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### **Gardner-Webb University Awards Degrees During Commencement Exercises May 6-7**

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# Gardner-Webb University Awards Degrees During Commencement Exercises May 6-7

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Office of University  
Communications

May 7, 2016

## *Three Separate Ceremonies Honor More than 650 GWU Graduates*

[View GradImages Official Commencement Photos](#) 

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[View List of Spring Graduates](#)

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner–Webb University hosted Spring Commencement on Friday, May 6 and Saturday, May 7 in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center. More than 650 graduates were honored during three separate ceremonies.

The University’s College of Health Sciences conferred degrees on the first graduating class of the Physician Assistant (PA) Studies program. Other milestones include the awarding of the 3,500th overall degree (associates, bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral) by the Hunt School of Nursing. The School of Education conferred its 6,000th overall degree (bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral), while the Godbold School of Business awarded its 10,000th overall degree (associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s).

### **Friday Evening Graduate Programs Ceremony (May 6; 7 p.m.)**

[View Photos From the 7 p.m. Ceremony](#) 

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The Friday evening ceremony featured the conferring of nearly 270 degrees from the University’s graduate programs. Ruthanne Palumbo (Wilmington, N.C.), who earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree, offered the invocation. Scott Lund (Shelby, N.C.), who celebrated earning a Master of Science in Nursing, provided the reading of scripture. Dr. Robert Canoy, who serves as the dean for the M. Christopher White School of Divinity, offered the commencement message, titled “Believing the Minority Report.” He encouraged graduates to be brave, especially when the task ahead seems impossible.

“In your own eyes, you may feel like a tiny grasshopper in the land of the giants,” Canoy shared. “The only thing that will get you through all of life’s transitions is to never forget that God has made a great promise to you that he aims to keep. He promises to be with you and never forsake you. You have a purpose, and God has a plan for you.”

### **Saturday Morning Traditional Undergraduate Program Ceremony (May 7; 10 a.m.)**

## [View Photos From the 10 a.m. Ceremony](#)

The Saturday morning ceremony featured more than 250 graduates of Gardner-Webb's traditional undergraduate program. Lauren Elizabeth Seiler ( Mooresville, N.C.), who earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, offered the invocation. Juliette Lawson Ratchford (Demorest, Ga.), who celebrated earning a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, provided the reading of scripture.

Several morning graduates were honored for outstanding leadership, citizenship, and academic excellence. The Most Outstanding Male Graduate medal was presented to computer science and philosophy major Nathan Wangerin Lile of Waynesville, N.C, while Mary Elizabeth Toohey, a biology major from Winston-Salem, N.C, was awarded the Most Outstanding Female Graduate medal. Lile and Kevin Alexander Mills of Sanford, N.C., an economics, finance, and accounting triple major, were both recognized for academic achievement with the Senior Scholastic Award.

The ceremony also featured the conferring of an honorary doctorate degree. Longtime GWU trustee and active volunteer Frank Beam (Shelby, N.C.) was awarded the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree for his considerable contributions to both the University and the community.

GWU President Dr. Frank Bonner explained that the awarding of an honorary doctorate degree affirms the University values, honors individual achievements, and recognizes the recipient's embodiment of Gardner-Webb ideals of caring and Christian service. "These guidelines are exemplified to the fullest degree by Frank Beam in his personal, professional, church, and civic life, and in innumerable leadership roles," Bonner shared. "The common denominator in all of these areas is a firm commitment to service, consistent with strong Christian faith."

Beam is a native of Cleveland County, N.C., and in 1963, he co-founded a business that later became Quality Insulation and Siding in Shelby. More than 50 years later, he is still a co-owner. In the 1970s, he stepped into a corporate role at Lowe's Company, Inc., where he served for more than 40 years. When he retired from Lowe's as regional vice president of operations, Beam directed senior management and all store operations in the southeast, and was responsible for more than 15,000 employees.

"As stellar as Frank's professional and civic life has been, his devotion to Gardner-Webb is just as noteworthy," Bonner reflected. "He really loves this University, encouraging others and serving tirelessly as a trustee and committee chairman."

## **Saturday Afternoon Degree Completion Program Ceremony (May 7; 3 p.m.)**

[View Photos From the 3 p.m. Ceremony](#)

The Saturday afternoon ceremony featured nearly 150 graduates of Gardner-Webb's Degree Completion Program. Randi Geena Eckard (Claremont, N.C.), who earned a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice degree, offered the invocation. Spencer Ray Cline (Newton, Ga.), who also celebrated earning a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice, provided the reading of scripture. The Degree Completion Program Senior Scholastic Award was presented to Noah Arlon Miller of Cleveland, N.C. Miller also earned a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice.

Dr. Tracy Jessup, senior minister to the University and vice president for Christian Life and Service, offered the commencement address for Saturday morning and afternoon ceremonies. "Our hope, graduates, is that you have been intellectually, spiritually, physically, and emotionally nurtured during your time of study at Gardner-Webb University," Jessup said. "You can bring no greater pleasure to your alma mater than to live a life that is pleasing to God—believing in the name of his son Jesus Christ—and actively loving others in ways that bring about Christlike transformation in our world."

*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).*