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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "Gardner-Webb University Awards Degrees During Exercises on May 12" (2014). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 1410.
<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive/1410>

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Gardner-Webb University Awards Degrees During Exercises on May 12

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Office of University Communications

May 12, 2014

Two Separate Ceremonies Honor More Than 700 Graduates

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner–Webb University hosted Spring Commencement on Monday, May 12 in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., and over 700 graduates were honored during two separate ceremonies.

Morning Graduate Programs Ceremony (10 a.m.)

The morning ceremony featured the conferring of over 370 degrees from the University's graduate programs. Kimberly Denise Moore of Gastonia, N.C., who earned a Master of Divinity in Pastoral Ministries, offered a commencement speech during the ceremony. She experienced many emotions at the conclusion of her time at GWU, but said most of all, she feels grateful. "I'm thankful that my time here has not been all about the academia," she shared. "It has been a life-enriching experience that has been more impactful than I ever thought possible. I am thankful that in the midst of all of the theology, I was reminded to always practice 'knee-ology' and always find time to pray and spend quality time with God."

Doctor of Nursing Practice graduate Michele Ann Pfaff of Waxhaw, N.C., also shared thoughts from her time at GWU. "Today completes my educational journey which has spanned more than 25 years," she said. "As I reflected upon this journey, the words of Harry S. Truman came to mind and painted a perfect picture of the experience: 'Work hard, do your best, keep your word, never get too big for your britches, trust in God, have no fear, and never forget a friend.'"



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/KA2kv9xroD8>

Afternoon Traditional Undergraduate & Degree Completion Program Ceremony (3 p.m.)

The afternoon ceremony featured more than 360 graduates of Gardner-Webb's Degree Completion Program (formerly GOAL) and the traditional undergraduate program.

Several morning graduates were honored for outstanding leadership, citizenship, and academic excellence. The Most Outstanding Male Graduate medal was presented to biology major Cody Lee Meyers of Mobile, Ala., while Kate Frances Oliphant, a music major from Chantilly, Va., was awarded the Most Outstanding Female Graduate medal.

Mary Jeanine Hellstrom (Boiling Springs, N.C.), a biblical studies major, was recognized for academic achievement with the Senior Scholastic Award. The Degree Completion Program Scholastic Award was presented to Ivy Faith Oates (Nebo, N.C.), who majored in accounting.

Kaitlyn Elizabeth Spiro, a double major in political science and journalism from Sylva, N.C., shared thoughts on her years at Gardner-Webb in a commencement address. She shared wisdom from Mark Twain that was recently offered to her. "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why," she quoted. "I know now that the day I find out why I was placed on this earth is yet to come. It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow. But this place—this important and transformative place—has given me more than I could have ever imagined. If you are unsure of where your path will lead, know that Gardner-Webb will always claim you."

Keon Williams, Jr. also shared a speech with his fellow graduates. An economics/finance major from Charlotte, N.C., he encouraged his classmates to focus on God's will for them both in the future and in the present. "This will be our tool of personal guidance through this place of unfamiliarity we are about to enter," Williams reflected. "It does us no good to invest in speculation in the future, because it will drain our passion for the now. In the process, let's not allow our dreams to die in the wilderness of change and transition. Claim victory over all obstacles and challenges, while believing and receiving the truth that all things work for the good of those who love the Lord."

Gardner-Webb's support of the national "Reach Higher" campaign was also evidenced during the graduation ceremony. The University encouraged students, graduates, and attendees to use the hashtag #ReachHigher when posting photos and updates to social media outlets. The campaign was initiated by First Lady Michelle Obama in early May, and is designed to inspire every American student to complete an education beyond a high school diploma. A 2014 U.S. Department of Labor survey of American workers shows both employment and earnings increase as an individual completes levels of higher education programs beyond high school.

The new White House initiative seeks to motivate students by highlighting others' success, and to prepare them to complete their education through:

- Exposure to college and career opportunities;
- Information about financial aid that can make college affordable;
- Resources for academic planning and summer learning programs; and
- Support from high school counselors who can guide more students to colleges.

"Gardner-Webb University fully supports the Reach Higher campaign at the national level," said GWU President Dr. Frank Bonner. "We admire the effort to encourage students to pursue and complete a college degree. At Gardner-Webb, we want to do all we can to enable our students in their goals to graduate and move on to successful experiences in their lives."

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).

To view photos from the 10 a.m. ceremony, click here.

To view photos from the 3 p.m. ceremony, click here.

