

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications


12-16-2013

Gardner-Webb University Awards Over 550 Degrees During Fall Commencement Ceremonies

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Gardner-Webb University Awards Over 550 Degrees During Fall Commencement Ceremonies

 webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/gardner-webb-university-awards-over-550-degrees-during-fall-commencement-ceremonies/

Office of University Communications

December 16, 2013

Two Separate Ceremonies Honor Hundreds of Graduates

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner–Webb University hosted Fall Commencement on Monday, Dec. 16 in the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. More than 550 graduates were honored during the two ceremonies.

The GWU School of Divinity presented its 500th degree since the program began 20 years ago. In addition, Courtney Atkins (Forest City, N.C.) and Bonnie Baczewski (Damascus, Md.) each received the University's first Bachelors of Science in Exercise Science degrees.

Morning Graduate Programs Ceremony (10 a.m.) [Click for Photos]

The morning ceremony honored more than 350 students who successfully completed curriculum for a master's or doctoral degree. In addition, the University awarded an honorary doctorate to former professor and administrator Dr. Gil Blackburn, a man who spent more than half of his 74 years as either a student, faculty member or administrator on the campus of Gardner-Webb. Following his 38 years at GWU, Blackburn served for six years at the University of Virginia's College at Wise. He retired from his post in 2010.

In presenting the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Blackburn, Gardner-Webb President Dr. Frank Bonner believes his contributions to the University were monumental. "There is no single individual who has had a greater influence on the award-winning curriculum, the exceptional faculty, and the academic culture that shapes the Gardner-Webb experience than Dr. Gil Blackburn," Bonner noted. "Today, for his years of faithful servant-leadership, his unwavering integrity, his considerable contributions to the academic communities at Gardner-Webb and Virginia-Wise, and his embodiment of the ideals for which this institution is known, it is my distinct privilege, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, to present the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Dr. Gil Blackburn."

As commencement speaker for the morning ceremony, Blackburn offered words of encouragement and wisdom for the graduates' futures, by illustrating the history of Gardner-Webb's establishment at the boiling springs following a period in which many thought the institution would close its doors. "A spring is formed when a powerful underground vein of water forces its way to the surface through a fissure in the earth's hard crust," he pondered.

“Here at the boiling spring, God’s love gushed through the hard crust of human waywardness to create a spiritual oasis. All who matriculate at this institution have an opportunity to drink from that spring.”

He believes the graduates are now in positions to help people—even those who may not seem as if they want help. “All of you—pastors, teachers, nurses, counselors and business people, in a typical year, encounter individuals who need more than your professional code of ethics requires you to give them,” Blackburn said. “The Bible has a name for that kind of obligation; it’s called ‘going the second mile.’ When you ‘go the second mile,’ you have a unique opportunity to impact peoples’ lives. In doing so, you change the world—at least your corner of the world. You also serve the God who gave you the gifts you possess.”

Afternoon Traditional Undergraduate and GOAL Programs Ceremony (3 p.m.) [Click for Photos]

The afternoon ceremony featured nearly 200 graduates of Gardner-Webb’s Greater Opportunities for Adult Learners (GOAL) program and students who successfully completed traditional undergraduate programs. Several graduates were honored for academic achievement and received accolades for all-around outstanding performance and service during their time at GWU.

The Most Outstanding Male Graduate Medal and the Senior Scholastic Achievement Award were given to Andrew David Slesinger (Charlotte, N.C.), who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies. The Most Outstanding Female Graduate Medal was awarded to Amelia Catherine Bolick of Gastonia, N.C., who earned a Bachelor of Music and also offered the traditional scripture reading during the ceremony. The GOAL Senior Scholastic Achievement Academic Award was presented to Micah Daniel Rivera of Shelby, N.C., who received a Bachelor of Science in Accounting/Business Administration.

Dr. Gil Blackburn also served as the commencement speaker for the afternoon ceremony. “Graduates, when you enrolled at Gardner-Webb—whether as a regular student on campus or in the GOAL program—you were told that the program here would give you a ‘transformational experience;’ that you would depart a different person,” he reflected. “Promising to ‘transform’ someone is a tall order. No institution of higher learning can transform a student without that student’s participation. However, if you entered into the Gardner-Webb experience with your whole being, you indeed will leave here transformed. And, I might add, the world needs more like you.”

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).