

2019

President Emeritus Frank Bonner Biography

Gardner-Webb University Office of Marketing and Web Communications

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Biography

Arnold Frank Bonner

Born in Durham, North Carolina, Frank Bonner grew up in Greenville, South Carolina. The son of Francis Wesley Bonner (deceased) and Nilaouise Carnes Bonner, he was raised in a college environment, almost literally in the shadows of the campus of Furman University—first the “old” campus near downtown Greenville, and later the present-day campus.

His father served Furman for more than 30 years as professor and, under various titles, chief academic officer—Vice President and Provost at the time of his retirement. “My parents instilled in me the values I still hold dear. To this day, my father was for me the model of everything that a teacher, academic leader and university administrator should be.”

Educational Background

Frank Bonner graduated in 1969 from Furman with a BA degree in English. Coincidentally, his major professor was Dr. Phil L. Elliott, son of the legendary president of Gardner-Webb from 1943 until 1961, Phillip Lovin Elliott. After Furman, Bonner earned the MA from the University of Georgia in 1971, and the PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1977. His specialty is Victorian literature, primarily the poetry of Alfred Tennyson, and eighteenth-century British literature, with a special interest in Jonathan Swift.

In 1974 Bonner began his academic career as a faculty member at Anderson College in Anderson, South Carolina. He was particularly active in civic life in Anderson, most notably as chairman of the Board of Trustees for Anderson County School District Five. Bonner was assigned various administrative responsibilities at Anderson College and immediately prior to coming to Gardner-Webb was Associate Dean for Special Programs.

In 1987 Frank Bonner came to Gardner-Webb as Vice President for Academic Affairs. His role later evolved into Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, and then Provost and Senior Vice President. He was named President in May 2005 and took office on July 1.

Professional Service and Affiliations

President Bonner has done extensive work in accreditation through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), one of the nation’s seven regional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. He currently serves as a member of the Executive Council of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees and chair of the North Carolina delegation to the Commission. He has served previously on the Board, the Criteria and Reports Committee (C&R Committee), and as chair of C&R working groups. Bonner has served on more than 30 accreditation committees, many times as committee chair.

President Bonner is also involved in intercollegiate athletics. In 2017, he was appointed to the NCAA Division I Board of Directors, which includes 24 presidents and chancellors. He also serves on the NCAA Board of Directors and the Division I Committee on Academics. In addition, Bonner is a member of the Executive Committee of the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU). He is also a past president of the Big South Conference and a past chair of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities.

While at Gardner-Webb, Bonner has remained active in civic affairs. He is a past chair of the Cleveland County Chamber, past president of Shelby Rotary, a Paul Harris Fellow, and a former board member for the Cleveland County YMCA and Communities in Schools. Bonner is a member of First Baptist Church, Shelby, where he teaches Sunday School and serves as both a deacon and church moderator. A graduate of ROTC, Bonner retired at the rank of Colonel after 22 years in the United States Army Reserve.

Family Life

President Bonner is married to Florence (Flossie) Black of Chester, South Carolina, also a Furman graduate. She is a retired high school mathematics teacher. They have two daughters, Alison Bonner Dalton of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Florence Bonner Crawford of Fort Myers, Florida. The Bonners have six grandchildren.