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**ACADEMICS**

## GWU Officials Announce Appointment of New Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JANUARY 5, 2022



### Dr. Karen Aubrey Begins Her Responsibilities at GWU on March 21, 2022

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University officials are excited to announce that Dr. Karen Aubrey, of LaGrange, Ga., has been named to the position of provost and vice president for academic affairs. Her predecessor, Dr. Ben Leslie, will be returning to the classroom to serve in the School of Divinity as professor of theology and ethics. Aubrey's appointment comes after a national search conducted with the assistance of Myers-McRae Executive Search Firm. Aubrey begins her responsibilities at GWU on March 21, 2022.



▲ Dr. Karen Aubrey

In her new role, Aubrey will report directly to GWU President Dr. William Downs. “In searching for a new provost for Gardner-Webb, I was looking for a strategic partner, a program builder, and a relentless pursuer of student success. I believe we have found all of those crucial qualities in Dr. Karen Aubrey,” Downs affirmed. “Dr. Aubrey comes to us after already serving with distinction as vice president for academic affairs at a private, Christian university. She understands the importance of developing degree programs and high-impact practices that will attract high-ability students and grow the institution’s reputation for excellence. Above all, she brings fresh energy and new ideas to the challenge of ensuring that our students stay on track for graduation. I very much look forward to working with Dr. Aubrey as we advance the mission of our University in bold and innovative ways.”

Aubrey will supervise academic deans, directors and department chairs across the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Health Sciences, College of Business, College of Education and School of Divinity. Among her many duties, she will provide leadership in the areas of new program development and reshape and reinvigorate the University’s efforts to improve student retention rates. She will coordinate the University’s multiple accreditation reviews and renewals and work collaboratively with the Athletics Department to support the academic success of approximately 600 student-athletes participating in 22 Division I sports.

Aubrey has served as vice president for academic affairs and as a professor at LaGrange College since January 2017. She has 30 years of experience in higher education, working since 2007 in administrative leadership positions. Her extensive academic and administrative experience includes such areas as curriculum development, experiential learning, outreach, shared governance, and resource management. Much of her work at LaGrange was directed at creating infrastructure, launching innovative programs in support of high impact practices and market demand, expanding faculty development support, and developing internal and external partnerships. Additionally, she has extensive experience in accreditation procedures through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), including serving as a SACSCOC reviewer and presenter at annual meetings.

“I am honored to join such an exceptional institution that is committed deeply to students and whose values I share,” Aubrey stated. “I look forward to working in partnership with President Downs and the campus community to achieve the mission of Gardner-Webb University, building upon a history of success, to help its students go on to thrive in their lives.”

Aubrey began her academic career as a graduate teaching assistant in 1985 at the University of Southern Mississippi, where she became an instructor in 1989. She was hired as an instructor at Augusta (Ga.) University in 1990, where she was promoted to assistant professor in 1993, associate professor in 1997 and served as a professor from 2010 to 2017. She taught courses ranging from core curriculum undergraduate surveys to graduate level seminars in the Department of Communication, Department of English and Foreign Languages, in campus Study Abroad Programs and in University System of Georgia European Council Programs.

She earned her Ph.D. in 18th Century British Literature in 1990 from the University of Southern Mississippi. She received her M.A. in English Literature in 1985 from the University of Central Arkansas, and her Bachelor of Science in Education in English, with a secondary teaching certification in English, in 1983 from the University of Central Arkansas (Conway).

Among her many accomplishments, Aubrey is most satisfied with her work in experiential learning. She was active at, and helped grow, Augusta University's study abroad programs and administered LaGrange College's Global Engagement program. Almost 90 percent of LaGrange students travel abroad, and wherever they go a service-learning activity is part of the program. For example, in South Africa students construct a greenhouse for a school in a township; and in Senegal, they deliver school supplies and interview and write about the story of the SEED Academy, a school for middle school and high school children that specializes in training gifted academics and athletes in basketball.

Aubrey is involved in her community, particularly with the Imperial Theatre, a historic nonprofit in downtown Augusta. She and her husband, Phillip D'Ambrogi, have worked with its director in finding grants for upkeep and extensive restoration. She is active in fundraising activities in the Augusta and Atlanta areas, and is a partner with Richmond County nonprofit organizations to cultivate student internships and build connections to the university.

Members of the provost search committee included Downs, Kristen Setzer (vice president for Enrollment Management), Lesley Villarose (vice president for Student Development and Dean of Students), Dr. Tracy Jessup (vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University), Dr. Robert Canoy (dean, School of Divinity), Dr. Tom Jones (director, Honors Program), Dr. Jennifer Putnam (associate dean, College of Education), Dr. Earl Godfrey (professor of Accounting, College of Business), Dr. Anna Hamrick (chair of faculty; assistant director, Hunt School of Nursing), Stephanie Stearns (executive assistant, Office of the President), Jada Newton (Student Body president), Christina Alexander (graduate student representative).

*Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*