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Peter Strickland '97 Directs Successful High School Orchestra Program

Peter Strickland, a 1997 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, is an educator because of an intuitive professor at a state college. He was a music business major, but the professor said he was “too giving” when role-playing contract negotiations. “I was more concerned about the people in the room than I was about getting the best deal,” Strickland recalled. “My professor pulled me to the side and asked me if I had ever thought about being a teacher.”

When he switched majors, Strickland also decided to transfer to GWU, where the Department of Music was willing to work with the credits he had. “Gardner-Webb was flexible enough to allow me to earn a double major in the time it would have taken me to receive a single degree from a state school,” Strickland observed.

He earned degrees in music education and music composition with minors in professional education and business administration. He liked the smaller classes and Christian environment at GWU. “Some of the classes in my major had three to seven students in the room,” Strickland described. “My experiences were more like apprenticeships than courses. I had access to quality professors in a setting that allowed us to get up close and personal with the material presented as well as the practical applications that would come after graduation. Having Christian professors who encouraged prayer in the classroom, especially before exams, allowed me to live out my faith while taking my education seriously.”

Strickland began his career in 1997 with Cleveland County (N.C.) Schools and founded the orchestra programs at two middle schools. In 1999, he became the director of the orchestra programs at Crest Middle and Crest High School in Shelby, N.C., and in 2000 joined Crest High exclusively. His students participate in All-County, Western Regional and All-State Orchestra events. Many choose to major in music education, performance, composition, and production at the collegiate level. “Teaching students from ninth to 12th grade, you can really see the change in their skill level and maturity,” Strickland assessed. “By the time we get to that final concert, the students have grown into their musicianship which allows them to play some really good music.”



Peter Strickland, 1997 GWU Alumnus, was recently presented the Western Regional Orchestra Director of the Year award from the North Carolina Music Educators Association.

Peter Strickland

Strickland is certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and has received several honors over the years. In 2010, he transcribed and arranged Earl Scruggs' bluegrass classic, "Flint Hill Special," for bluegrass band and orchestra as part of the Smithsonian's American Roots concert series performed by the GWU Orchestra. He has also served as a guest clinician and conductor for orchestra programs across the state. In 2017, he received the Western Regional Orchestra Director of the Year award from the North Carolina Music Educators Association.

Each year, Strickland brings a group of his orchestra students to play in a concert with the Gardner-Webb Orchestra. "Participating in the GWU concerts gives my students the opportunity to experience world-class music alongside professors who are at the top of their field," he asserted. "The GWU orchestra, under the direction of Dr. Patricia Sparti, has opened many doors for my students to perform repertoire that would be inaccessible otherwise. I am truly grateful for Dr. Sparti's generosity in sharing those experiences with my students."