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### **Gardner-Webb University Graduates First Class of Physician Assistant Studies Students**

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# Gardner-Webb University Graduates First Class of Physician Assistant Studies Students

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Office of University  
Communications

May 7, 2016

## *22 Receive Master's Degrees, Praise Program's Commitments to Service, Excellence*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Some students sewed machete wounds and delivered babies in remote stretches on the island nation of Haiti. Others washed the feet of the local homeless to prepare them for desperately needed medical examinations. All of the students in Gardner-Webb University's first Physician Assistant (PA) Studies program class experienced healthcare education through an intensive rotation of clinical training and a robust didactic curriculum. The class of 22 students became Gardner-Webb's first Master of Physician Assistant Studies graduates during the University's commencement ceremony on May 6.

"This first PA class has done exemplary things through tremendous outreach and taking care of the most vulnerable populations you can imagine. They are fulfilling the program's mission to care for medically underserved people," exults Larry Herman, professor, dean and director of the GWU Physician Assistant Studies program. "Through their training these students are adaptable, flexible and nimble in the way that no other healthcare provider is. They have shown dedication to the nth degree. We are so proud of everything they've done."

Members of the graduating class have already secured jobs in an array of rural and urban medical settings, including trauma centers, emergency departments and internal medicine clinics. Graduates are prepared to meet the challenges of those careers thanks to the GWU PA program's elite faculty, rigorous academic curriculum, top-notch campus facilities in the University's new College of Health Sciences, and diverse medical training experiences.

"From international opportunities to clinical rotations in underserved communities, the Physician Assistant Studies program at Gardner-Webb embodies service," offers Christopher Smith, the PA Class of 2016 valedictorian who will work in emergency medicine for Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System in Upstate South Carolina. "The program does an excellent job of creating PAs who will be valuable assets to any healthcare team."

Caitlin Heredia, the GWU PA Class of 2016 president, also credits her fellow students with the mutual support to help each classmate succeed. “We even prayed aloud as a class before almost every exam,” shares Heredia, who will begin work in family medicine in Hickory, N.C. “We have all hoped the best for one another and been supportive. My classmates are going to be incredible PAs. They’re wise and compassionate, resilient and genuine, and I would entrust them with my own care. The simplest way to describe this inaugural PA class is ‘family.’”

The University’s first Master of Physician Assistant Studies class includes:

Mariam Ali (Manassas, Va.)  
Carson Lee Antis (Wilmington, N.C.)  
Sarah Elizabeth Arcara (Fayetteville, N.C.)  
Neisa Nicole Beasley (Shelby, N.C.)  
Adam Tyler Benfield (Lawndale, N.C.)  
Brittany Leigh Cochran (Lincolnton, N.C.)  
Zachary Yates Eaker (Forest City, N.C.)  
Landrie Fox (Micaville, N.C.)  
Caitlin Goodman (Mooresville, N.C.)  
Caitlin Blazek Heredia (Gastonia, N.C.)  
Curt Andrew Litton (Shelby, N.C.)  
Krishna Patel (Snellville, Ga.)  
Christopher James Smith (Boiling Springs, S.C.)  
Joel Alan Stiles (Greer, S.C.)  
Courtney A. Stump (Stanley, N.C.)  
Michael Richard Towery (Hickory, N.C.)  
Joshua Thomas Tucker (Boiling Springs, S.C.)  
Sarah Marie Turner (Elizabeth City, N.C.)  
Brian Charles Wallace (Belmont, N.C.)  
Erica Joy West (North Augusta, S.C.)  
Sarah Charlene Woytek (Charlotte, N.C.)  
Savanna Richelle Yount (Shelby, N.C.)

*The Gardner-Webb PA Program is deeply committed to developing within each student a strong foundation in the basic medical, clinical and psychosocial sciences. This provides our graduates with the education to treat patients and enables them to meet the life-long challenges inherent in the practice of medicine.*

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University provides exceptional educational opportunities within a Christian environment, preparing students to think critically, to succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully as members of their local and global communities.*