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Gardner-Webb Launches Year-Long Celebration of Title IX 50th Anniversary

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JUNE 23, 2022



Observance will Highlight the Women Athletes and Leaders Who Led the Way for Future Generations

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—On June 23, 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 was signed into law by President Richard Nixon.

The law celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2022 and has opened the door to countless educational opportunities for women across the United States.

Intercollegiate athletics has been positively impacted, and Gardner-Webb University will join hundreds of athletics departments around the country in celebrating Title IX (<https://gardner-webb.edu/about/policies-and-information/title-xi-compliance/celebrating-50-years/>) throughout 2022-2023 athletics season.

In addition to its individual pioneers and trailblazers, Gardner-Webb will honor several teams and alumni groups at games and events on campus as part of a year-long celebration of the anniversary.

As part of the recognition, the University will also highlight the women influencers and administrators, who made valuable contributions throughout GWU's 117-year academic history. Beginning with Gardner-Webb's co-namesake, Fay Webb Gardner, who was an ardent supporter of the University, along with her husband, the former governor of North Carolina and U.S. ambassador to Great Britain, O. Max Gardner. Despite living in Raleigh, N.C., and Washington, D.C., the Gardners never forgot their hometown of Shelby and the junior college in Boiling Springs. Their devotion to the college was recognized in 1942, when the trustees voted to name the school, Gardner-Webb, after them.



▲ Fay Webb Gardner



▲ Dina Smith McClure



▲ Fredia Lawrence King



▲ Dr. Darlene J. Gravett

Mrs. Gardner was a leader in the community and extensively involved in her husband's political career. She was also a member of the State League of Women Voters and the Benjamin Cleveland Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. For their contributions, Mrs. Gardner and her husband were inducted into the Cleveland County Hall of Fame in 1976.

Dr. Darlene J. Gravett, the University's first female member of the senior staff and associate provost emerita, is the second influential women to be recognized this month. Born in Roanoke, Va., Gravett lived there for 10 years before moving from one state to another as well as to other countries as the daughter of an Army enlisted man, who retired as a master sergeant, and then as the wife of Ray, an Army officer, who retired as a lieutenant colonel.

Along the way she managed to stay at Eastern (Ky.) University for all four years to earn a B.A. degree in English; she worked around her husband's various Army assignments to attain her master's degree in English education from the University of Miami while he was in Vietnam the first time; and finally she earned a doctorate in English literature from the University of Southern Mississippi while her husband had an ROTC assignment there and while he was in Vietnam a second time. Upon her husband's retirement from the Army after 21 years of active duty service, she started her full-time teaching career, 10 years at one college and then 18 years at Gardner-Webb. After retirement, the couple stayed in Boiling Springs, where they have lived for 30 years, longer than anywhere else in her life. She describes these different phases of her life in her autobiography "Army Brat, Army Bride, Civilian: A Life."

Other influential female leaders in Gardner-Webb's history will be recognized during the year, including Lisa Tucker, board member and benefactor; Dr. Karen Aubrey, provost and vice president; Dr. Dee Hunt, Gardner-Webb Vice President of Student Development; and others.

Gardner-Webb's first women's athletics teams predate Title IX by many decades, dating back to the school's time as a boarding high school in the early 1900s. Known then as Boiling Springs High, the school first fielded a tennis team in 1913 and a basketball team in 1916.

Programs also appeared in the 1920s for soccer, softball and volleyball. Gardner-Webb Junior College briefly fielded women's basketball from 1956-1959 under head coach Hester Haynes—with Joan Cline the first women's star player. Cline earned All-State honors twice during her time with the Bulldogs.

Gardner-Webb transitioned to senior college status following the 1968-1969 season, joining the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). Following the passage of Title IX in 1972, the Bulldogs' athletics program moved into a new era when women's basketball started competition during the 1975-1976 season.



▲ The 1976 Gardner-Webb Women's Basketball Team

Coached by Phyllis Littlefield, the team played its first game on Nov. 18, 1975 in historic Bost Gymnasium vs. Claflin (S.C.). The starting five consisted of Linda Cody, Pam Helton, Sherwin Johnson, Wanda Nantz and Linda Ramseur. The Bulldogs picked up their first win soon after, beating UNC Charlotte 61-56 on Dec. 9, 1975 in Bost Gym. Helton led the way with 23 points, Cody added 11 points and Ramseur scored 10.

