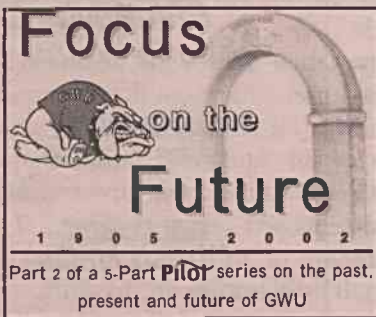




A look at Gardner-Webb's Christian environment



Erin Boyd
Pilot co-editor

Friday night: A group of Gardner-Webb students travel to Charlotte to attend a praise and prayer service together. During the service, explained students, they sing praise songs, play instruments and raise arms toward Heaven.

While these students are spending their evening in worship, many of their classmates are checking into an old warehouse in Shelby. For a mere \$2 entry fee, one GWU female said, they spend their night drinking from unlimited kegs of beer, inhaling whiffs of marijuana and dancing to the beat of the music around them.

These two descriptions picture the sharp contrast of student life at Gardner-Webb. It is no secret to current GWU

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students that the University was founded under strict Christian principles. But what did those who started this institution intend it to become? What do current students, who lead a wide range of lifestyles, think of the religious affiliation the school upholds? And how do faculty and staff view the spiritual focus of the institute?

Gardner-Webb historian Lansford Jolley, in his book *Dreaming, Daring, Doing...The Story of Gardner-Webb University*, stated that the Baptists founders of Gardner-Webb believed Christian education to be vital to the church, the state, the nation and the world.

"Its founders believed in undergirding the best in academic teaching with the steadfast base of Christian morality," wrote Jolley.

Tom Jones, professor of Natural Sciences, has seen many shifts in the spirituality of the school since coming to the institution in 1980.

"The majority of people have the principles which Christ lived and dictat-

ed central to their lives," said Jones. "A wide range of [Christian] denominations are represented at Gardner-Webb."

Jones noted that all faculty and staff must be professing Christians in order to be employed by the school. Though it is not a requirement for students to be Christians, Jones believes that the majority of students are.

Jones stated that he has seen the spirituality of the faculty and staff remain relatively constant, while the spirituality of students has moved to a different level.

"Gardner-Webb students have moved from a Moderate Baptist group to a more fundamental group. More students profess Christianity," he said.

He recounted a story, however, of how a former Buddhist student perceived Gardner-Webb Christians.

"The student said that many Gardner-Webb Christians wear their Christianity on their arms, like a badge of rank, rather than in their hearts," he said.

Even some of Gardner-Webb's

Christian students state that many Christian students display hypocrisy.

"There are a lot of hypocrites here that keep non-Christians from wanting to hang around Christians," said junior Sarah Cox, a religion major.

Cox, a Christian, stated that she believes non-Christians are more accepting than Christians on the Gardner-Webb campus.

Senior Dan Rothem, who is Jewish, believes that Gardner-Webb maintains "just enough" religious requirements, such as Dimensions and religion classes, to be classified as a Christian university.

Though Rothem acknowledged that some GWU students have treated him differently because of his religious beliefs, he has found a place for himself at the University on the baseball team and in the Communications department. He feels, however, that the school could be less demanding of students in the area of religious practices.

"I'd like to see GWU concentrate more on offering students Christian activities without forcing them to participate in them. Forcing students to go to Dimensions doesn't work," he said.

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Student meeting results in petition instead of protest

Emily Killian
Pilot staff

SGA and about 85 students met in the clubhouse on Wednesday, Feb. 27 to discuss the recent changes on campus and to decide for or against protesting in front of the Board of Trustees meeting the next morning.

The impromptu meeting was called by SGA to address issues about a possible student picket outside the board meeting. During the meeting, rumors about cut staff positions were discussed, as were rumors about the proposed new football stadium and concerns about the "Christian" atmosphere on campus.

Many attendees questioned the direction of the school and actions taken by administration

members.

The decision was made not to protest by the majority of students present, even though these students represented only 8 percent of all students living on campus.

As students gathered, there were whispered conversations in groups; however, when the meeting started, it was like a military briefing.

SGA senator Mike Rakes, a junior, spoke about recent position eliminations in the faculty and possible solutions for maintaining those positions with minimal damage to students.

Rakes explained that some of the budgets could be manipulated to keep the academic advising center, the campus ministries intern and secretary positions and others in opera-

tion.

"I propose that we shift some of the money from the capital fund to the operational fund," said Rakes.

SGA Vice President Patrick Woody talked about the outcome of a recent SGA meeting with President White.

"Basically it was a back and forth thing. We asked for something and he said no," said Woody. "We really didn't get anywhere."

Woody, along with SGA President Andy Polk, expressed hope that the meeting had an effect on White.

"Student concerns are being heard," said Polk, who advised against picketing in front of the board meeting. He believes that students have not exhausted all their other options, including petitioning

and talking to the administration.

"Basically it [picketing] will make the administration angry and feel like we're being extremist," said Polk, who does not want to alienate the administration.

During a lengthy session of student questions and comments, many students expressed concerns that the administration is putting finances before student interests and that the school's Christian values are being compromised.

"Students tried to place the blame of the budget changes on other students rather than on departmental changes," said junior Christina Parkins, who attended the meeting. "The good thing is that both sides came together and people lis-

tened to each other."

"The school should be rotating around a cross instead of a dollar sign," said Amanda Kersey, sophomore class president. "This is not the Christian school that was represented to people."

The meeting was wrapped up with a prayer and a vote on whether or not to picket the following day.

"We as a student body can choose to protest or not," said Senior Class President Hamal Strayhorn.

After students voted not to protest, and to make a petition instead, Woody asked them to write down exactly what they want the administration to do, and send it to his campus box (6045), so SGA can draft the ideas into a petition.