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Fall Symposium at GWU to Explore Race Relations, Identity Issues

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Office of University
Communications

September 21, 2015

Event Planned for Oct. 22-24 on the Campus of Gardner-Webb University

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Members of the Gardner-Webb University community will take a closer look at a range of current issues facing contemporary society through an upcoming event. “Transcending Boundaries: A Symposium on Race, Class and Identity” will be held at Tucker Student Center Oct. 22-24 and will feature opportunities for students and citizens to explore tensions that often serve as catalysts for division.

GWU Alumna Randi Gill-Sadler ('10) will serve as the keynote speaker at the three-day event. Gill-Sadler is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Florida (Gainesville, Fla.) and her scholarly interests are African American literature, the Black diaspora and U.S. imperialism. She received the GWU Outstanding Female Graduate Medal in 2010.

The symposium is being co-sponsored and presented by three university groups: the Life Of The Scholar (LOTS), represented by Dr. Shea Stuart; GWU Undergraduate Research, directed by Dr. June Hobbs, and the Center for Christian Ethics and Social Responsibility, directed by Dr. Tom LeGrand. The discussions for the event began last spring, and national events—including the Charleston church shooting—confirmed the urgency and importance of the symposium.

“We are surrounded by political rhetoric and social media sniping on all sides, and in all directions, on issues of race, class and identity,” LeGrand offered. “It is easy to assume that there is a singular position to take on all these issues and to simply ‘side’ with those that agree with us. But, if the University teaches us anything, it is that the world is not so simple. Our vision is to help our campus and community learn to listen to new voices and to dialogue with those that challenge our thinking.”

Hobbs agreed. “I think people often rely on tradition to give them their views on things without looking at what that tradition is based on, and without really investigating their own thoughts,” she reflected. “I look in my heart sometimes and say, ‘Do I have prejudices?’ And of course, because I am a human being, I do. The problem is becoming aware of them.”

The three-day symposium is intended to offer participants an opportunity for listening, reflecting, and acting. “We wanted to create some momentum so that on the very first day, people would be inspired to look at various issues,” Hobbs shared. “We’re going to offer a lot of things to get people thinking.”

Throughout the “Listening” day on Thursday, Oct. 22, attendees will experience exhibits of photography, art, documentaries, and music on the topics of race, class and identity. Sessions will be offered to allow students and other community members a chance to record their own experiences of boundaries created by these sometimes polarizing issues. In addition, Randi Presentations, lectures, and other discussions will also be offered at various times during the day. On Friday, Oct. 23, “Reflecting” opportunities will be facilitated through panel discussions, breakout sessions, and other group activities. On the third and final day, Saturday, Oct. 24, the focus will be on “Acting.” Concurrent sessions presenting written or oral compositions, music, and visual art are planned and answers to the question “Where do we go from here?” will be discussed.

“Life Of The Scholar organizes events in order to facilitate lifelong learning and transformative experiences,” said Stuart, LOTS representative. “We want the community to think about the boundaries that separate us and about how we can truly listen to and learn from one another. ‘Where do we go from here?’ is a key question for the symposium and one that we want students, faculty, and staff to continue to ask and to work to answer long after the event is over.”

For more information about the “Transcending Boundaries” symposium, visit Gardner-Webb.edu/symposium.

Click below to hear the full WGWG.org interview with Dr. June Hobbs.

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).