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### **Collaborative Community Partnership Helps Prepare Disabled Students for the Workplace**

Office of University Communications

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# Collaborative Community Partnership Helps Prepare Disabled Students for the Workplace

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Office of University  
Communications

June 6, 2016

## *2015-2016 Project SEARCH Interns Recognized for Program Completion*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Several Cleveland County residents who took part in a unique collaborative partnership based at Gardner-Webb University were honored during a graduation ceremony on June 1 in Tucker Student Center. Seven 2015-2016 Project SEARCH participants earned certificates of completion for their involvement in the high school to workplace transition program.

Established as a partnership between business, education, and vocational rehabilitation, Project SEARCH provides on-site internship experiences for youth with disabilities. Based on the national model that was first designed and implemented at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Project SEARCH is a business-led, one-year, school-to-work immersion program that facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and relevant job-skills training through strategically designed internships for participants.

Project SEARCH graduate Samuel Falls said the experience was challenging and rewarding. “I was nervous about Project SEARCH because it was getting me ready for adulthood and it was something I had never done before,” Falls shared at the ceremony. “It taught me that even if you have a disability, you can still get a job in the world. It has been a wonderful experience to serve as an intern on Gardner-Webb’s campus.”

Samuel Falls

Falls was named the 2015-2016 Intern of the Year. Interns provided assistance in a variety of locations around the GWU campus, including the cafeteria, campus shop, athletic department, events department, housekeeping services, WGWG.org radio station, the library, the campus post office, and more. A range of university employees served as supervisors for the interns. Kala Cole, who works at Gardner-Webb as an attendant in Tucker Student Center, was named Project SEARCH Supervisor of the Year.

Participant Brandon Goins said he learned a lot through the program. “The thing I liked most about Project SEARCH was getting to work different jobs,” he offered, “and getting to know different people.”

In addition to Falls and Goins, other interns who received certificates for completing the program were Christopher Jordan, Olivia Ledger, Andy McLeod, Jr., Brian Spriggs, and Thomas J. Stroud II. The multi-agency partnership involves Gardner-Webb University, Cleveland County Schools, North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation, Cleveland Vocational Industries, and Partners Behavioral Health Management. For more information, visit [projectsearch.us](http://projectsearch.us).

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*Since its inception, Project SEARCH has grown from a single program site at Cincinnati Children's to over 300 sites across the United States and Canada, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Australia. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities.*

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for professional success and for productive citizenship.*