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Biology Student Explores Forensic Science Through Internship

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Office of University
Communications

February 5, 2018

Michaela Mays ('18) Will Observe How Evidence is Processed

By Chelsea Sydnor ('18) Intern for Communications

A Gardner-Webb University senior is taking her classroom experience into the field this semester as an intern for the Rutherford County Sheriff's Department in Spindale, N.C.

Michaela Mays ('18)

Michaela Mays ('18) of Reidsville, N.C. will spend three hours each week at the sheriff's department and write a blog about her professional journey. She will present the experience as part of her Biology seminar April 27.

Mays pursued several majors before settling on biology and forensic science, including journalism and exercise science, but neither was the right fit for her. "I started researching possible fields and discovered forensic science," she said.

Dr. Venita Totten, GWU associate professor of chemistry, was also helpful. "[Totten] encouraged me to take Advanced Topics in Chemistry with a focus in Forensic Science," said Mays. "I was able to talk with her about the career paths in the field."

The Department of Natural Sciences has given Mays an understanding of and appreciation for the ever-changing science field. "I have been taught in my classes that what I have learned is just the surface," said Mays. "I am going to uncover so much more information in the future."

Mays was drawn to Gardner-Webb for its Christian environment, where she has been encouraged to express herself and develop her interests. As a Student Recruitment Ambassador for the Office of Undergraduate Admissions, teaching assistant for biology, and cheerleader, Mays says that her time in college has helped her develop time management skills, which she will use in her internship and career.

As her faculty mentor for Biology Seminar, Professor Jay Zimmer introduced Mays to Sgt. Bruce Greene of the Rutherford County

Michaela Mays in the lab on campus

Sheriff's Department. He is acquainted with Greene through Gardner-Webb's Science Academy, a summer camp for high school students. One of the camp's activities is to visit the Forensic Division of the Rutherford County Sheriff's Department.

Zimmer recommended Mays for this internship because of her high motivation and his confidence that she would represent Gardner-Webb well. He expects that she will develop her understanding of forensic science as a career and receive advice from experts active in the field.

"Depictions of forensic science on television have increased expectations from juries [in courtroom trials] for forensic evidence," said Zimmer. "There are many programs available and high demand for the profession, so she will have a place in the field."

According to Sgt. Greene, Mays will observe the department as they process evidence, including fingerprinting, photography and organizing case files.

"We'll show her the procedures required of the job from the menial to hard tasks," said Greene. "She'll have the advantage of seeing those aspects before she officially enters the field."

Mays hopes to pursue a Masters of Forensic Science degree with a concentration in DNA and lab work. Eventually, she would like to work in a crime lab for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) or the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.