

Sent: Wednesday, February 17, 2021 3:04 PM

**Methodist University Earns Gold Status
Designated Military Friendly® School for 2021-22**

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – It was announced today that Methodist University earned the prestigious "Gold-Level" ranking while being designated as a Military Friendly® University for the 2021-22 school year.

The Military Friendly® ratings program started in 2003 as an advocacy vehicle to encourage civilian programs to invest in, recruit, retain, and advance military veterans as employees and/or students. With a long history of creating opportunities for military-affiliated students and their families – and with an office on the Fort Bragg base in Fayetteville –MU is annually recognized with an exemplary Military Friendly® honor.

"We are immensely proud of our Military Friendly® designation and work hard each year to review and expand services and implement programs and policies that positively impact our military-affiliated students," said Billy J. Buckner, director of MU at Fort Bragg. "As a result, we can provide more scholarships, transfer credits, and programs that meet the unique needs of this student population."

Being just a few miles from Fort Bragg and Pope Airfield, Methodist University students, faculty, staff, and alumni include veterans, active-duty military, and their families. With an office on base, veterans on staff, and educators who understand the unique wants and needs of soldiers and their families, MU is uniquely positioned to "Serve Those Who Serve."

MU recognizes the dynamic nature of military service and strives to enhance policies and academic programs, as well as develop degree programs, that best meet the needs of military students.

In January 2021, Methodist University began offering 100-percent online degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, which offer great opportunities to serve veterans, their spouses, and families.

"Our Methodist University Online Program is a tangible example of listening to, and meeting the needs of, our military community," said Buckner.

In addition to new online programs, military students can earn degrees without leaving the base, with B.S. degrees in Entrepreneurship, Environmental & Occupational Management, Leadership Communication, Health Care Administration, Business Administration and Political Science.

Learn more about the MU Fort Bragg Campus and programs at methodist.edu/bragg

Sent: Thursday, April 22, 2021 9:28 AM

Methodist University Honored for Supporting Military Spouses

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – Just weeks after being recognized with a Gold Ranking for its continued success in offering high-quality education programs for veteran and active members of the military, Methodist University is once again being acclaimed for its service to those in the military.

Today, the highly regarded Military Friendly organization announced that Methodist University has been designated a Military Spouse Friendly School.

“The Military Spouse Friendly Schools designation helps military spouses select schools that will support them in their education journey by meeting their unique needs as a part of a military family,” said Josh Rosen, National Program Manager of Military Friendly. “Schools that are selected for the list are at the forefront of supporting the goals of military spouses.”

For MU students in the military, the designation hardly comes as a surprise. MU has a long history of excellent service to military students and their families. Methodist University’s faculty includes veterans both on and off campus who understand the tough scheduling demands associated with military life.

In January of 2021, Methodist began offering 100-percent online degree programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels that best serve military families.

“We are dedicated to serving service members, veterans, and their families with compassion and the support they deserve,” said Billy Buckner, director of MU’s Fort Bragg Campus. “Methodist University Online is a huge benefit for our military-student population and affords students the flexibility and convenience they need to balance family, work, and school.”

Flexibility and balance for family life are just a few benefits a Methodist University education offers its military-students and their spouses.

Natasha Thomas, a stay-at-home mother, is pursuing a degree in Social Work at MU and is married to an active serviceman. Thomas, a veteran herself, appreciates the flexibility MU’s online classes offers.

“I find the class time very flexible with my schedule even when my husband is out in the field. The professors at MU, many who are veteran’s themselves or married to a service member, understand our situation and work with us,” said Thomas. “They are always there to help.”

Though Thomas had several choices for continuing her education, one of the things that convinced her MU was the place for her was MU’s personal attention through its admission counselors.

“Most colleges handed me a brochure and told me their information could be found in there. Randy Smith, director of Veteran Services at MU, really took his time with me and explained everything,” she said. “MU welcomed me like family and explained everything afforded to me and walked me through the entire process.”

Thomas is scheduled to graduate next spring and recommends classes at MU to service members and their spouses. “They are there to help you; you’re not going to feel alone,” she said. “MU will always help and say, ‘Hey we got you.’”

