

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

1-26-2021

Gardner-Webb Alumni Remember Transition to Senior College (50 years ago)

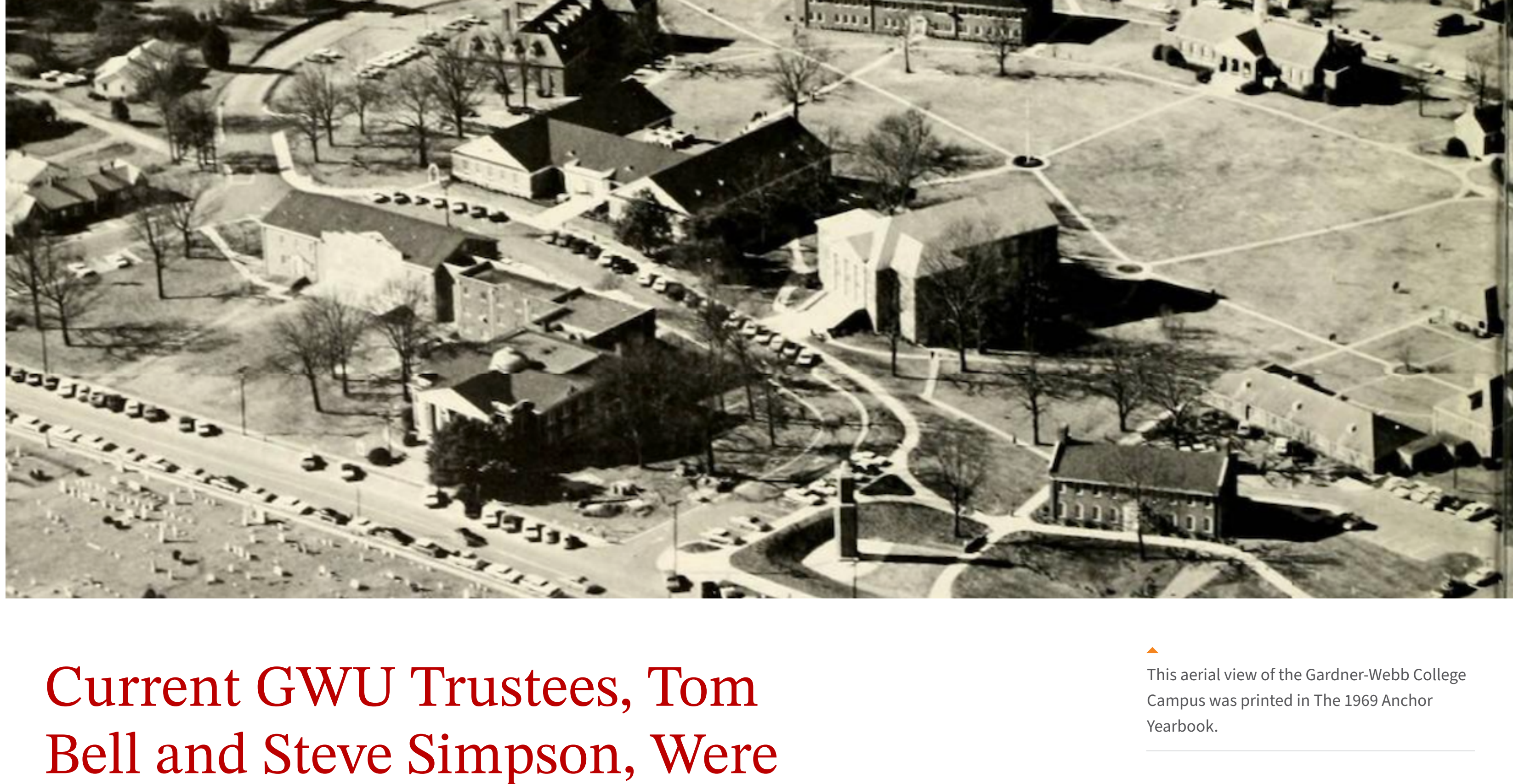
Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

CAMPUS NEWS

Gardner-Webb Alumni Remember Transition to Senior College (50 years ago)

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JANUARY 26, 2021



▲ This aerial view of the Gardner-Webb College Campus was printed in The 1969 Anchor Yearbook.

