. A native of Seneca, Ohio, Munoz came to work at GWU in 1989.

He received his Ph.D. in rural sociology at The Ohio State University in Columbus. He also earned his Master of Science from Ohio State and his Bachelor of Science in 1975 from the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

While earning his doctorate, he worked as a research associate at Ohio State for the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology.

After completing his doctorate in 1979, Munoz worked nine years for the United States Department of Agriculture in the Economic Research Service. He was responsible for conducting research and analysis on the effects of programs and policies designed to improve the farm and nonfarm income opportunities of

farm families. He worked with farmers in Mississippi, Tennessee, Wisconsin and Ohio. He also served as an adjunct professor at Ohio State.

Munoz was a member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Shelby, N.C. He liked visiting the beach, playing racquetball and collecting old money. He was preceded in death by his wife, Lynn Childers Munoz. He enjoyed spending time with his two daughters and grandchildren.



GWU Alumnus and Former CBF Leader Don Durham Passes Away

Former leader of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) Foundation and Gardner-Webb University alumnus, Don Durham, passed away in the fall of 2022. Durham was a well-loved figure who was always said to be both passionate and compassionate.

Durham was so inspirational that he was awarded the Gardner-Webb Distinguished Alumnus award in 2002. Before serving CBF, Durham worked for

the University's office of the President and University Advancement.

"Don was an essential member of CBF's leadership for many years," said CBF Coordinator Paul Baxley in a statement to Baptist News Global. Durham was the CBF president from 2002 to 2010 and worked with many local Baptist churches and organizations during his time as the president. Hal Bass also told Baptist News Global that Durham was

a "visionary, conscious-raising leader for the Foundation and the broader CBF movement."

During his time in leadership, Durham grew CBF Foundation's assets by about \$20 million despite two stock market crashes. The Foundation reached fiscal stability and his efforts strengthened the bonds between local churches and CBF.

After serving as a powerful leader for eight years, Durham left behind the white-collar life. At the age of 41, he changed his approach to ministry by reaching those he felt the church had left behind.

He became a true "field" pastor, growing food for those in need, and trading in a shirt and tie and clean shave for overalls and grown-out hair and beard. His garden, Healing Springs Acres, provided food in Denton, N.C., and nearby communities. The food was distributed by his new biker ministry in Thomasville, N.C.

For those who knew Durham, this change made complete sense. When Durham was introduced as the president of the CBF Foundation, he was asked what he liked to do in his spare time and Durham responded, "I'm a bull rider in rodeos." Reflecting on Durham's statement, Daniel Vestal, former CBF executive coordinator, said the comment "fit him well."

Durham was also known to be a fierce advocate for social and economic justice. He spent time introducing many to the book "A Billion Bootstraps: Microcredit, Barefoot Banking, and The Business Solution for Ending Poverty." All of this led to him giving up his six-figure salary to work in the soil and dedicate more to smaller communities. Because of the endowments he helped start and his efforts to reach people "living on the margins," Durham's impact on North Carolina will be seen for years to come.

Support sources content for this story was gathered from Baptist News Global and CBF.

Bob Shepherd Remembered for His Pastoral Ministry and Service to Gardner-Webb and School of Divinity

Former University Vice President of Development and Trustee Passes Away on April 30

Bob D. Shepherd, a pastor and former vice president for development at Gardner-Webb University, passed away on April 30, 2023. Shepherd, 93, touched and enriched countless lives through his 60-year ministry career. He also served two terms on the GWU Board of Trustees and was recognized as a trustee emeritus in 2020.

Shepherd made history at Gardner-Webb in 1998 when the Bob D. Shepherd Endowed Chair in Biblical Studies was established and named in his honor. This endowment was the first of its kind at Gardner-Webb. Its purpose was to provide professional development expenses for the person within the role.

School of Divinity Dean and Professor of Christian Theology Dr. Robert W. Canoy described Shepherd as “one of the moving forces in the early life of the School of Divinity.” Dr. Jim McConnell, professor of New Testament interpretation, expressed his honor to hold the Shepherd Chair. “I am thankful for Dr. Bob and Dolores Shepherd’s generosity in establishing the chair,” McConnell reflected. “By doing so Bob and Dolores have invested in the work of the School of Divinity and demonstrated their commitment to its work. We will miss Bob, but through the Shepherd Chair his legacy will live on in the lives of countless future students.” Shepherd served in over a dozen churches, primarily as a pastor or interim pastor. In 1994, he retired from First Baptist Church Morganton where he was named pastor emeritus. After retirement, he continued to serve as an interim pastor for several churches in the community.

At the request of his children, Shepherd wrote, “A Shepherd’s Joys in Fields of Service,” which recounts his experiences as a pastor and



Gardner-Webb employee. The work contains many heartfelt and humorous firsthand accounts.

Canoy observed, “Dr. Shepherd’s laugh and sense of humor were infectious as was his unwavering love for the church. In North Carolina Baptist life, particularly in the western part of the state, Bob and Dolores are role models. He was a man of deep wisdom, a wonderful communicator, and a friend to everyone.”

Shepherd served three terms as chairman of the General Board of the Baptist State Convention and also as chairman of the Executive Committee. He served eight years as a Wake Forest University trustee. Morganton honored Shepherd with the Morganton’s Man of the Year award. Shepherd also was awarded an honorary Doctor of Ministry from Gardner-Webb’s School of Divinity.

