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### GWU Alumni- and Student-Produced Documentary, led by Christian Jessup, Captures Men's Basketball Journey to the 2019 NCAA Tournament

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ALUMNI

# GWU Alumni- and Student-Produced Documentary, led by Christian Jessup, Captures Men’s Basketball Journey to the 2019 NCAA Tournament

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 15, 2020



## ‘The Dancin’ Bulldogs’ Features Interviews, Never-Before-Released Footage and Insights into the Championship Run

A new documentary, directed by Christian Jessup, celebrates the Gardner-Webb University Men’s Basketball team’s magical 2018-’19 season, which ended with an appearance in the NCAA Tournament, a first in men’s Division I basketball history. “The Dancin’ Bulldogs: A 16 Seed’s Journey to the NCAA Tournament” debuts Oct. 16, 2020, on YouTube. The film follows the team’s and coaching staff’s entire journey, from the early wins against NCAA powerhouses to heartbreaking losses, the tournament appearance and coming home after the loss to No. 1 seed Virginia. Also featured are several interviews with players, coaches and NCAA officials, and never-before-released footage of the team’s championship run.

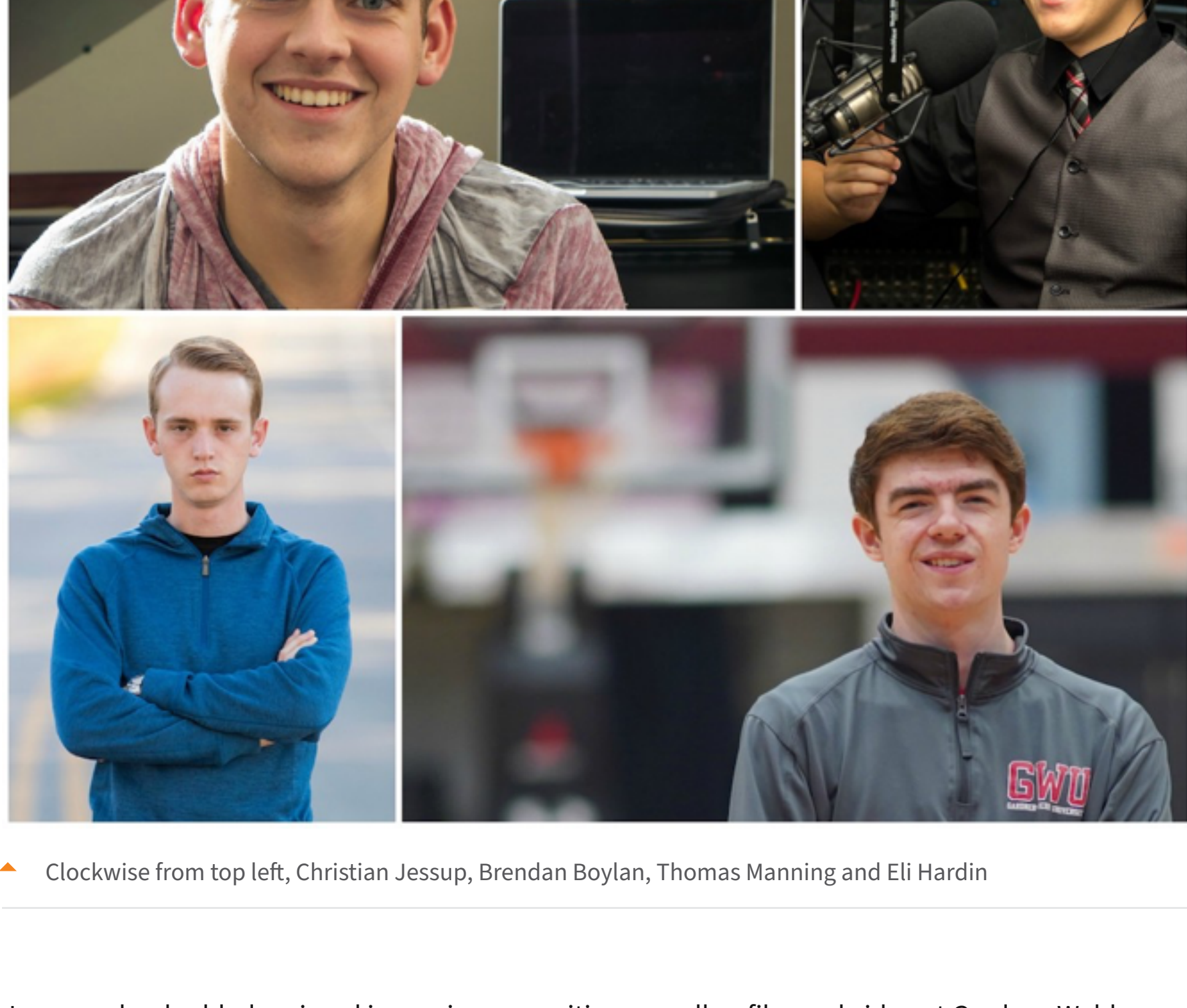
Jessup, a 2018 GWU alumnus, makes his directing debut with this 80-minute film that started out as a short tribute. He got the idea for the documentary from watching ESPN’s “The Last Dance,” a documentary series that followed Michael Jordan’s NBA finals run. Jessup compared the feelings he had watching the series to those he had while witnessing Gardner-Webb win the Big South Championship on television and then participate in the NCAA tournament.

