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Office of University Communications, "Student Journalists Capture National Attention" (2011). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 2053.

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Student Journalists Capture National Attention

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Office of University Communications

July 15, 2011

Gardner-Webb Photojournalists Cover Southern Baptist Convention

 Rick Warren

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – As part of a summer communication studies special topics course, five Gardner-Webb photojournalism students covered last month's Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Annual Meeting

in Phoenix, Ariz., as interns for Baptist Press. The group's 21 online multimedia pieces garnered more than 13,000 hits, the highest productivity of any Gardner-Webb student team during the six-year partnership with Baptist Press.

“Six years ago, Baptist Press asked us to bring students to provide photo coverage for the Annual Meeting, and particularly of Crossover, SBC's evangelistic outreach effort,” said Dr. Bob Carey, chair of the Communication Studies department at Gardner-Webb. “Baptist Press pays their travel and lodging expenses, and they get to go and report in a professional environment. As an educator, that's an opportunity I can't pass up.”

Initially Carey only brought one or two students, but the internship has grown in popularity, and Carey now selects five applicants. This summer's participants were Dominique Bray, Faith Kempf, Rebekah Rausch, Amanda Smith, and Katey Wright

The students spent an entire day covering Crossover activities in the greater Phoenix area, and then worked for nearly 15 hours a day shooting, editing, and producing multimedia and photography projects during the Annual Meeting itself. Each of them had photos posted in the convention coverage, and each did at least two multimedia pieces. “Our students are becoming more proficient in digital media convergence,” Carey said, “and this group's 21 pieces is more than double what any other group has produced yet.”

One of the group's most interesting opportunities came when Rausch and Kempf approached Rick Warren, esteemed author of “The Purpose Driven Life” and founder of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif. Warren gave them a 15-minute one-on-one interview, which they published in three short interview clips.

“At first, I was just excited that I was going to meet a famous person,” said Rausch, a junior video and film major from Durham, N.C. “It was awesome to experience something so intense. We had one shot to get it right, and we just had to stay calm and manage the adrenaline.”

Kempf, a sophomore graphic design major from Sterling, Kan., also mentioned the challenge of maintaining composure in a fast-paced, deadline-driven professional environment. “The expectations were so different from the classroom. It was crunch time, and we had to deliver

our best work,” she said.

For Carey, the chance to work alongside and learn from professional journalists is the most valuable aspect of the internship. “Journalists from the International Mission Board, Lifeway, the North American Mission Board, not to mention all the various state papers and news agencies, are all there covering the event, and our students are working right with them, asking them questions and watching how they go about their work. There is no way to simulate that in the classroom.” Impressed with their work, several of the papers even expressed potential interest in offering the students internships after graduation. “They performed quite well,” Carey said.