Current GWU Trustees, Tom Bell and Steve Simpson, Were Among First to Receive Bachelor’s Degrees

To our readers: Gardner-Webb University celebrates a historic milestone in 2021—the 50th anniversary of senior college status. Transitioning to a four-year college in 1971 was the result of 10 years of planning and meeting goals. To celebrate this anniversary, Gardner-Webb will publish a series of articles highlighting the stories of former faculty, staff, alumni and supporters who experienced this significant achievement. [View the history timeline here.](#)

On Dec. 1, 1971, students at Gardner-Webb College gathered in Bost Gymnasium to hear the official announcement that Gardner-Webb was a senior college, accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The student newspaper, “The Pilot,” reported that Bill Boyd, director of public relations, played a recording of his telephone conversation with President Dr. Eugene Poston, who was in Miami, Fla., at the SACS meeting.

Boyd held a cassette tape player up to the microphone for the assembly to hear Poston say, “I am grateful to God that our dream has been fulfilled—an accredited senior college with the extra dimension, which is a Christian atmosphere. This is the beginning of a new era for Gardner-Webb College. Our greatest task of excellent quality is ahead of us and we will need the help of all of our friends.”



▲ Photo of Bill Boyd from the Dec. 13, 1971 Pilot

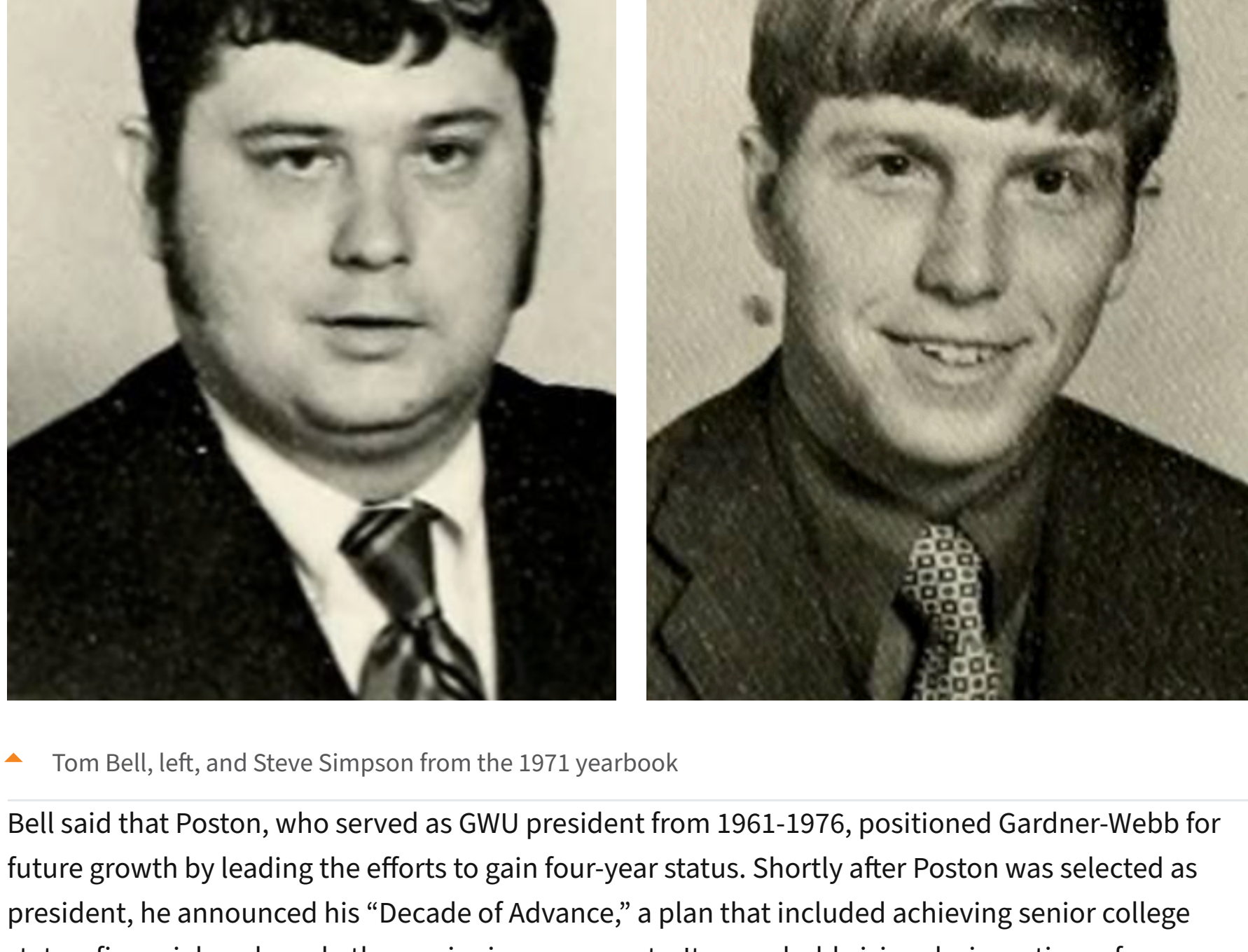
Two students who played a role in helping Gardner-Webb achieve four-year status were [Tom Bell](#) and [Steve Simpson](#). Among the first to receive bachelor’s degrees on May 16, 1971, they were confident that in seven months their alma mater would achieve accreditation.

