

CAMPUS NEWS

Gardner-Webb Presidents Switch Places for One Day

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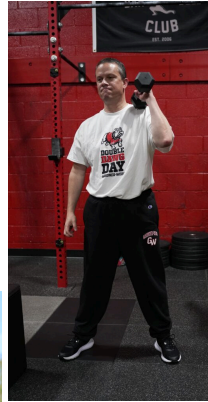
SGA President Attends Meetings While GWU President Goes to Class and Student Activities

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Recently, Gardner-Webb University’s two presidents tested the idiom, “Walk a mile in my shoes.” Senior Blake Elizalde, Student Government Association (SGA) President and GWU President Dr. William M. Downs switched places for a day.

Downs started the President Switch Day last year at Gardner-Webb, because he believes it is essential to learn as much as possible about the actual, day-to-day student experience. He began the custom when he was a dean at his former university.

“I truly look forward to this day each academic year,” Downs observed. “On one level it’s just pure fun for me to get out from behind the desk and immerse myself in college life because there’s so much to do at GWU. On a more substantive and meaningful level, it is important as a university president that I experience what our students experience—classroom instruction, service projects, campus dining, recreational activities, and more. The annual swap provides me with a productive lens through which I can see what’s working well on our campus...and what needs our attention.”

While Downs began the day dressed as Mack, GWU’s costumed mascot, Elizalde had a meeting with Stephanie Stearns, executive assistant to the president, to discuss commencement plans.



▲ Photo by
Samantha
Holt / GWU
Photo Staff

Moving through Elizalde's itinerary as SGA president and student, Downs ate breakfast, attended Spanish class, and participated in a service activity, packing food bags for Shelby Middle School and James Love Elementary. He took a coffee break at Starbucks, chatting with students, before going to a leadership book talk, eating lunch in Tucker Student Center, working at the Admissions office front desk and joining a CrossFit Class to end the day.

Elizalde attended the Community Prayer Gathering and spent the rest of his day in meetings with members of the President's Cabinet and Academic Council: Associate Provost Dr. Bruce Boyles, graduate studies; Executive Director of Student Success Dr. Ryan Erck; Vice President for Advancement Nate Evans and Director of Alumni Relations Leah Clevenger and Assistant Director of Annual Giving Kanisha Fowler; Vice President and University Chaplain for Christian Life and Service Dr. Josh Parrott; Vice President for Enrollment Management Dean Clark; Vice President of Marketing Richard McDevitt; and Vice President and Director of Athletics Dr. Andrew Goodrich.

They discussed topics related to academics, student success, young alumni giving and a student Bulldog Club, admissions, SGA marketing, and improving the game day experience for students.

"I really enjoyed switching places with Dr. Downs," Elizalde noted. "I was able to discuss student issues directly with vice presidents, directors, and deans. I was also shown what a meeting with President Downs looks like. Whenever I did get a chance, I would ride around in the Presidential Golf Cart and pick up students and take them where they needed to go. The only thing that I wish I could have gotten to do was see Dr. Downs in CrossFit Class."

He added, "I learned that sometimes change can't happen immediately, even if you're a university president. Everything begins with a conversation and then you go from there. Getting feedback from many individuals about a decision or change is a must. I just enjoyed the conversations that we had.

Administrators are people, too, and they care a lot about the students here on campus. Overall, it was an excellent day!”

View more photos from the day, [here \(https://photos.gardner-webb.edu/2023/April/President-Swap-2023/\)](https://photos.gardner-webb.edu/2023/April/President-Swap-2023/).



▲ Student Government Association President Blake Elizalde meets with Associate Provost of Graduate Studies Dr. Bruce Boyles.

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.