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BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — Dr. Earl Leininger is an accomplished man, to say the least.

He has traveled across the world, served at two institutions of higher learning, and is a proficient actor. He also has received multiple undergraduate degrees as well as a Ph.D. And while he has twice served as a senior administrator at Gardner-Webb University, no title can accurately describe him.

Leininger is from Fort Smith, Ark., where he attended high school and adopted his love for education. “My mother was a college graduate and taught in public schools,” said Leininger. It was from her that his path to higher education began. Although his high school experience fostered a liking to theatre and speech, he ultimately felt a call for ministry upon graduating. “With that, I felt a call to be prepared,” he added.

Leininger went on to attend Oklahoma Baptist University for his undergraduate studies. He majored in speech and theatre with a minor in psychology. He also attended the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., where he earned an undergraduate degree in theology as well as a Ph.D in philosophy and theology. Leininger was very fond of his studies. In fact, the only area he has “flunked” would be retirement.

“I just can’t seem to stay away from the academic environment,” said Leininger. For a professor who has taught for nearly 50 years, this definitely seems to be the case. His scholarly background also extends beyond the states, traveling with a number of academic groups to England, Italy, China, North Africa, and Egypt, among other countries. “Everything is a learning experience,” he added.

Leininger retired for the first time after serving Mars Hill College for 34 years as both a faculty member and academic vice president. He had only been retired for a few months when Dr. Frank Bonner, the current president of Gardner-Webb, invited him to join the GWU staff. “I had only planned on staying for a short while,” he joked. “But I was still here three and a half years later. This was a good place to be. I liked it here.”

Before retiring again in 2006, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from GWU during spring graduation. Dr. Bonner commended Leininger on his success for leaving a mark at two institutions, let alone one. “Few have made such a mark,” said Bonner.

Leininger did not expect that he would return to Gardner-Webb in 2010 as Associate Provost for Arts & Sciences. He had after all, retired twice. “It was a great place to come back to, so that’s what I did,” said Leininger.

The University even provides Leininger with great opportunities outside of his office. He appeared in last year's "Burial at Thebes" as well as this year's "Tuesdays With Morrie," keeping his love for theatre alive even after his undergraduate career. "Theatre gives a place for creative juices that differ from pure academic life," he said. "It's nice to actually work with students as peers." If anything, contributing to Gardner-Webb art alongside students give him a truly unique perspective.

Leininger also enjoys playing racquetball and tennis and has for close to 40 years. "I love to play," he said. "I'm not the greatest, but that doesn't matter if you're having fun." Enjoyment seems to be a big part of Leininger's life. He is able to blend intelligence, talent, humor, and leadership together into one life and vocation. He truly is a renaissance man.

Leininger continues to serve as Associate Provost for Arts & Sciences today. "When I began my teaching career, if you had told me I'd ever be an administrator—one of "them"—I'd have laughed," he said. "But life has a way of surprising you. I treasure my 20 plus years of teaching and realize that learning is the core business of a university." Leininger ultimately believes that administration is not an end in itself, but a means to the larger end of teaching and learning.