“We trusted the process,” Bell stated. He and Simpson were part of the final prerequisite to complete accreditation, which was that Gardner-Webb must graduate one four-year class. Bell received a Bachelor of Arts degree in social science, economics and history. Simpson, who lives in Raleigh, N.C., earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry.

Bell and Simpson have remained close friends since their graduation, and now serve on the GWU Board of Trustees. “Over the long period of time being associated with Gardner-Webb, I’ve been blessed to have friends like Steve,” affirmed Bell, a retired business owner who lives in Atlanta, Ga. “There’s about eight of us who still get together every couple of years.”

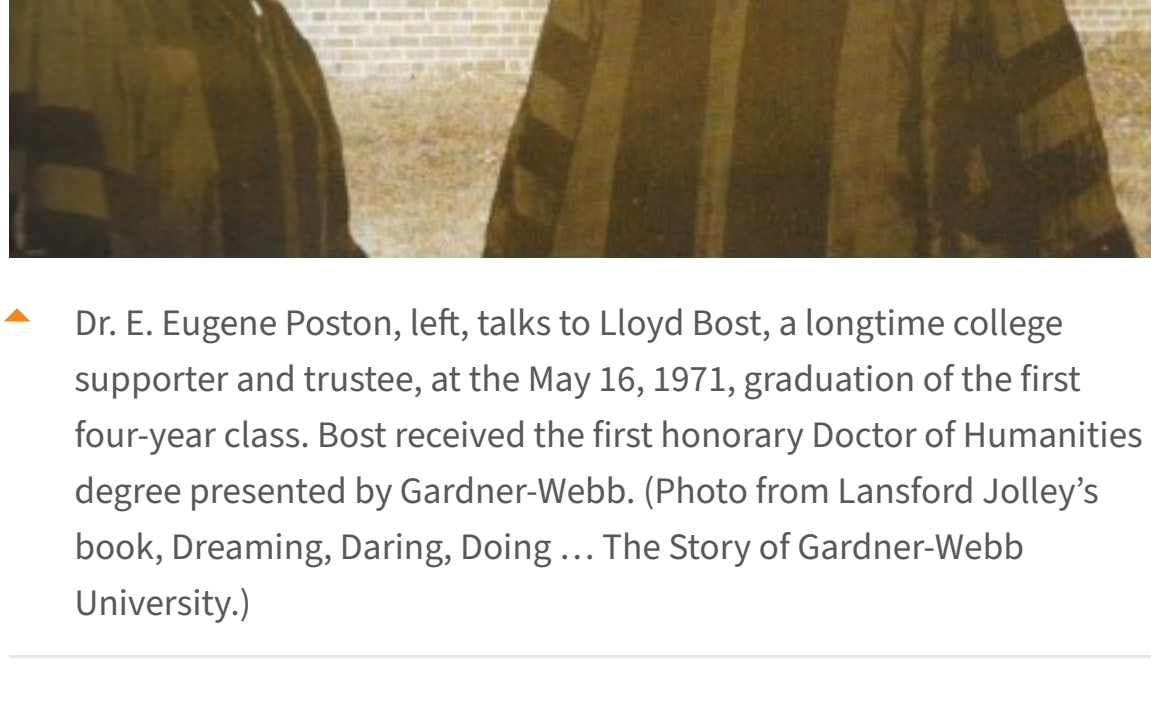


▲ Tom Bell, left, and Steve Simpson are 1971 alumni and serve on the Gardner-Webb University Board of Trustees.



▲ Tom Bell, left, and Steve Simpson from the 1971 yearbook

Bell said that Poston, who served as GWU president from 1961-1976, positioned Gardner-Webb for future growth by leading the efforts to gain four-year status. Shortly after Poston was selected as president, he announced his “Decade of Advance,” a plan that included achieving senior college status, financial goals and other major improvements. It was a bold vision during a time of uncertainty and unrest internationally. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the threat of nuclear war, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and John and Bobby Kennedy, the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movement were among many items on the hearts and the minds of the students, faculty and staff as they navigated these transitional waters to four-year status.