“Dr. Shepherd’s laugh and sense of humor were infectious as was his unwavering love for the church. In North Carolina Baptist life, particularly in the western part of the state, Bob and Dolores are role models. He was a man of deep wisdom, a wonderful communicator, and a friend to everyone.”

Dr. Robert W. Canoy, School of Divinity Dean and Professor of Christian Theology

GWU Alumnus and Charlotte Hornets' Broadcaster Gerry V Dies at Age 72

Former longtime Charlotte Hornets fast-talking broadcaster Gerry Vaillancourt, commonly known as Gerry V, passed away on Nov. 27, 2022.

A 1973 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, Vaillancourt grew up in New York City and decided to attend college in the South. He played basketball at GWU and became a large part of the culture of North Carolina basketball. He followed the Hornets for most of his career, starting in the late 1980s when the Charlotte Hornets were first created. Vaillancourt even relocated to New Orleans when the team moved there.

George Shinn, the first owner of the Charlotte Hornets, said in a statement to the Charlotte Observer, "Gerry was a beloved member of the team on radio and television broadcasts for the original Charlotte Hornets."

On the day of Vaillancourt's passing, the Hornets released an official statement, "The Hornets are saddened to learn of the passing of Gerry Vaillancourt. Gerry V was a mainstay on our TV and radio broadcasts from 1990-1992, serving in roles including radio analyst, TV analyst, and TV studio host. He also hosted sports talk radio shows on several local stations throughout that time and returned to the Charlotte airwaves in that same format in 2017. His analysis and opinions will be greatly missed, and our condolences go out to his family, friends, and colleagues."

Before Vaillancourt began his association with the Hornets, he was a basketball recruiter and coached at the University of Virginia, Appalachian State University, James Madison University, and Davidson College. "He would often say that basketball had saved his life," Kelly Vaillancourt, Gerry V's daughter, shared with the Charlotte Observer.

His true passion for the sport and life is summed up in his signature phrase "chase



your crazy." Once on Twitter, Vaillancourt stated, "Chase what you're crazy about. The day will come when you'll regret that you didn't chase your crazy!"

Even though Vaillancourt died due to a heart condition he was diagnosed with 25 years ago, he was a man with a big heart fueled by "living life." After the discovery, he was not expected to live long, but according to Kelly, "He never did anything by the book."

Kelly told the community on the CaringBridge website that, "Our family is devastated, but we will honor his memory by living life the way he did—with chuckles and grins, positivity and always chasing our crazy."

Support source content for this story was gathered from the Charlotte Observer, WBTV, Gardner-Webb: The Magazine 2013, and the Gaston Gazette.

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Champions in Christ and for His Service

By God's grace, our university has experienced a historic year of athletic victories on the fields, on the courts, and in the arena. We have also experienced spiritual victories as students have professed faith in Christ and grown in their love for God and neighbor. We have even celebrated individuals around the globe who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have professed faith in Christ through the efforts of our various university mission teams.

Athletics can teach us words like “champion” and “victory.” Biblically, we understand that these words also have spiritual and eternal significance. Within the context of Scripture, we find that a “champion of faith” is someone who has victoriously run life's race with discipline, determination, endurance, and perseverance while having their eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb 12:1-2).

The champions listed in the famous “Hall of Faith” of Hebrews 11 had suffered personally and experienced losses, yet they were ultimately victorious because they completely trusted in Christ, our crucified and resurrected Redeemer. These champions are “commended by God” (Heb 11:2) for their faith.

On our campus, “champions of faith” can be found throughout the student body and within the offices of our faculty, staff, administrators, and coaches. Across the nation and around the globe, thousands of Gardner-Webb alumni serve as “champions of faith” in their communities. There are four qualities consistent among these champions. First, these individuals help to strip away distractions and encourage us to run life's race with discipline, determination, endurance, and perseverance (Heb 12:1). Second, they exhort us to keep our “eyes on Jesus” (Heb

12:2) and to become more like Him. Third, they direct our hearts toward God by encouraging us to love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). Fourth, they direct our hands toward humanity by encouraging us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31).

Our victories excite us, and they fill us with anticipation and hunger for more. Why is that? It's because the human heart longs for victory. We ache for a champion, and we desire for rivals to be defeated. This is the testimony of Scripture. Throughout the Bible we find stories of God's people longing for and anticipating God's final victory. The Israelites in Egypt cry out in their bondage, and God raises up a champion named Moses who steps forward to lead them to freedom. Later in their history, the Israelites fight the Philistine giant named Goliath and they yet again need a champion to step forward to fight for them to lead them to victory. The young man named David answers that call. On another occasion when God's people face annihilation, a beautiful queen named Esther risks her own life for the freedom and victory of others.

Finally, humanity is faced with its ultimate foe and rival—sin and death. In that moment of need, by God's grace, a new champion runs on to the field to fight for us. Jesus mightily wins the victory over sin and death for us, and now His banner as King of kings and Lord of lords hangs in the rafters of Heaven for eternity. One day all “champions of faith” will worship our Victor there and celebrate with Him forever!

Josh Parrott, *Vice President and University Chaplain for Christian Life and Service, GWU*





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