For more on the MU Fort Bragg Campus, MU Online, or information helpful to military families, please visit methodist.edu/bragg

Sent: Thursday, May 6, 2021 12:37 PM

Methodist University to Hold First Outdoor Commencement at Segra Stadium

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – This Saturday (May 8), Methodist University will host its 58th Spring Commencement Ceremony which will include many historic firsts. It will be the first time since its 1956 charter that the prestigious liberal-arts university will invite two different classes to the ceremony, and the first time hosting its Commencement outdoors. It's also the first time a graduation ceremony will be held in Segra Stadium in downtown Fayetteville.

Saturday's in-person Commencement is a triumph for Methodist, which successfully navigated the uncharted territories created by a global pandemic for an entire academic year. MU's doors remained open to residential living and in-person classes when numerous colleges and universities across the state and nation were unable to do the same.

"During this pandemic year we have gone forward together," said MU senior DJ DeCotis. "Together we hosted Zoom meetings and practiced social distancing. Together we cheered at or competed in athletic events. Together we completed our final full year of college. I'm filled with alacrity knowing in a couple days we will make one last piece of history together. I'm ecstatic and grateful to be a part of our MU history."

As the Commencement for last year's class was held virtually, MU has offered those graduates the opportunity to return for this year's event and walk the stage at Segra in celebration of their academic accomplishments. MU will include the commissioning of its graduating U.S. Army officers as part of the ceremony, as well.

Andy Macks, a class of 2020 graduate, is thankful for the chance to participate this year. He feels it brings closure.

"Being able to walk and be hooded, live and in person, brings a sort of legitimacy to having graduated," said Macks. "Our university inviting us to attend this Saturday's Commencement ceremony is very much appreciated."

Saturday's Commencement speaker will be Tom Austin, MU's head baseball coach and the winningest active coach in NCAA Division III. Austin recently passed the 1,200-win milestone. He's a fitting speaker for the first commencement held at Segra.

"It's awesome that we'll be celebrating our achievements in a state-of-the-art facility," said MU senior Daniel D'Antonio. "My family from Florida is coming and they're going to love the stadium and their time in downtown Fayetteville."

Several businesses in downtown Fayetteville have partnered with MU and will be offering products and discounts to the graduates.

Tickets for the Commencement are distributed solely by the graduates, there is no walk-up attendance, and stadium safety protocols for masks and social distanced seating are in place.

The Commencement will be livestreamed, with the link available on the homepage of the university web site, Methodist.edu.

Sent: Saturday, May 8, 2021 11:55 AM

METHODIST UNIVERSITY HOLDS HISTORIC GRADUATION AT SEGRA STADIUM

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – Methodist University graduated more than 200 students on Saturday during the first outdoor commencement ceremony in the school’s history. The commencement, held at Segra Stadium in downtown Fayetteville, graduated seniors from the class of 2021, but also recognized graduates from the class of 2020, who missed their in-person commencement when the global pandemic hit.

“Graduates, I’m proud of you. Together, we’ve been through a long dark season because of COVID,” said Dr. Stanley T. Wearden, MU’s president. “I have witnessed your resilience and have seen you make countless sacrifices. I have witnessed you rise above challenges and uncertainty of these times. It has been a sacred privilege to spend this time with you.”

Students, faculty and staff were able to make a far-from-ordinary academic year successful with hybrid learning and modified events, which resulted in the campus staying open for residential living and in-person classes all year while many colleges and universities across the state and nation shut their doors.

One of these modified events was the commencement ceremony, which is usually held indoors. Methodist University became the first institution of higher learning to partner with Segra Stadium downtown to host the open-air ceremony.

While some aspects of MU’s commencement changed, the ceremony remained one that honored the many accomplishments of its students. Eight students were recognized for their recent commission into the U.S. Army, while graduates Elias Rodriguez (Argentina) and Hamza Boubacar Kassomou (Niger) were recognized as the first MU grads from their respective countries.

Aiden Sherry was presented with the L. Stacey Weaver Award, which is awarded to a Spring graduate via a vote from MU faculty. The student must exemplify academic excellence, spiritual development, leadership, and service.