▲ Dr. E. Eugene Poston, left, talks to Lloyd Bost, a longtime college supporter and trustee, at the May 16, 1971, graduation of the first four-year class. Bost received the first honorary Doctor of Humanities degree presented by Gardner-Webb. (Photo from Lansford Jolley’s book, *Dreaming, Daring, Doing ... The Story of Gardner-Webb University*.)

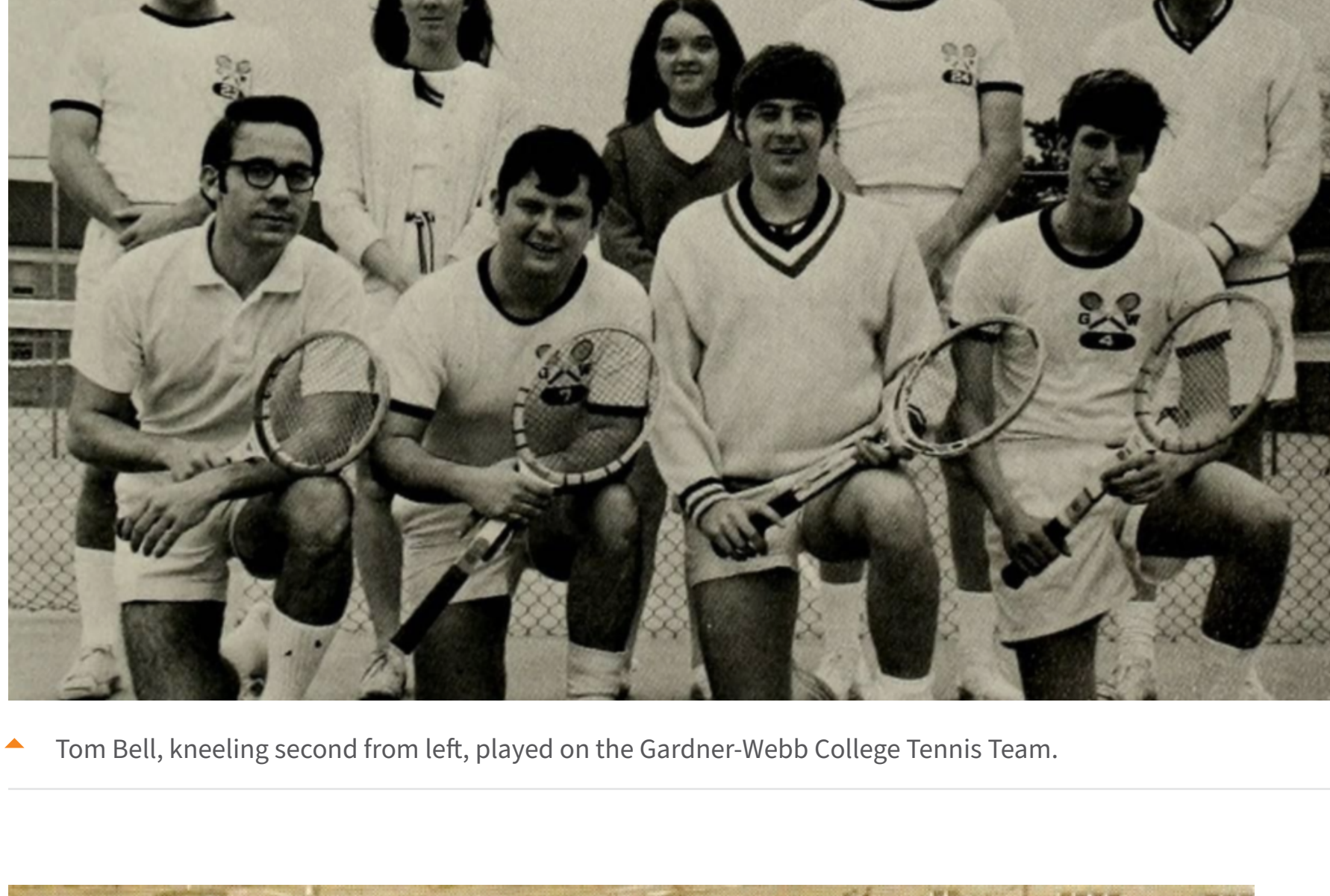
Poston enlisted the help of community leaders, and with support from Gardner-Webb’s faculty, staff and students, the school prepared for the accreditation process. A press release from 1968 described the growth Gardner-Webb had experienced in seven years and thanked people from the surrounding counties in North and South Carolina, who gave gifts, ranging from five cents to \$750,000. The release stated, “In 1961, enrollment was 640, the plant value at around \$2 million, and income at \$500,000. By 1968, Gardner-Webb had increased its value to over \$7 million, endowment neared \$2 million, enrollment grew to 1,310, and teaching faculty increased to 72 with 15 professors having doctoral degrees.”