He texted his friend, GWU student Thomas Manning, who is a member of the North Carolina Film Critics’ Association and was on the ESPN Plus camera crew that filmed the men’s basketball team that year. “When I first texted him about the idea, it was like, ‘What if we did a 5-minute tribute?’” Jessup shared. “Then, it was like we can stretch it out to a 10-minute tribute. Somehow along the way, I roped Thomas into helping me make a full-length documentary.”

The two enlisted the help of GWU 2018 alumni, Eli Hardin and Brendan Boylan. “Eli is second assistant director and a writer,” Jessup said. “He was really a huge help when it came to fact checking. He is a stats guy and keeps up with all of these news articles. Brendan is producing it and gave a ton of voice work. Some scenes didn’t quite have the original audio. Brendan helped call some game shots and provided some much-needed commentary to make sure the documentary moves along.”



▲ Jose Perez celebrates the Big South Championship win.



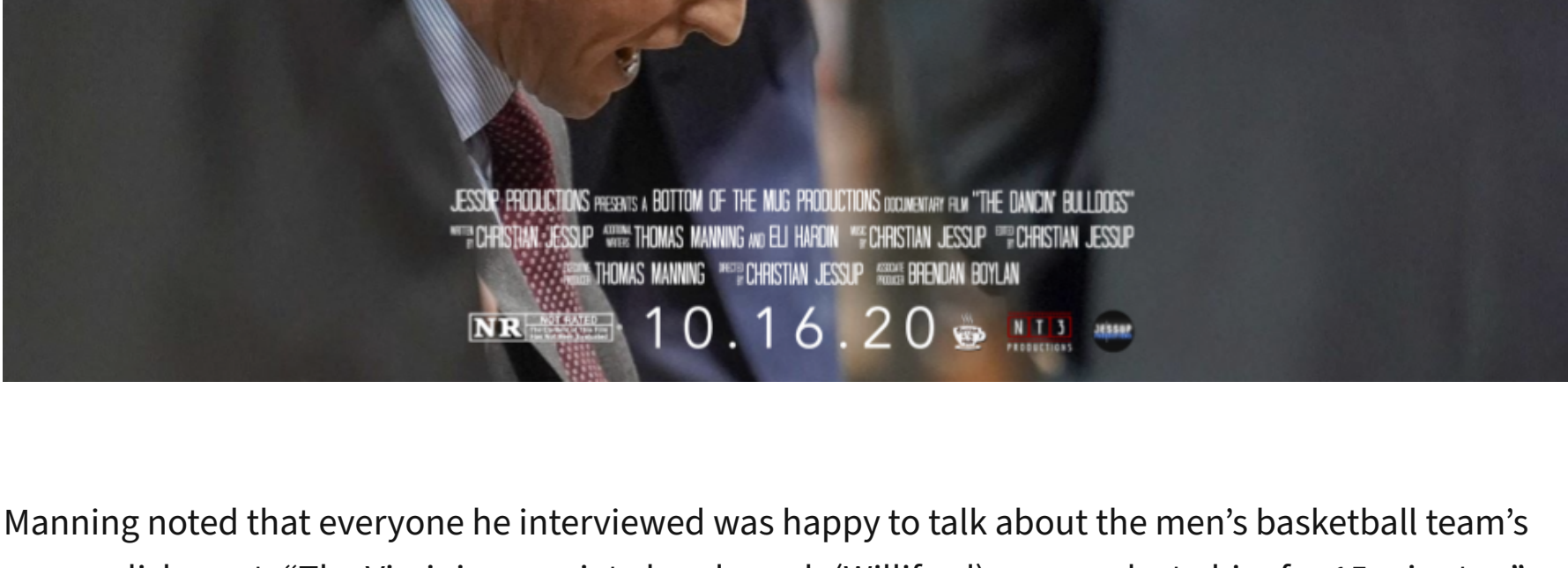
▲ Clockwise from top left, Christian Jessup, Brendan Boylan, Thomas Manning and Eli Hardin

Jessup, who doubled majored in music composition as well as film and video at Gardner-Webb, wrote and performed the music for the documentary. He has been a composer for film and visual media since 2016 and interned in 2017 with Hans Zimmer (Pirates of the Caribbean, The Lion King, Dark Knight Trilogy). He also writes music for television and radio advertisements with VisionPoint Marketing.

