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Office of University
Communications

August 26, 2016

Blackburn-Eastman-Hambright Humanities Scholarship Developed by University Alumni

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – A new scholarship has been established in honor of three outstanding former Gardner-Webb social sciences professors. The *Blackburn-Eastman-Hambright (BEH) Humanities Scholarship Fund* will provide support for a rising GWU senior majoring in one of the social sciences. To institute a permanent endowed scholarship fund, organizers are working to raise \$25,000 over the next five years.

Andy Polk, the alumnus behind the scholarship idea, is just one of thousands of students influenced by the careers and personalities of Drs. Blackburn, Eastman, and Hambright.

“For many of us, Dr. Gil Blackburn, Dr. Tony Eastman, and the late Dr. Barry Hambright were more than our professors; they were our mentors and friends,” said Polk, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and Political Science from GWU in 2002. “I had the pleasure of learning under the tutelage of all three of Gardner-Webb University’s own triumvirate. I can still remember their words of wisdom and their mannerisms in class each day. Most important, I remember seeing their integrity and honor in action—perhaps the greatest example they gave us all.”

Current faculty members say they are committed to continuing the heritage of excellence established by Blackburn, Eastman, and Hambright. “When I was offered the chance to be at Gardner-Webb after Dr. Eastman announced his retirement, someone said he would give his final lecture to a packed house of students and alumni,” shared Dr. Joseph Moore, assistant professor of history. “I drove down from Greensboro just to see it and I remember thinking, ‘Now *that* is a legacy.’ It is my great privilege to know Dr. Eastman and to work inside of the legacy he and Drs. Hambright and Blackburn built over their long careers.”

Dr. Gil Blackburn

Blackburn’s career in higher education spanned five different decades and included more than 35 years at GWU and six years at The University of Virginia’s College at Wise (Wise, Va.) before his retirement in 2010.

Blackburn earned his associate's degree from Gardner-Webb in 1960 and headed to Wake Forest University (Winston-Salem, N.C.), where he received a Bachelor of Arts in History (1962). He served four years in the United States Military from 1962 to 1966 and continued his education at Wake Forest, receiving a Master of Arts in European History in 1967. He then transitioned to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Chapel Hill, N.C.) for his terminal degree and earned a Doctor of Education in Philosophy and History in 1975, while simultaneously working full-time at GWU.

After initially teaching at the junior high and high school levels, he returned to Gardner-Webb to serve as professor of history from 1968 through 1990 and added a role as professor of education from 1980 to 1990. In 1983, he became director of graduate studies and later served as associate dean, dean, and vice president for academic affairs. His final post at Gardner-Webb was as coordinator of special projects. He became provost and senior vice chancellor at UVa-Wise in 2004. At the time of his resignation from Gardner-Webb, Dr. Blackburn stated, "The values of GWU are engrained in the warp and woof of my character and I'll always be a 'Gardner-Webb Bulldog.'"

Dr. Tony Eastman

In 2011, after 45 years of teaching at Gardner-Webb University, Dr. Tony

Eastman, professor of American history, announced his plans to retire. Eastman is the University's longest-tenured professor, having joined the faculty of Gardner-Webb Junior College in 1966.

Born in Laurel, Miss., Eastman developed an interest in history and culture while moving around to the various places where his father was stationed in the Army. His time in Germany during high school was particularly influential, exposing him to the richness of German and European history and stirring a passion that would come to define his life. He earned his bachelor's degree in history at Union University in Jackson, Tenn., and then his master's degree in history at Memphis State University (Memphis, Tenn.). Eastman then taught for two years at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Ga., before joining the Gardner-Webb faculty and then earning his doctorate in history from the University of Southern Mississippi (Hattiesburg, Miss.).

Eastman helped transform Gardner-Webb Junior College into a solid four-year institution, graduating the College's first four-year class in his fourth year of teaching. Part of an eager group of young professors, he helped define the values of faith, service, and leadership, and the standards of academic excellence, for which Gardner-Webb College would be known. "We had to answer some difficult questions about our standards and our goals during those early days," Dr. Eastman remembers, "but we had great senior faculty leadership, and I think we finally found ourselves."

Dr. Barry Hambright

A native of Cleveland County, N.C., Barry Hambright graduated from Shelby High School and went on to receive his Bachelor of Arts at Carson-Newman College (Jefferson City, Tenn.), his master's degree at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst, Mass.), and his doctorate at the University of South Carolina (Columbia, S.C.). He was a professor at North Greenville College (Tigerville, S.C.) for four years, and served for 41 years as a professor at Gardner Webb University, where he taught political science, history, and criminal justice.

Hambright was instrumental in initiating the current GWU Degree Completion Program, better known as adult distance learning. He was awarded the Fleming-White award for excellence in teaching and also received the Faith, Service, and Leadership Hall of Fame award. A very active community participant, he served on various committees including the courthouse restoration for Destination Cleveland County (DCC), and the American Legion World Series, Shelby, N.C., committee. He was a published author of several books on Cleveland County's historical people and places and was an active member at New Hope Baptist Church in Gastonia where he served as a Sunday School teacher and church moderator. He passed away in 2010 at the age of 69, following a two-year battle with cancer.

Hambright loved the opportunity to connect with students, and once said, "Our best recruits are our students. They finish the program and prove to others you can get a degree."

These social sciences professors and their students represent the best that Gardner-Webb has to offer. "Though their offices and classrooms were hidden under a chapel for most of their careers, these three men reshaped Gardner-Webb as an institution and put thousands of students on the path to more enlightened lives," Polk offered. "For their dedication to students and the University, these men have earned the right to be recognized and remembered. There is no better way to honor them than with a scholarship fund."

University officials are encouraging donations to the BEH Humanities Scholarship so future students can experience the legacy these three professors established. For more information on how to give, contact Steven Bessert at 704-406-2320 or visit gardner-webb.edu/BEH-scholarship.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University's purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).