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GWU's New President Welcomes Students to Fall Semester 2019

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Office of University
Communications

August 13, 2019

Dr. William M. Downs Presides Over Fall Convocation and Offers Presidential Address



BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University's new president, Dr. William M. Downs, officially welcomes new and returning students in two programs to begin the 2019 Fall Semester. Downs, the institution's 13th president, will preside over the Fall Academic Convocation on Aug. 27 and give an address to the student body on Aug. 29.

Both programs will begin at 9:25 a.m. The Fall Convocation, which includes presentations of academic awards and scholarships, will be held in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center. The President's Address will be in Stewart Hall of Tucker Student Center.

Downs' career spans over two decades of service in higher education. Before GWU, he was dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts & Sciences at East Carolina University (ECU) in Greenville, N.C. He had been at ECU since 2014, and was also the W. Keats Sparrow Distinguished Chair in the Liberal Arts and a professor of political science. He managed 16 academic departments and 17 interdisciplinary degree programs in the College of Arts & Sciences, which had more than 6,000 arts and sciences undergraduate majors and more than 730 graduate majors.

Downs ensured the quality of general education curriculum for more than 23,000 undergraduate students. Working with his colleagues, he introduced several initiatives to improve undergraduate research and international study opportunities for ECU students. “I am an avowed internationalist, both in my own scholarship and in my approach to higher education,” Downs remarked. “I firmly believe that our students must have global competence if they are going to be competitive in a global economy and thrive in a global society.”

From 1997 to 2014, Downs served various roles at Georgia State University (Atlanta), including area dean, department chair, director and professor. He is an accomplished lecturer, research scholar and the author of “Political Extremism in Democracies: Combating Intolerance.” He has been a research fellow at Harvard University’s Mind de Gunzburg Center for European Studies, a graduate research associate at the Carter Center’s African Governance Program and a Fulbright Research Fellow in Belgium.

A Raleigh native, Downs earned his Bachelor of Arts in political science (with a minor in journalism) from North Carolina State University (Raleigh) in 1988, and his Master of Arts (‘90) and Doctoral (‘94) degrees in political science from Emory University (Atlanta). Downs is married to Kimberly Harwood Downs and has two children, Rachel and Bradley.

He and his family are followers of the Christian faith. “In fourth grade, Kim and I were in the same Sunday School class in Raleigh, and we have been partners in our spiritual journey ever since,” Downs related. “That journey has shaped who I am as an educator, as a husband/father, and as a member of my community. I fully embrace Gardner-Webb’s commitment to providing rigorous academic programs in a compassionate Christian environment, and I look forward to celebrating the University’s Baptist heritage.”

[Click here to learn more about President Downs.](#)

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university, Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.