“I’m grateful that Christian would have me along,” Manning asserted. “He’s the mastermind behind it all. I hope that my efforts have meant something to him. Here we are at three-and-a-half months after he sent the first text asking for the clips. It’s been an incredible experience.”

Jessup confessed that in the beginning he didn’t realize how much work was involved. He started out by searching for anything he could find online related to the Bulldogs season. “Once I had that first outline in place, purely based on the footage and the interviews I found online, that was when we made the executive decision to build this out into a documentary,” Jessup explained. “That’s when we started interviewing others and setting up interviews. There’s no telling how many people Thomas interviewed. We were doing Zoom recordings.”

One of the reasons Manning had access to so many people was because of COVID-19 restrictions. “Everyone was at home over the summer,” Jessup informed. “The Big South commissioner (Kyle Kallander), Chris Holtman, the former head basketball coach, who is at Ohio state now, and Jason Williford, Virginia’s associate head coach. A lot of people we might not normally be able to interview, we were able to get in touch with and hold Zoom interviews. Once we got all the interviews in place, that’s when we really did a deep dive, detailed script to build out exactly how we wanted to make this story flow. From there, it was editing and editing, over and over again.”



Manning noted that everyone he interviewed was happy to talk about the men’s basketball team’s accomplishment. “The Virginia associate head coach (Williford)—we spoke to him for 15 minutes,” Manning related. “He was extremely complimentary of Gardner-Webb, and the fight they put up in the NCAA tournament game against Virginia, who went on to win the National Championship that year. It blows my mind—Kyle Kallander the Big South Commissioner—he was very generous with his time. One of the greatest learning experiences from this is that it never hurts to ask. The worst they can say is no. If you approach it with a positive outlook and try to respect their time, they will reciprocate that.”

While wrapping up the documentary and feeling good about the content, Manning and Jessup received a last-minute email that took the film to the next level. “Ryan Bridges (GWU director of Sports Information) emails us and says, ‘Hey I’ve got 150 gigabytes of never-before-seen footage made by Eric Mangum (former director of new media relations). It’s not on YouTube, and it’s never been shown at Gardner-Webb. Would you guys want it?’” Jessup stated. “Of course, we said yes, but I said to Thomas, I’m going to need to change the release date. It was a huge help from Gardner-Webb. The documentary was coming together, but that was a game-changer in terms of the angles and the shots we were able to include. Some of the quotes in that footage we never thought we’d ever find.”

Jessup and Manning are excited for people to see the film and grateful for the support they received in its making. “We’ve had a lot of people enthusiastic about it,” Manning concluded. “We are proud of our entire crew. Christian, Eli, Brendan—all have been fantastic in their respective roles.”

Jessup added, “I’m excited to share it. I’m so proud of it, and I hope by reliving those moments, people watching it will be proud of Gardner-Webb and what they accomplished.”

## Where to find the movie

[The Dancin' Bulldogs website](#)

[IMDb](#)

[Letterboxd](#)

