

**GWU COMMENCEMENT**

# Gardner-Webb Awards Degrees in Spring Commencement Ceremonies on May 4 and 5

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON MAY 4, 2023



## More than 500 Graduates Honored with Traditional Ceremony and Separate Recognition Events

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Officials at Gardner-Webb celebrated with over 500 graduates at the University’s formal Commencement on Thursday, May 4, at 7 p.m. Former N.C. Secretary of Commerce Sharon Decker was the guest speaker for the ceremony held in Spangler Stadium. The celebrations continue today with separate recognition ceremonies for the University’s four colleges and the School of Divinity.

Gardner-Webb President Dr. William M. Downs began Thursday’s program with a welcome to graduates and their guests. “Tonight, we celebrate your achievement. We celebrate your persistence, and we celebrate your determination,” he emphasized. “And, perhaps most importantly, we celebrate the promise that each of you will carry forth from this place...the promise of a bright and rewarding future. As graduates, you will be Gardner-Webb’s legacy to the world. And for each and every one of you, we give thanks.”

During the ceremony, two students were recognized with the Most Outstanding Graduate Medals, an honor that is voted on by the faculty. The awards recognized outstanding leadership, citizenship, and academic excellence. Gabrielle Martin, of Statesville, N.C., who received a Bachelor of Arts in music, was honored with the Most Outstanding Female Graduate Medal. Martin has participated in the Opera Theatre at GWU as well as several music ensembles, including Concert Choir, Old Time Ensemble and Treble Chorale.

Micah Zehnder, of Boiling Springs, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in art, received The Most Outstanding Male Graduate Medal. A potter, Zehnder's specialty is making ceramic musical instruments. During his career at Gardner-Webb, he's also received academic awards in art history and German.

Senior Scholastic Awards were presented to students who completed their academic careers with a perfect 4.0 GPA. The honorees were:

- Lauryn Bailey Ashe, of Orangeburg, S.C., Bachelor of Science in psychology.
- Helena Isabel Berczes, of Henrico, Va., Bachelor of Science in biology.
- Allyson Hope Butts, of Concord, N.C., Bachelor of Science in exercise science.
- Katie Jones Canipe, Bachelor of Arts in art.
- Catherine Clover, of Waxhaw, N.C., Bachelor of Science in psychology.
- Catherine Mahaley Faulkner, of Clover, N.C., Bachelor of Science in nursing.
- Leah Bell Holland, of Kings Mountain, N.C., Bachelor of Arts in art.
- Jasmine Page Jones, of Tamuning, Bachelor of Science in exercise science.
- Pankti Kirit Patel, of Pageland, S.C., Bachelor of Science in nursing.
- Victor Putter, of Pretoria Gauteng, Bachelor of Science in math.
- Kendall Carlisle Smith, of Shelby, N.C., Bachelor of Science in psychology.
- Katherine Anne Turner, of Apex, N.C., Bachelor of Science in nursing.
- Selah Rose Werner, of Robbinsville, N.C., Bachelor of Science in Christian studies.



▲ Photo by Shira Edwards / GWU Photo Staff



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▲ Photo by Samantha Holt / GWU Photo Staff

The Degree Completion Program Scholastic Award recognizes students with the highest cumulative grade point average. These awards were presented to Emma Kathryn Cloninger, of Gastonia, N.C., Bachelor of Science in elementary education, and Sarah Nance Jones, of Trinity, N.C., Bachelor of Science in human services.

In her speech, Decker, shared two of the most important lessons she's learned in her life. Now serving as the president of Carolina Operations at Tryon Equestrian Partners in Mill Springs, N.C., Decker started her career at Duke Energy Corp. in 1979, and during her 17 years there, she made history by becoming the company's youngest and first female vice president. She came to Tryon in 2015 as chief operating officer and vice president and was named president in 2020. Prior to Tryon, Decker was appointed Secretary of Commerce by Gov. Pat McCrory and served in that capacity for two years.

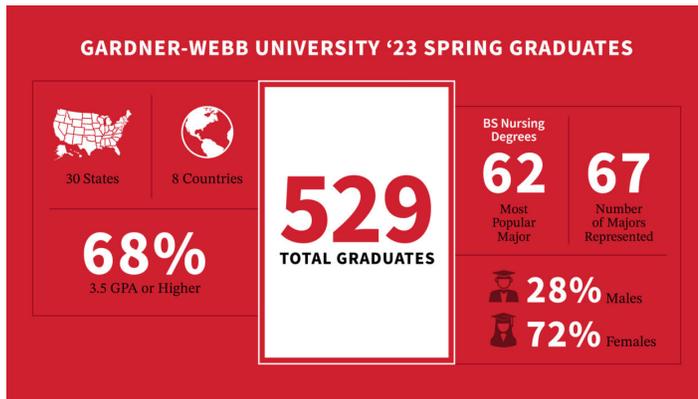
Throughout all of her experiences, she's learned the importance of living a life of generosity. "Don't get caught so actively in the pursuit, that you forget the purpose of this journey," she emphasized. "The longer I live, the clearer it is to me, that the point of this journey is not about me, it's about what I do for others."

The second lesson is "Live a Life of Love." Decker shared how her father taught her to love God first, then self, because of you don't take care of yourself is difficult to care for family, friends and others. "At the root of my success has been a willingness to humble myself to God's leading and to love God with every ounce of my being," Decker stated. "And to love my neighbor as myself."

A video of Friday's commencement ceremony is available on the [University Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/) (<https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/>) and [YouTube channel](#).

(<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGP4wUtKfrvrbjjsSFyGnNw>). A gallery of photos is available [here](https://photos.gardner-webb.edu/2023/May/Graduation-/) (<https://photos.gardner-webb.edu/2023/May/Graduation-/>).

For graduates or families interested in purchasing official commencement photos, you should reach out to GradImages online at [GradImages.com](https://www.gradimages.com). (<https://www.gradimages.com/Home/Search>) You should be able to explore images by school, or name, check out frequently asked questions, and contact customer services.



*Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to nine colleges and schools, 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](https://gardner-webb.edu).*