Darryll Decotis and Rachel Townsend became the first MU recipients of the Algernon Sydney Sullivan and Mary Mildred Sullivan Awards. These awards are given to the students who demonstrate a noble character and act as humble servants who place service to others before their own self-interests.

Distinguished graduates Allison Nagel (2020) and Maria Choi (2021) were selected by a vote by the senior class to share a few words during the ceremony.

“The close-knit community at Methodist is what makes our experience so much different than that at other colleges,” said Nagel. “I want to say thank you to every single person I’ve encountered at Methodist, and I challenge you to reach out and do the same. Even when you struggle, the people around you here today want you to succeed as much as you want to succeed yourself.”

“We’ve experienced so much in the past few years,” added Choi. “How much more will we learn and grow in the coming years? Every day, we have the opportunity to leave the world a slightly better place than it was when we woke up.”

The commencement address was given by long-time MU baseball coach Tom Austin, who was recently recognized as the winningest active baseball coach in NCAA Division III.

Austin, who has earned more than 1,200 career wins at Methodist University since joining the staff in 1980, gave graduates several pieces of advice for their life after MU.

His advice included be on time, be prepared, give a great effort, do the job no one wants to do, have a great attitude and great body language, treat others with respect and do the right thing.

“I’m going throw you one final pitch,” Austin said. “I hope you get a job you love as much as I love this job here at Methodist. Congratulations graduates, may God bless you and guide your every step.”

Following his speech, Wearden presented Austin with the University Medallion, one of Methodist’s highest honors.

Sent: Monday, October 4, 2021 1:58 PM

Huddleston Addresses 'Values' During Tally Center Event

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — A few hundred Methodist University students poured into the school's Huff Concert Hall on Monday and were treated to an eye-opening presentation on morals, ethics, and values from Army Colonel (ret.) Lou Huddleston, a leadership consultant and entrepreneur from Fayetteville.

"The path that you're on now will greatly influence the path that you'll be on as you go out into the world," Huddleston said. "As a young person, what you come to value now will be who you are 10, 20, 30 years from now."

Presented by the Lura S. Tally Center for Leadership Development at MU, Huddleston shared both personal stories and hard-hitting experiences that he related to the students and the university. He mentioned some of MU's mission-statement values "truth, virtue, justice, and love" and he asked the students: "Do you have a moral and ethical compass? If the answer is 'yes,' do you then have the moral courage to use it? A moral compass is useless if you don't have the courage to speak up and say 'No. Don't do that.'"

The Lura S. Tally Center for Leadership Development was started 25 years ago at Methodist University when a group of faculty and community leaders recognized an opportunity to design a program that would teach leadership, an ability essential to success in all careers. Then N.C. Senator Tally supported the program and more than two decades later, hundreds of MU graduates have greatly improved their career options as a result of stronger leadership ability.

"What resonated with me most was when (Huddleston) talked about looking to the person you will be 10, 20 years from now," said Kyle Schlegel, a sophomore from Philadelphia who was in the audience along with MU President Stanley T. Wearden and other MU staff and faculty. "It's great that they can bring in leaders like this who have persevered to find success."

Huddleston is the President and CEO of Operations Services, Inc. (OSI), a management consulting firm he founded in 2010 in Fayetteville. OSI provides government organizations with professional services in areas such as leadership training, information technology, cyber security, systems analysis, logistics, and management. Before launching OSI, he served 31 years in the U.S. Army in conventional and joint warfighting commands, retiring as a colonel.

Dr. Drew Ziegler, chair of MU's Political Science Department and director of the Tally Center for Leadership Development, shared with students the opportunities they have at MU to participate in new and expanded leadership activities. One of those is the Leadership Fellows Program, which provides an array of leadership courses and opportunities to students who want to develop such skills.

Sent: Thursday, October 28, 2021 3:39 PM

Methodist University Receives Largest Gift in School History

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — Methodist University has received a gift of more than \$14 million, the largest gift in school history. More than \$12 million of the gift will go directly to student scholarships.

The record-setting gift — with all but \$1.5 million being endowed — was given through the estate of Robert J. Chaffin of Fayetteville, who died in late May of this year at the age of 93. Chaffin's professional career was with Commercial Credit Corporation in Lumberton and Fayetteville, Cross Creek Savings and Loan in Fayetteville, and East Coast Federal Savings and Loan in Fayetteville.

