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Office of University Communications

December 19, 2011

Several Students Honored for Outstanding Achievement and Service

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.— Gardner-Webb University, along with thousands of family and friends, celebrated the achievement of more than 340 graduates during the University's annual fall commencement exercises on Monday.

In keeping with Gardner-Webb tradition, all of the graduates were recognized individually as they received their degrees. As Gardner-Webb President Dr. Frank Bonner said in his opening remarks, "We pause to recognize our graduates one by one because we value them highly as individuals, and we are so very proud of each of them." Dr. H. Gene Washburn also brought greetings on behalf of the Gardner-Webb Board of Trustees.

After Bonner's remarks, three students shared the podium as commencement speakers: Rita M. de Gouveia, a biology major from The Azores, Portugal; Cortney Anne Kerley, a mathematics education major from Newton, N.C.; and Otto Reynolds, III, a music major from Crouse, N.C.

Gouveia, who needed Portuguese subtitles to watch American movies as a child, remarked on the beautiful irony that she was now offering her commencement address in English. Though she was afraid she would never find success in college because of her language barrier, "I was wrong," she said, "and you students, if you doubted yourselves, you were wrong as well."

Kerley traced many of the "firsts" she enjoyed during her Gardner-Webb journey, insisting that her professors and friends at GWU taught her "that everything I do should be done for the glory of God, and that no challenge is too large." Reynolds, who was active on the Gardner-Webb stage during his time as a student, said, "Just as the characters I have played on stage have evolved and changed throughout the years, so have I. My experiences here have shaped me into the person I am today."

During the ceremony, several students were recognized for outstanding leadership, citizenship, and academic excellence during their undergraduate careers. Jack Harold Zimmerman, III, of Williamsburg, Va., who received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, was awarded the Most Outstanding Male Graduate Medal. Haleigh Peterson of Calgary, Alberta, who received her bachelor's degree in international business, was honored as the Most Outstanding Female Graduate.

The Senior Scholastic Achievement Award recognizes the graduating senior with the highest cumulative scholastic average. This spring, the Award was presented to Stephanie Lynn Oliver of Glen Allen, Va., who maintained perfect 4.0 scholastic average while earning her bachelor's degree in American Sign Language and Spanish.

Nearly 140 of the graduates at Monday's commencement were students in Gardner-Webb's Greater Opportunities for Adult Learners (GOAL) program. The GWU College of Adult and Continuing Education presented the Academic Student Award to two GOAL graduates who tied for the highest scholastic averages during their tenure:

- Lisa Marie Hanson Brown, a human services major from Rutherfordton, N.C.
- Denise Crotts Jones, a business administration major from Shelby, N.C.

[Click here to see Graduation Photos](#)