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Office of University
Communications

August 22, 2019

Chelsea West '22 Values Community Spirit in School of Divinity

Chelsea West of Hickory, N.C., left her job as a high school English teacher to pursue a dual degree in Master of Divinity/Master of Arts in English at Gardner-Webb University. While earning her degree, West plans to continue promoting an issue that is close to her heart: mental health awareness.

Her brother, a Marine veteran, struggled with depression and died by suicide in 2014. “The most important thing I want people to take away from our story is that it’s OK to struggle,” West shared. “My brother struggled with depression for many years. Between society-enforced taboos about mental health and being in the military, he never felt like he could talk about it. He never reached out for help. I was one of only a few people who knew he struggled at all.”



Chelsea West

Recently, West sang and her friend, Vincent Agrusa, played the piano for a benefit concert and raised \$800 for Headstrong, a nonprofit that provides free mental health services to post-9/11 combat veterans.

“By raising awareness and working with organizations such as Headstrong, I want to open up those lines of communication and take away some of the stigmas,” West explained. “When I was teaching, I was intentional about discussing mental health with my students, even being transparent about my own struggles with mental illnesses. Giving people an opportunity to talk about things they struggle with, regardless of societal stigmas, may very well save their lives.”

The daughter of a pastor, West felt a call on her own life in high school, and her ultimate goal became to pursue her Master of Divinity. As an undergrad, she also discovered her interest in English and love for writing. Gardner-Webb’s dual program fits her needs.



“I knew that getting my Master of Divinity would give me the tools I would need to build a ministry of my own at some point down the line,” West reflected. “I also realized that I wanted to pursue English beyond undergrad, particularly to focus more on my writing, but I was worried about the cost and time to pursue two degrees. My search for the right program led me to GWU. Everything just fell into place, and I have no doubt that God led me directly to Gardner-Webb.”

She hopes to graduate in 2022 and is keeping her options open for the future. In the meantime, she’s learning new ways to examine information and gaining new perspectives on concepts she already knew. “Most importantly to me, I’m learning the importance of community in everything,” West asserted. “My classmates and professors are a blessing. I’m not afraid to ask for help or just reach out if I’m confused or struggling. Without the support of the community I’ve built in my programs, I don’t think I could do it. I couldn’t be happier to be a part of this family and community.”

[Learn more about the GWU School of Divinity.](#)