The gift includes \$1.5 million designated for the renowned Nursing program at MU and its state-of-the-art facility, which will be named in honor of Chaffin.

“This remarkably generous gift demonstrates the extent to which the path we are taking as a faith-based university, rooted in the liberal arts but with strong professional programs, is both appreciated and valued,” said MU President Stanley T. Wearden. “Our willingness to adapt to workforce development and professional needs, while also holding strong to our mission and values, has put Methodist University in a position to succeed for decades.

“This gift also gives MU an even greater opportunity to offer scholarships that open doors for students who seek MU’s unique combination of a tight-knit, inclusive community with a top-tier education.”

Humble service to causes in which he believed was typical of Chaffin, and Wearden spoke to that exceptional humility in the way he established the gift for MU.

“Mr. Chaffin clearly was not looking for attention to his generosity during his lifetime. Quietly, very much behind the scenes, he was working on building a highly successful financial portfolio for the purpose of one day making a transformative gift to the University,” said Wearden. “While we knew he had established a bequest for the University, Mr. Chaffin never shared the full extent with us nor asked for any thanks in return.”

In addition to his successful career, Chaffin served on the Administrative Board and the Board of Trustees for Camp Ground United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, and was a long-time member of the church. He also served in the U.S. military and graduated from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

“The Board of Trustees at Methodist University has long wanted to grow our endowment and Mr. Chaffin’s gift is foundational as we launch a campaign for that purpose and continue to make MU affordable to all who desire our commitment to a mission-based education that prepares students to be both successful professionals and capable moral actors in the world,” said Mac Healy, chair of the Methodist University Board of Trustees. “This gift and others through the campaign will support all of our students, including greater scholarship support and improved campus facilities.”

With more than 80 areas of study across undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs — offered on campus and online — MU degrees include Forensic Science, Engineering, Computer Science, Business, Professional Golf Management, Sciences, Liberal Arts, and several programs in the Health Sciences.

"The Nursing Program at MU is continually expanding along with the need for highly trained nursing professionals," said Shannon Matthews, director of the MU Nursing Program. "For more than a decade we've been offering students a hands-on learning environment — including a nursing building with its own 10,000-square-foot simulation hospital — and we couldn't be more grateful for this gift to help us make this unique, state-of-the-art program even more affordable through additional scholarships for our outstanding students."

With expanding programs for military students and new partnerships with community colleges in the state — plus a growing number of 100-percent online degree programs — MU's footprint is expanding and additional scholarship funds through this gift allow for increased opportunity.

"I'm one of 97 percent of the MU students who receive financial aid from the University already, and to see our school have the chance to reach out and help future Monarchs even more is really encouraging," said MU Student Government President Daniel Magen '22 "That a private institution with one of the best faculty-to-student ratios in the state can be as affordable as the big state schools shows me we're investing in our students, both in our present and in our futures. MU students are so grateful to all who make Methodist University such an amazing value for us."

The \$14-million gift comes on the heels of other recent donations and grants to Methodist University resulting in a ribbon-cutting this fall for the Nancy and Murray Duggins Soccer Stadium, completion of work on the Price Softball Fieldhouse, installation of lights at Monarch Stadium, major renovations to the Green & Gold Dining Hall in the Berns Student Center, construction of the Matthews Ministry Center, construction of the Union-Zukowski Lobby & Gallery, a critical stream restoration, numerous golf course upgrades, a new endowment and naming of the Dr. Darl H. Champion Center for Excellence in Justice Administration, and in 2022, the anticipated completion of the Linda and Ralph Huff Concert Hall.

Sent: Tuesday, November 24, 2020 3:51 PM

Methodist University Professor Earns One of Army's Highest Civilian Honors

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. -- Dr. Sheri Michel, a professor in the Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program at Methodist University, has received the Meritorious Civilian Service Medal, one of the U.S. Army's highest civilian honors.

As our times often dictate, Michel was honored by the Army in a virtual ceremony with her physical honors (medal and proclamation) coming later.

