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**CAMPUS NEWS**

## Panel of Journalists Discusses Wide Range of Topics During Forum at Gardner-Webb

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON FEBRUARY 18, 2022



▲ The panelists participate in the discussion, from left, Emma Way, T.J. McCullough, Beatriz Guerrero and Ken Lemon.

### Moderated by University President Dr. William Downs, Program Available on GWU Website, Social Media

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb University President Dr. William Downs invited a panel of journalists to campus recently to discuss “The Mass Media in American Society: From Fake News to Twitter Politics and Beyond.” Downs shared with the capacity crowd of more than 50 students and faculty about his own interest in the news media, which goes back to when he was an undergrad in the 1980s, majoring in political science and minoring in journalism.

“I grew up in Raleigh, N.C., during a time when two newspapers were delivered at the foot of every driveway, every day—think about that—we got two newspapers at my home every day, The News and Observer came every morning, and The Raleigh Times came in the afternoon,” Downs reflected. “One thing I think most of us can agree upon is that we need the media. A democratic society needs access to good information. Without it, our system may break down. Without it, our system will break down. So, we know that the media matters to us in some very real ways, but the interaction of today’s society with the media is quite different than the interactions perhaps of our parents or of their parents before them. That’s why we have a panel of experts here tonight to help us make some sense of these changing media matters.”



▲ GWU President Dr. William Downs and the panelists listen as Ken Lemon answers a question.

Downs began the discussion by asking the panel to describe their motivation for entering the field. Questions during the program, ranged from describing media’s evolution to discovering and offering what customers want. Gardner-Webb alumnus T.J. McCullough, market president and publisher at Charlotte Business Journal, talked about how his publication offers two emailed newsletters a day and a longer printed piece on Fridays because that is what readers want. He also said that outlets will discover their own strengths.

In discussing the greatest change in media, Emma Way, deputy managing editor of the Axios Local news initiative in Charlotte, N.C., talked about how readers’ attention spans are much shorter than they were a decade ago. “Think about how fast you swipe on TikTok,” Way said. “Everyone is on their phone. They are not going to sit down for a story. People only stay on a web page for a minute or less.”

Ken Lemon, an award-winning journalist with WSOC-TV in Charlotte, mentioned that social media has changed the way people are consuming news. “They no longer wait for their news,” he said. “It’s a lot easier to reach people through social media than the traditional channels.”

When discussing fake news, Beatriz Guerrero, education reporter for the Gaston (N.C.) Gazette, told the audience that her view of fake news is anything considered an opinion. “We’re journalists; we’re here to tell you the facts,” she said. “It’s something that I learned in school—no one cares about your opinion when you are telling the news.”

Before the program ended, the audience was given an opportunity to ask questions. The entire discussion was recorded live, and the program will be available for viewing below soon and on the Gardner-Webb [Facebook Page \(https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/\)](https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/) and [YouTube channel \(https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGP4wUtKfrvrbjicSFyGnNw\)](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGP4wUtKfrvrbjicSFyGnNw) and linked on the University’s [Instagram \(https://www.instagram.com/gardnerwebb/\)](https://www.instagram.com/gardnerwebb/), [LinkedIn \(https://www.linkedin.com/school/gardnerwebb/mycompany/\)](https://www.linkedin.com/school/gardnerwebb/mycompany/), and [Twitter \(https://twitter.com/gardnerwebb/\)](https://twitter.com/gardnerwebb/) platforms.

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