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February 13, 2019

GWU Board of Trustees Unanimously Confirmed Downs' Appointment

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—The Gardner-Webb University Board of Trustees is pleased to announce Dr. William M. Downs has been named the institution's 13th president. He currently serves at East Carolina University (ECU) as the dean of the Thomas Harriot College of Arts & Sciences in Greenville, N.C.

Board members unanimously confirmed his appointment at a special meeting, capping a highly competitive one-year national search. His term as GWU president begins July 1.



According to David Royster III, GWU Board of Trustees member and chairman of the Presidential Search Committee, the new president has significant leadership experience and understands higher education on multiple levels. “He has served as a faculty member, department chair, program director and dean,” Royster noted. “The Board of Trustees has faith that Gardner-Webb will thrive and continue to provide transformative opportunities for students under his guidance.”

With over two decades of service in higher education, Downs has been at ECU since 2014. He is the W. Keats Sparrow Distinguished Chair in the Liberal Arts and a professor of political science. He administers 16 academic departments and 17 interdisciplinary degree programs in the College of Arts & Sciences, which has more than 6,000 arts and sciences undergraduate majors and more than 730 graduate majors. Downs also ensures the quality of general education curriculum for more than 23,000 undergraduate students. Working with his colleagues, he has introduced several initiatives to improve undergraduate research and international study opportunities.

“I am truly honored by the privilege and opportunity of serving as Gardner-Webb University’s next president” Downs said. “So many things have attracted me and brought me to this moment...GWU’s mission and underlying values, its people and programs, and

its rich traditions of excellence. Together, we will have the chance to write a new chapter in the history of one of North Carolina's great universities. I cannot wait to get started."

Downs, his wife and children are lifelong followers of the Christian faith. "Kim and I actually met in fourth grade in a Raleigh Sunday School class, and we have been partners in our spiritual journey ever since," Downs said. "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. My family is eager to find a new church home in the Boiling Springs/Shelby area."

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 Minda 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.

The search committee worked in conjunction with the Charlotte-based executive search firm Coleman Lew + Associates, Inc. to help in the search process. Members of the Presidential Search Committee include trustees, GWU faculty and staff, and a student representative.

"I am delighted to welcome Dr. Downs to Gardner-Webb" said Jennifer Marion Mills, chair of the Board of Trustees. "He brings academic depth, significant leadership experience and vision to the position. We expect great things ahead."

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.

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.