"Without a doubt, it truly is an honor," said Michel, who is now a part of MU's ground-breaking program, the first entry-level OTD program in the state of North Carolina. "It is quite humbling and exciting to know that others saw my accomplishments as distinguished enough to warrant an award of this caliber."

Prior to joining MU's OTD program in August 2020, Michel worked as the Chief of Rehabilitation Services of the Soldier Recovery Unit (formerly Warrior Transition Battalion) at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. Her work with the Army dates back to 2008.

During the ceremony, former colleagues discussed Michel's accomplishments, which include managing a team of more than 20 personnel, both military and civilian, and completing deployments to the Republics of Georgia and the Ukraine. She was nominated for the award by Lt. Col. Edward Bridges, M.D., who served alongside her as a battalion surgeon.

"I consider her to be a pioneer in the area of developing rehabilitative care and comprehensive recovery for soldiers who have experienced trauma, as well as soldiers who have just gone through difficult times over the history of their career," Bridges said.

The choice to move away from her position with the Army was difficult, but necessary. After returning from her deployments, Michel was ready to step aside to allow another professional to grow and mature as a leader in the newly reformed Soldier Recovery Unit.

"I was intrigued by the fact the OTD program at Methodist was new and developing and I was drawn to the challenge of being on the forefront of change," said Michel.

For Dr. Meredith Gronski, director of the OTD program at Methodist, Michel's unique background is a strong point. Professors with extensive backgrounds in unique settings have a special knowledge and expertise to offer future occupational therapists.

"We were immediately impressed with Dr. Michel's prestigious career with the U.S. Army that highlighted her skills as a leader and trailblazer," said Gronski. "Her successful development of rehabilitation programs and staff reflects exactly what we have done here at the MU OTD program as the first entry-level OTD program in the state."

Michel hopes to simply “be a good professor” who instills her love of occupational therapy within her students. She looks forward to continue challenging future leaders of occupational therapy in hopes of advancing the practice beyond its traditional settings. These hopes are common amongst the faculty in the OTD program. According to Gronski, applicants and students quickly develop strong connections to the program’s faculty.

“A genuine care for students is a disposition that you cannot teach, and we have successfully built a team that embodies this as an essential value,” she said. “We knew Dr. Michel would be a good fit on our team to fulfill our mission to develop exceptional practitioners who will advance the profession through innovative, authentic practice.”

Sent: Friday, December 3, 2021 4:35 PM

**Methodist University and FTCC Partner for Students
Partnership Creates Easy Pathway for Community College Students to Earn a Four-Year Degree**

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — Two of the most successful institutions of higher learning – not just in Fayetteville, but in all of North Carolina – have joined forces to create a seamless path for students to advance their education and open doors for their futures.

In a ceremony on Thursday, the presidents of Methodist University and Fayetteville Technical Community College signed a Memorandum of Understanding that creates a seamless path for students to transfer from FTCC and pursue their four-year degree at MU. FTCC offers two-year associate degrees and certificates that can lead to the Bachelors – or perhaps eventually graduate degrees – that are offered at Methodist.

The signing, at Methodist's Matthews Ministry Center, was facilitated by MU Provost Suzanne Blum Malley, Ph.D., and featured administrators from both institutions – including MU President Stanley T. Wearden, Ph.D., and Dr. J. Larry Keen, the president at FTCC.

“We all understand the transformational power of education to change lives, to put people on a trajectory they may have never thought was possible,” Wearden said. “Some of Methodist's very best students come from community colleges which are integral to the future of higher education, both to North Carolina and to the nation at large. I'm excited about what we're doing with this agreement and the future for our institutions and the students.”

Both Wearden and Keen praised their academic and institutional planning teams for their hard work and careful attention to transfer detail and curriculum that is making the transition from FTCC to Methodist so smooth. Both schools plan to work together for many years for the benefit of their students.

“What we are doing is extraordinarily important to our institutions, but more importantly for our students,” Keen said. “None of us can do it alone, it's when we come together collaboratively that we're able to truly impact the lives of the students.”

The new agreement opens doors, relieves burdens, and provides aid to students. Students from nearly 30 FTCC programs can now take up to two Methodist campus courses – up to eight hours or eight credits and all at the community college rate– while completing their associate degree.

