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Dr. Allison Abernathy Follows Caring Example Set by Faculty in GWU School of Nursing

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Office of University
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GWU Alumna Offers Encouragement and Support to Her Students


As a young nursing student, Dr. Allison Abernathy was unsuccessful at a local community college and started looking for

Dr. Allison Abernathy

another school. Her mother-in-law had heard positive comments about the School of Nursing at Gardner-Webb University, so Abernathy contacted Dr. Shirley Toney, the dean in 1995. “Dr. Toney reviewed my coursework and admitted me into the ASN (Associate of Science in Nursing) program immediately,” she recalled. “She believed in me, and I knew I was where God wanted me to be in order to finish my nursing degree in such a nurturing environment.”

That was 22 years ago, and Abernathy has since earned two more degrees from GWU—completing a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) in 2007 and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in 2013. She is employed as a nursing instructor and the dean of Health & Human Services at Gaston College in Dallas, N.C. A resident of Cherryville, N.C., Abernathy has also been honored as a NC Great 100 Nurse, an award presented to Registered Nurses in North Carolina for their commitment to excellence.

“I always say that GWU changed my life,” Abernathy shared. “This University helped to write an important part of my story that I never dreamed possible. I am forever grateful for every person who was placed in my path while I was a student there. I love teaching students and giving back to this wonderful profession by igniting a passion in them through my past experiences.”


Dr. Allison Abernathy, center, with students
at Gaston Community College.

She treats her students with the same respect she was given from Toney and other GWU faculty members. “Not only did I gain the knowledge I needed to be a successful nurse educator and dean, but I also learned things that were not in the curriculum, such as compassion, integrity and how to bring glory to God in the way I carry myself,” Abernathy offered. “I want all the students I come into contact with to feel like they matter and can do anything with the right support and encouragement.”

Abernathy especially appreciated the freedom to express her faith. “We were allowed to pray before tests and during difficult times throughout the semester,” she offered. “I learned how to be bold in my faith and pray anywhere that I felt led to lift up a need to the Lord. The weekly Dimensions series provided a foundation for weekly Christian connections through speakers, music, etc. I also appreciated my professors sharing their faith through prayer and encouragement in class. I respected the way they communicated to my fellow students and me.”