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OUACHITA
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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita honors 331 graduates, awards honorary doctorate to Larry Kircher

May 16, 2016

By Trennis Henderson, OBU vice president for communications

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Celebrating Ouachita Baptist University's 129th spring commencement on May 14, university officials conferred a total of 337 degrees on 331 graduates, including Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Music, Bachelor of Music Education and Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees as well as Ouachita's first Associate of Arts degrees earned through the university's Ouachita at New Life Church program.

This year's graduating class featured 142 honor graduates, including 21 who graduated *summa cum laude* with a grade point average of 3.95 or higher, 54 who graduated *magna cum laude* (3.75 GPA) and 67 who graduated *cum laude* (3.5 GPA). University officials also recognized 14 graduates who completed Ouachita's Carl Goodson Honors Program and 32 members of the Alpha Chi national honor society. Also honored were three graduates who were commissioned with the rank of Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army: Benjamin Adcock, Joseph Hughes and Noah Myers.

Senior Class President Jacob Moreno Robles, a nutrition/dietetics major from Mexico City, led the commencement invocation. Scripture reading was led by three students from the Pruet School of Christian Studies: Haylee Garland, a Christian studies/Christian ministries and psychology double major from Ward, Ark.; Elizabeth Peevy, a Christian studies/Christian missions major from Bryant, Ark.; and Amber Williams, a Christian studies/Christian missions major from Mount Vernon, Ark.

Ouachita Interim President Charles Wright also recognized Nathan Lowman, a history major from Little Rock, who is a fourth-generation Ouachita graduate dating back 95 years to his great-grandfather's graduation in 1921.

Dr. Wright presented Larry Kircher, a longtime member of the Ouachita Board of Trustees, with an honorary Doctor of Humanities degree on behalf of fellow trustees. Board members voted earlier this year to honor Kircher, a 1965 OBU graduate, in recognition of his "outstanding labors in business, civic and church life, as well as his generous and loyal service to his alma mater."

"It is with a very grateful heart that I stand in front of you today," Kircher responded. "Ouachita has meant a great deal to me and has made the difference in my life over the years."

Citing Jeremiah 29:11, he told the graduating class, "God does have a plan for you and His plan is to prosper you and to give you hope for a future."

Encouraging graduates to give their alma mater "your undying support," he said, "One of your obligations will be to always give a cheer for Ouachita, You need to speak highly of Ouachita. Who better to recruit new students to Ouachita than those who have just finished their education here?"

Kircher, who began serving at Citizens Bank of Bald Knob, Ark., in 1969, retired as president of the bank in 2014 after 45 years of service. Dedicated to serving his community, he founded the White County

Community Foundation, co-founded the Bald Knob Public Education Foundation and the White County Single Parent Scholarship Fund and has served nearly 50 years as a deacon and treasurer at Central Baptist Church of Bald Knob. In addition to serving eight terms on the Ouachita Board of Trustees, he has served on the boards of Arkansas' Independent Colleges and Universities, Arkansas Bankers Association and American Bankers Association.

He and his wife, Molly, a 1964 OBU graduate, have two daughters, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. The Kirchers have supported numerous projects and capital campaigns at Ouachita, including funding the Kircher Endowed Scholarship, the Kircher International Student Endowed Scholarship and the Kircher Study Abroad Endowed Scholarship. He was named a 2015 OBU Alumni Milestone Award recipient.

Jay Heflin, chairman of the Ouachita Board of Trustees, introduced Dr. Ben Sells, OBU's president-elect, who will assume office as president on June 1. "We are excited about a new era on the horizon at Ouachita," Heflin said. Affirming Dr. Sell's election as Ouachita's 16th president, Heflin said Dr. Sells and his wife, Lisa, "are a wonderful fit for our university."

"Graduates, your Ouachita experience has been a special opportunity for you," Dr. Sells emphasized, "and I want to suggest you have a special responsibility.

"Ouachita has prepared you exceedingly well to accept this special responsibility of contributing to God's redemptive purposes through your family, your vocation, your church, your community, this nation, this world," he added. "Your family and your alma mater will stand with you. We believe in you, we love you, we support you and we will pray for you.

"As you begin this transition from students to alumni, Ouachita is better because of you," he concluded. "As we dream a larger dream for Ouachita, your university asks you to help by living out the Ouachita mission whatever you do and wherever you go."

Dr. Wright, who is concluding 10 months as Ouachita's interim president, told the graduating class, "We pray God's blessings on each one of you young women and men who today are completing a meaningful milestone in your lives.

"Not only does this day represent the completion of a significant goal but it also presents a new beginning as you enter the next phase of your life," he noted. "I say this from our hearts: It has been an honor to know you, to serve you and, most importantly, to love you."

Dr. Ray Granade, director of library services and professor of history, and Dr. Nancy Hardman, Edna and Freda Linn Professor of Communication Sciences and Pre-Medical Studies, served as commencement marshals. Honorary marshals were Dr. Hal Bass, Professor Emeritus of Political Science, and Dr. Charles Fuller, Professor Emeritus of Music, who also were honored during the commencement ceremony.

Dr. Bass has taught at Ouachita since 1976, including serving as a full professor since 1989. He holds degrees from Baylor University and Vanderbilt University. He also has served in several administrative roles, including chair of the Department of Political Science, director of the Maddox Public Affairs Center and founding dean of the W.H. Sutton School of Social Sciences. He and his wife, Mitzi, are active members of First Baptist Church of Arkadelphia.

Dr. Fuller served at Ouachita from 1993 to 2007. He holds degrees from Baylor University, West Texas State University, Arizona State University, Truett Theological Seminary and Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond. He joined the Ouachita faculty as an associate professor of music and director of choral activities after serving in a similar role at East Texas Baptist University. He was promoted to full professor in 1997 and was named dean of Ouachita's School of Fine Arts and chair of the Division of Music in 2004.

Dr. Fuller has served since 2010 as minister for congregational life at Second Baptist Church of Little Rock. He and his wife, Cindy, continue to support Ouachita, including endowing the Rachel Fuller Memorial Scholarship named in memory of their daughter.