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Love for Literature and Theology Leads Alumnus to Pursue Doctorate in Religion

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Keith A. Menhinick '11 Appreciates Continued Support of GWU Faculty

When he graduated from Gardner-Webb University in 2011, Keith A. Menhinick left with more than a diploma. He also took a GWU support network with him to his job as a high school English teacher.

Photo of Keith A. Menhinick

“By far, what I valued most about my experience at Gardner-Webb was the community and close relationships I built with faculty and staff,” Menhinick assessed. “Many college students from across the country talk about meeting their best friends in college, but few include faculty and staff in those relationships. At Gardner-Webb, I found faculty mentors and friends who invested in me while in school and who continue to guide and reach out to me.”

A native of Hickory, N.C., Menhinick did not begin his studies at GWU with the intention of becoming an educator. He wanted to study literature, but soon discovered his passion for teaching and changed his plans. He double majored in English and Spanish and minored in professional education. During his first teaching job, he liked explaining the theological narratives that came up in class, and he also became interested in community spiritual care and activism.

Eventually he transitioned to graduate studies at Wake Forest University School of Divinity in Winston-Salem, N.C. After receiving his Master of Divinity, he worked as a pediatric trauma chaplain and served on staff at a progressive Baptist church. He left Winston-Salem to pursue his doctorate in religion at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., and his goal is to become a professor of religion.

“My GWU classes prepared me excellently as a high school English teacher and as a chaplain responsible for leading interfaith spirituality groups,” Menhinick praised. “Particularly relevant were my English education courses about effective pedagogy and teaching strategies. All of the English professors stand out as brilliant mentors and teachers who cultivated intimate community and critical dialogue. (They) taught me how to think critically and independently, as well as how to articulate my thinking both in speech and writing.”

Most influential were GWU professors, Dr. Shea Stuart, Dr. June Hobbs, Dr. Janet Land, and Dr. Shana Hartman. “They also took time to pour into me outside of the classroom and taught me the value of introspection,” Menhinick remarked. “I remember Dr. Hartman used to say, ‘No revelation without reflection.’ This is a truth I applied as a high school English teacher in the classroom, as a minister in the church, as a chaplain in the hospital, and now as a doctoral student in the academy.”

Because of the ecumenical and theological diversity at GWU, Menhinick was able to express his beliefs and be true to himself. “I learned to act for social justice and engage liberative practices that honor the diversity and humanity of all peoples,” he asserted. “GWU’s requirement that all students take Old Testament and New Testament developed in me a love for both critical and prayerful engagement with scripture and tradition.”