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### Gardner-Webb University Awards Over 250 Degrees

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# Gardner-Webb University Awards Over 250 Degrees

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Office of University  
Communications

December 15, 2014

## *Graduates Honored During Fall Commencement Exercises on Dec. 15*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner–Webb University hosted Fall Commencement on Monday, Dec. 15 in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center at 10 a.m. More than 250 graduates were honored for their achievements during the ceremony.

Many graduates participated in the ceremony through prayer, scripture reading, and commencement speeches. Benjamin Payne (Boiling Springs, N.C.) offered the invocation, while Zachary Parker (Boiling Springs, N.C.) shared passages from the Old and New Testaments. Four awards were given to exceptional graduates. Jaclyn Hudson Jenkins (Lincolnton, N.C.) received the Degree Completion Program Academic Award; Andrea Thomas (Shelby, N.C.) was honored as the recipient of the Senior Scholastic Achievement Award; Payne was named the recipient of the Outstanding Male Graduate Medal, and Thomas received the Outstanding Female Graduate Medal.

Commencement speakers were Thomas, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, and Jesse Roberts (Charlotte, N.C.), who received a Master of Arts/Education Specialist in Mental Health Counseling degree.

During her studies at Gardner-Webb, Thomas was inducted into Alpha Chi and Theta Alpha Kappa honor societies. In addition to many other activities, she spent last semester working for the Abuse Prevention Council's battered women's shelter in Shelby. She wants to continue her work with the women's shelter, and plans to attend graduate school in the near future for psychology and religion. She believes commencement offers a natural opportunity to look toward one's future—but she encouraged each graduate to be settled in the present.

“At graduation, we are at a crossroads,” Thomas shared. “Three-and-a-half years ago, I would have known exactly what to do at this crossroads, but my education here has taught me to strive for something bigger, to discover how to make a difference. Some of you probably have a plan for a job or grad school, and some of you are still trying to figure everything out. But today, I want to ask you not what you are going to do in the future, but who you are going to be in this moment.”

Roberts, originally from Rutherfordton, N.C., graduated from GWU in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in psychology and was named the Most Outstanding Male Graduate that year. He said his years at Gardner-Webb have taught him many lessons that were not the result of time in the classroom. "I was reminded time and time again that you do not have to be blood-related to be family," Roberts reflected. "Gardner-Webb has been my family for the past seven-and-a-half years, and I cannot imagine a better group of individuals to claim as my own. We have learned together and we have grown together. We have loved each other, we have hurt together, and we have survived together, and now, we have succeeded together."

*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).*