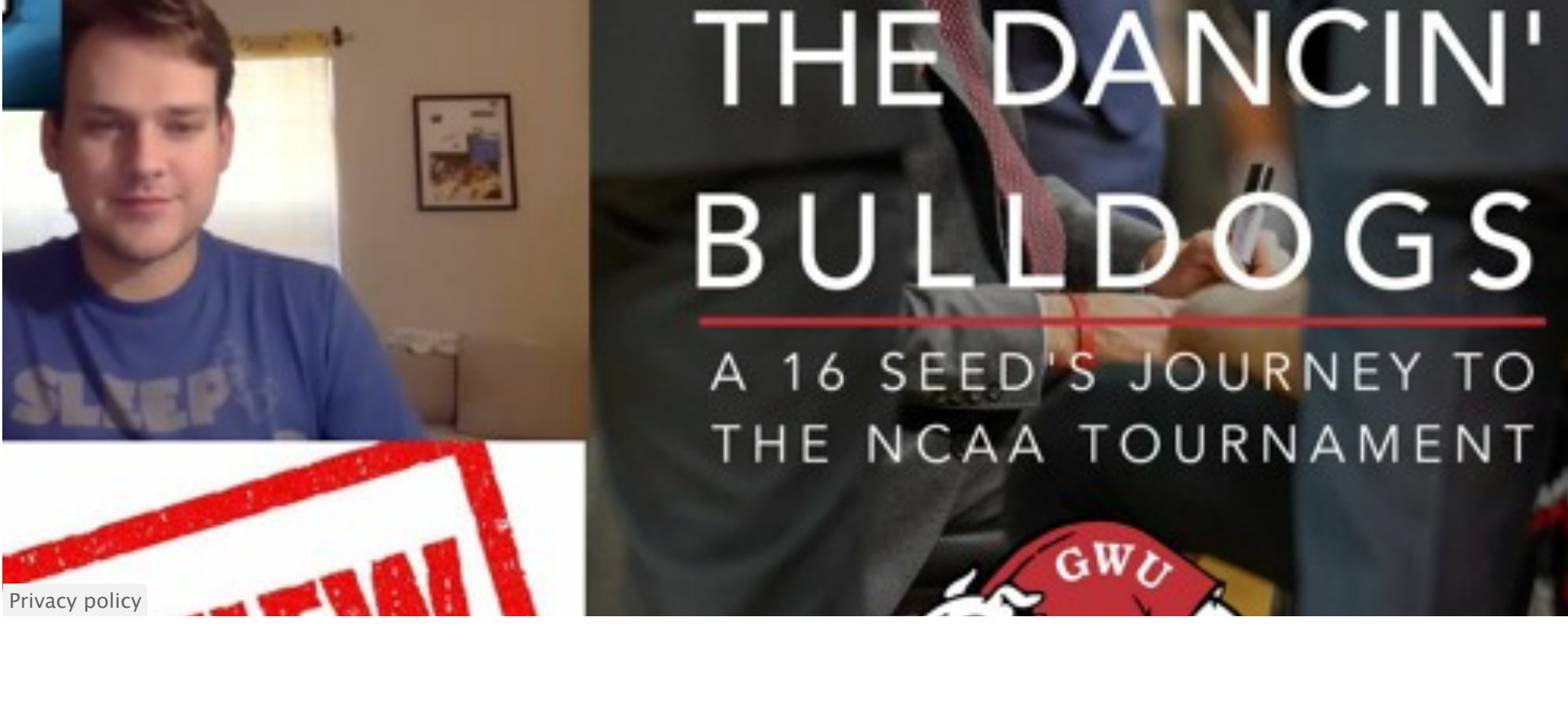
[YouTube](#)

## Interviews

[Behind the scenes video interview](#) with Christian Jessup and Thomas Manning.

## Soundcloud

Check out the interview on the making of The Dancin’ Bulldogs: A 16 Seed’s Journey to the NCAA Tournament.



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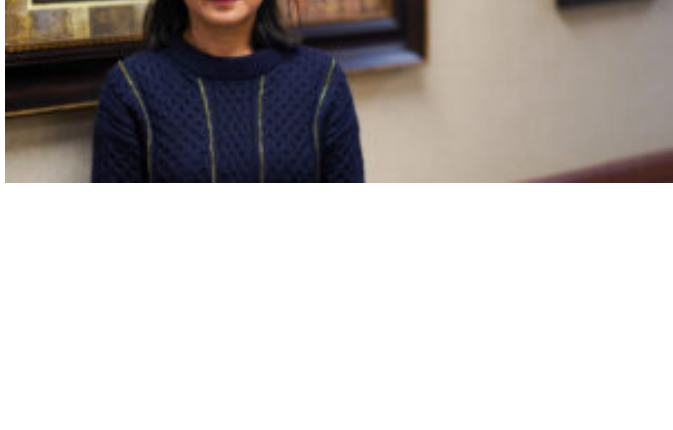
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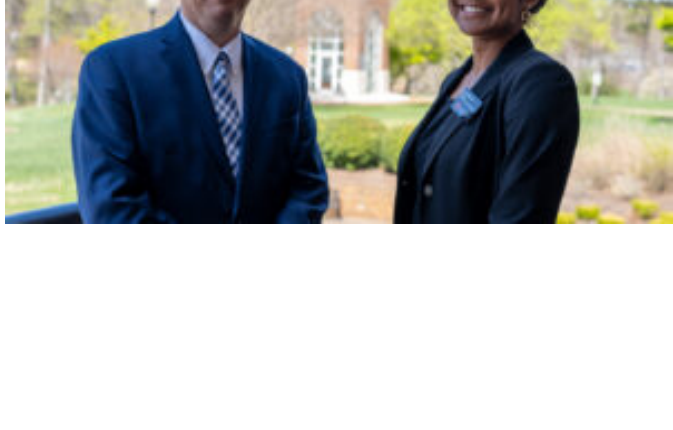


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