Over the last half-century, Gardner-Webb has experienced growth in all areas. The University’s total spring 2021 enrollment—in undergraduate, non-traditional undergraduate and graduate programs—is approximately 3,389, with 1,106 students living on campus. Gardner-Webb is a nationally recognized institution, with six professional schools and 14 academic departments offering more than 80 undergraduate and graduate major fields of study. The University has more than 168 full-time faculty, 77 percent with a Ph.D. or equivalent.

Alumni of 1971 and 1972 are invited to share their memories of being Gardner-Webb’s first four-year graduates. Click [here](#) to tell us about your days at GWU.

Other stories in this series:

- [Gardner-Webb is a Place Where Lasting Friendships are Forged](#)
 - [First Theatre Majors Appeared on Television Twice During First Four Years](#)
 - [Former Gardner-Webb Faculty Members Remember Transition to Four-year College](#)
 - [In late 60s, Gardner-Webb Gave Professors, Like Tony Eastman, Incentive to Earn Doctorates](#)
 - [Professor Emeritus Came to Gardner-Webb When First Baccalaureate Class Were Freshmen](#)
- Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*



▲ Tom Bell, kneeling second from left, played on the Gardner-Webb College Tennis Team.



▲ The Class of 1971 on graduation day, May 16, 1971 (photo from Lansford Jolley’s book, *Dreaming, Daring, Doing ... The History of Gardner-Webb University*)

PREVIOUS NEWS ARTICLE

In 1961, Gardner-Webb was Ready for Transition to Senior College Status

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS | JANUARY 26, 2021

NEXT NEWS ARTICLE

Gardner-Webb is a Place Where Lasting Friendships are Forged

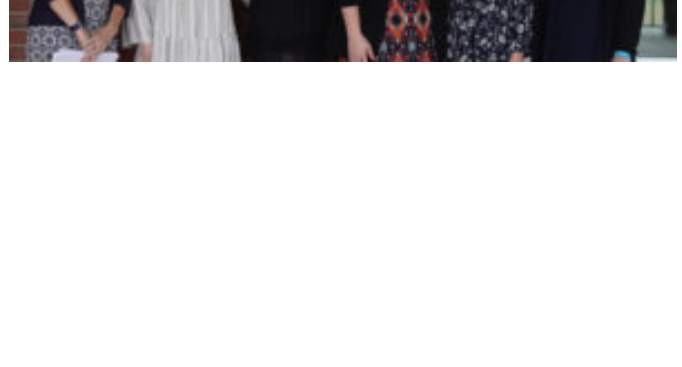
OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS | JANUARY 28, 2021

Related News

See All News >

NEWS ARTICLE

Gardner-Webb Sigma Zeta National Science and Mathematics Honor Society Inducts New Members

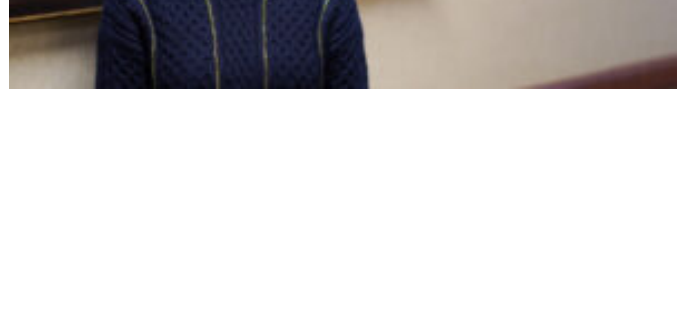


Students Recognized for Academic Achievement in Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, and Computer Science BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Nineteen students were inducted into the Sigma Zeta National Science and Mathematics Honor Society on April [...]

WEB COMMUNICATIONS | APRIL 7, 2022

NEWS ARTICLE

President’s 2022 Early Career Award Recognizes Social Sciences Professor



Dr. Aihua Zhang Honored for Exceptional Productivity in Scholarship, Creative Discovery and Instruction BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Dr. Aihua Zhang, assistant professor in the Gardner-Webb University Department of Social Sciences, has been [...]

WEB COMMUNICATIONS | APRIL 5, 2022

NEWS ARTICLE

Stanly Community College Partners with Gardner-Webb to Offer Co-Admission Agreements



‘Bulldog-Bound’ and Pathway Agreements Make Transferring to GWU Easy for SCC Students BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Officials from Gardner-Webb University and Stanly Community College (SCC) in Albemarle, N.C., signed agreements on April [...]

WEB COMMUNICATIONS | APRIL 5, 2022