The partnership with FTCC is part of a larger strategy that Methodist University has implemented to offer students smooth transitions from community college to the four-year, bachelor's degrees offered at MU. Although MU accepts transfer credits from all accredited institutions of higher learning, MU has created Memorandums of Understanding with several community colleges in North Carolina within the past year: FTCC, Bladen, Central Carolina, Robeson, Sandhills, and Sampson.

“These partnerships will help put a bachelor's degree within reach for many of our community college graduates,” said Dr. Beth Carter, MU's Vice Provost for Online and Extended Learning. “Students are

guaranteed admission at MU upon completion of their Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science, and Associate of General Education degrees. As long as a student earns a minimum 2.0 grade-point average from one of the six community colleges, they will be guaranteed admission into Methodist University."

For more information about transferring college credits to Methodist University, visit MU's transfer page at methodist.edu/academics/registrar/transfer-partners/

Sent: Tuesday, December 7, 2021 11:59 AM

**Methodist University Holds December Graduation at Crown
Commanding General, U.S. Army Forces Command, to Offer Commencement Address**

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — December is always a festive month, and in 2021 at Methodist University there are more than 160 additional reasons for joyous celebration. On December 11, Crown Coliseum in Fayetteville will be the site for MU's 2021 December Graduation with family, friends, faculty, and staff honoring nearly seniors as they reach an amazing milestone in their lives.

The Commencement speaker will be General Michael X. Garrett, Commanding General, U.S. Army Forces Command. As commander of the U.S. Army's largest organization, he commands 215,000 active-duty soldiers and 190,000 members of the U.S. Army Reserve while providing training and readiness oversight of the Army National Guard. In total, the Forces Command team includes 745,000 soldiers and 96,000 civilians.

Just a few of Garrett's positions of leadership since receiving his commission in 1984 include commanding the 3rd Battalion, 325th Airborne Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg here in Fayetteville, commanding and deployment of the Alaska-based 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006, and beginning in 2013, Garrett spent six consecutive years focused on military operations in the Middle East, first as chief of staff, U.S. Central Command, and later as commanding general, U.S. Army Central and Coalition Forces Land Component Command.

"We are thrilled to have General Garrett participate in our Commencement ceremony as an inspiring example of honor, commitment, and leadership," said Dr. Suzanne Blum Malley, Provost at Methodist University. "We look forward to celebrating a wonderful day for our students and their loved ones with General Garrett as our esteemed guest."

As is a unique tradition at Methodist, graduates will not just receive a diploma on Dec. 11, each will take part in an academic hooding ceremony on stage that will include participation from their special, chosen sponsor (often a parent, spouse, child, faculty member or friend). The academic hood is a visual representation of the students' level of academic achievement and the scholastic degree being conferred.

The Commencement celebration at MU will also include a Baccalaureate Service (this year to be held December 10 in the Huff Concert Hall at MU). The day's events will also include a President's Reception honoring the class.

MU is honored to welcome General Garrett as the entire Monarch Nation celebrates and honors the achievements of the University's 2021 December graduating class. For additional detail and information related to graduation, please visit Methodist.edu/graduation.

Sent: Saturday, December 11, 2021 2:37 PM

Methodist University Holds December Graduation at Crown Coliseum

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. – More than 160 students graduated from Methodist University on Saturday in a celebration held at the Crown Coliseum in front of family, friends, MU faculty, and staff. It was the 49th-annual December graduation for MU.

MU's president, provost, board chair, and special Commencement speaker General Michael X. Garrett – commanding general of the U.S. Army Forces Command – joined others in celebrating these seniors who persevered and succeeded despite the hurdles of an international pandemic put before them.

“You’ve shown you have what it takes to endure, to prevail, to succeed, because you’ve done so in the face of one of the greatest challenges in modern history,” said Dr. Stanley T. Wearden, president at Methodist University. “Tough times bring our character to the surface. And what I’ve seen in you has been resilience and commitment to one another and to Methodist University.”

While many universities across the country had to turn to remote learning at various times over the past year, these seniors and the rest of the MU community have held strong to the theme of moving “Forward Together,” have earnestly followed University safety measures, and the school has never had to suspend its residential living or in-person learning opportunities.