After a 1-3 start, Littlefield's team finished with a 7-7 record and went on to record winning records in each of the next three seasons – culminating with a 21-4 mark in 1978-1979.

Volleyball was added in 1978 and by 1985 Gardner-Webb sponsored five women's teams – with cross country (1980), women's tennis (1980) and softball (1984) emerging as intercollegiate programs.

Heading into the 2022-2023 athletics season, Gardner-Webb sponsors 11 women's teams at the NCAA Division I level, with lacrosse the most recent addition in 2015.

#GWUHerStory Submission Form

Help us tell the Title IX story by sharing your experiences. We want to recognize and celebrate our alumni, faculty, staff, and students who have been impacted by the Title IX law and the opportunities and experiences it has provided and protected.

Share your story, as well as a photo or video/audio recording with us to be included in the storytelling we publish on our website and social platforms.

Share your story here. 

Gardner-Webb Athletics Highlights In The Title IX Era – A Timeline

From its early beginnings in the 1970s, women's athletics teams at Gardner-Webb continue to produce conference championships, All-Conference performers, All-Americans, Hall of Famers and national tournament teams. Several of those notable moments are listed below:

1975 – Women's basketball plays its first senior college game

1978 – Volleyball added as a varsity sport

1980 – Women's tennis added as a varsity sport

1980 – Women's cross country added as a varsity sport

1984 – Softball added as a varsity sport

1990 – Women's soccer added as a varsity sport

1991 – Dina Smith McClure (Basketball) becomes first female student-athlete inducted into the Gardner-Webb Athletics Hall of Fame

1996 – Women's basketball advances to NCAA Division II National Tournament

1997 – Softball wins South Atlantic Conference Tournament title

1997 – Volleyball wins South Atlantic Conference Regular Season and Tournament titles

1998 – Women's golf added as a varsity sport

1999 – Women's tennis advances to NCAA Division II Regional Tournament

1999 – Volleyball wins South Atlantic Conference Regular Season and Tournament titles for the second time in three seasons

1999 – Women's Track & Field added as a varsity sport, finishes 4th nationally indoors and 5th nationally outdoors in first Division II season

1999 – Swimming added as a varsity sport, finishes 14th nationally in first Division II season

2000 – Women's tennis advances to NCAA Division II Regional Tournament for the second season in a row

2000 – Sylvia Chelimo, Nicole McLain and Julia O'Neal combine to win five individual Division II national titles in Track & Field

2000 – Melissa Smith swims to NCAA Division II individual national title

2004 – Women's swimming wins the first of four-straight Northeast Conference championships

2005 – Women's soccer star Leeanna Woodworth leads NCAA Division I in scoring

2007 – Terra Wilson swims to school's first NCAA Division I All-America honor

2010 – Women's basketball wins the Big South Conference regular season championship

2011 – Women's basketball wins Big South Conference Tournament, earns automatic bid to the NCAA Division I Championship

2015 – Women's lacrosse added as a varsity sport

Women in the Gardner-Webb Athletics Hall of Fame

1991 – Dina Smith McClure (Basketball)

1995 – Carolyn Dewberry Greene (Basketball)

2002 – Fredia Lawrence King (Basketball)

2005 – Susan Bolt Briggs (Basketball)

2006 – Kristen Lott Setzer (Soccer)

2008 – Kat Ayotte (Soccer and Softball)

2009 – Delania Adams (Basketball)

2010 – Kathy Smith Brooks (Volleyball)

2011 – Heather Hauser (Volleyball)

2013 – Sylvia Chelimo (Cross Country, Track & Field)

2013 – Melissa Smith (Swimming)

2014 – Natilee Dawkins (Track & Field)

2015 – Linette Ramseur (Volleyball)

2016 – Leeanna Woodworth Blalock (Soccer)

2017 – Terra Wilson (Swimming)

2018 – Taylor Simpson Jackson (Swimming)

2019 – Elizabeth Maxwell Knippen (Track & Field)

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.