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Degree Completion Program First Step to Lifetime of Achievements

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Office of University
Communications

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Neal Alexander ('84) Held Top Positions in Duke Energy, State Government and now Gardner-Webb

Neal Alexander, a member of the Gardner-Webb Board of Trustees, held a top position with Duke Energy before being tapped by North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory for a position in state government. He's also received Gardner-Webb's highest recognition of merit, the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree. And recently, he was named as the interim dean for the Godbold School of Business.

He firmly believes his achievements were made possible by the education he received through Gardner-Webb's Degree Complete Program (DCP).

"The program opened many doors for me at Duke, as well as other things in life," he asserted.

Alexander's journey with the University began as an undergraduate student in the mid-1960s before he was called away to active duty with the South Carolina National Guard. When his service ended, Alexander's one year of college credit helped him land a position with a field surveying engineering group, launching a career with Duke Energy that spanned four decades. He began climbing the ranks until a mentor at Duke encouraged him to think about completing his education.

"I will never forget when he pulled me aside and told me, 'Neal, you're doing really good work, but you should think about going back and finishing your college degree,'" Alexander recalled. "He knew the degree would open new doors and opportunities for me, and to this day I am grateful for his encouragement."

Before the emergence of online learning technologies, Alexander took courses at five different satellite campus centers including the Charlotte and Gaston centers, an advantage still available to DCP students today. Students take the program at their own pace to accommodate work or family needs. But more than the program's flexibility and convenience, Alexander appreciated the knowledgeable and caring faculty.

"What I remember most was the character and the integrity of the faculty," Alexander stated. "They always treated us with respect and dignity, and you could sense their Christian faith in how they interacted

with us. I used to arrive 20 minutes before class just to talk with them about the real-world business environment, and I learned things from them that I still use and share with others today.”

Another advantage of the DCP program is the opportunity to hear from classmates. Because DCP students come from diverse backgrounds, they contribute unique perspectives to the academic discussion.

“Adult learners add to the course with real-world experience, which adds more value to the entire classroom experience,” Alexander assessed.

After completing his degree at GWU, Alexander continued to receive promotions at Duke, eventually retiring as Vice President for Human Resources, US Franchised Electric and Gas Group. Gov. McCrory called him out of retirement to the position of director of the N.C. State Office of Human Resources.

“If you have the determination to complete the goal, the program provides a way,” Alexander affirmed. “You will work with a great group of advisors and professors. The professors understand adult learners and take an interest in them to help them be successful without compromising the integrity of the classes.”