“We’ve had plenty of challenges, and sometimes they seemed to change by the hour, but you’ve done what needed to be done,” Wearden said to the graduates. “Instead of letting the pandemic break you, you have risen to the challenges every day; you have cared for one another every day; and you have found what it took to finish your degrees in dignity and style.”

The ceremony was one that honored the many accomplishments of the students, including Macrae Conrad '21, who was chosen for the Distinguished Graduate Award by his classmates.

“The fact that we’ve made it to this point is pretty incredible,” Conrad said. “We’ve been hearing over and over how different things have been since this pandemic has started, but it is a significant accomplishment.”

Garrett's Commencement address touched on goals, values, and the hard work that leads to accomplishment.

“I know a couple of things about the power of teams who commit to share common goals and values and commit to working hard beside one another,” said Garrett, who commands 215,000 active-duty soldiers and 190,000 members of the U.S. Army Reserve. “It takes a whole lot of work to reach a day like today. That effort includes not only long hours, critical thinking and academic rigor that goes into your studies, but the resilience that goes along with balancing your academics with family. As you know too well, simply wanting something is not enough. You, graduates, wanted to do this hard work because you wanted the knowledge, personal growth, and credibility that comes with a Methodist

University education...It is my honor to be here celebrating what all of you know is a very meaningful and substantial milestone for today's graduates."

Following his speech, Wearden presented Garrett with an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University.

While getting a degree from Methodist University isn't easy, the students know how valuable it is when trying to enter the workforce and Wearden offered advice to remember those who walked alongside the graduates as they reached for this prestigious milestone in their lives.

"Remember this time. Remember each other and the faculty and staff of MU who have worked so hard to care for you," the president said. "Remember your families and friends who have made many sacrifices so you may have a better life. Remember your alma mater with pride and love, because that is how your alma mater will remember you. Remember, too, the Methodist University commitment to truth, virtue, justice, and love. Because our ability to thrive during a global pandemic has been rooted in these values."

Sent: Wednesday, December 29, 2021 5:12 PM

Methodist University Delays Opening of 2022 Spring Semester

FAYETTEVILLE, N.C. — With a continued focus on safety as the No. 1 priority, Methodist University President Stanley T. Wearden announced on Wednesday that the top-tier, highly ranked school in Fayetteville will be pushing back its 2022 Spring Semester start date for undergraduate on-campus residential and commuter students by one week (from Jan. 10 to Jan. 18, one day after the MLK Holiday).

“The Omicron variant of COVID-19 is spreading extraordinarily fast in our county, state, and nation. Today, in fact, we saw a national record for new cases during the entire pandemic,” Wearden said in a message to the MU community. “I am certain we will have cases on our campus this spring, but as promised all along, we are working daily to remain as open as possible while also being as safe as possible. Delaying the full opening of campus by a week affords us multiple opportunities to mitigate risk.”

MU has been extremely focused and effective in battling COVID-19 on campus for more than a year, never having to turn to remote learning like other schools in the region, state, and across the nation. The school’s “Forward Together” theme and efforts, plus the move to mandatory vaccinations in October, has kept reported COVID-19 cases on campus at zero for a majority of weeks since.

“As we transition from the 2021 Fall Semester to the 2022 Spring Semester, I see wonderful opportunities and achievements ahead. For some, it’s a final semester before the milestone of Commencement. For others, it’s a first semester at Methodist University with new doors being opened for the future,” Wearden said. “In every case, we move into this new year full of eagerness and excitement. As we have throughout the pandemic, we must continue to move Forward Together and make caring decisions to protect ourselves and one another.”

MU is also rolling out a phased return-to-campus plan for faculty, staff, and students this spring that includes COVID-19 testing and reporting. This strategic approach paid dividends in keeping the University community more safe in previous semesters. The University’s full-time professional Health Services staff continues to utilize its unique MU Green Screen health monitoring app and extensive COVID-19 Resource Web Site, as well.

“We remain willing and able to adapt as necessary to keep our community safe,” Wearden said. “What an amazing 2022 this will be as Monarchs continue in excellence and move Forward Together.”