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Office of University Communications

April 23, 2012

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – If the best learning happens on the job, then students in Dr. Michael Kuchinsky’s “Introduction to Political Science” class at Gardner-Webb University are getting a first-rate education about the purpose and function of city and county government.

As a class assignment, Kuchinsky arranged mini-internships for his 15 students with local government and civic officials. The students partnered with Cleveland County agencies like the Department of Social Services, the Health Department, Human Resources, Utilities, and Tax Administration.

Kuchinsky felt that students’ often have a thin understanding of the work and purpose of the public sector and its leaders. “Student opinion of the public sector, like wider American public opinion, is too often negative and uninformed,” Kuchinsky said. “The mini-internship was a way to counter that type of negativism by an experience with public-sector professionals that I hope will shift students’ understandings of public service and citizenship.”

The project is an example of the type of innovative service-learning initiatives that have landed Gardner-Webb on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for the fifth consecutive year in 2012.

Olivia Gibbs, a freshmen political science major from Claremont, N.C., served as the intern to Boiling Springs Town Manager Zack Trogon. “As an intern, I attended a town meeting, during which I sat and listened to council members discuss various projects and interests, such as improving the traffic lights and little league sports,” said Gibbs.

Bradley Bilsback, a freshmen political science and Spanish major from Summerville, S.C., worked with the Shelby Fire Department & Rescue, including Fire Marshal Ray Beck. Bilsback shared, “Marshal Beck’s three main responsibilities are fire code enforcement, fire education, and fire investigation. This internship gave me a whole new appreciation for the department. There is a whole side that I would never know if I had not had this experience.”

Kuchinsky’s project included a pre- and post-test for participants to identify any change in thought about governing. It seems that the project served its purpose well. “After being an intern, I do have more respect for local government,” Gibbs said. “Before this, I did not have

much knowledge of what local government did for the community. Now I see that it's a very serious and productive organization."

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University provides exceptional educational opportunities within a Christian environment, preparing students to think critically, to succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully as members of their local and global communities.