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Gardner-Webb Professor Gave Alumna Confidence to Pursue Doctoral Studies in English

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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "Gardner-Webb Professor Gave Alumna Confidence to Pursue Doctoral Studies in English" (2017). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 477.
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Gardner-Webb Professor Gave Alumna Confidence to Pursue Doctoral Studies in English

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Office of University
Communications

December 1, 2017

Katie Garahan '09 Teaches Writing at Virginia Tech University

Katie Garahan '09 of Rock Hill, S.C., came to Gardner-Webb University to play Division I golf. She was impressed with Coach Tee

Katie Garahan

Burton and also liked the school's location and size. As she began her studies, she appreciated the professors' genuine concern for students. "What I valued most about my education at Gardner-Webb was the guidance and mentorship I received from my professors and the communal atmosphere within the English department," she stated. "The professors were able to cultivate an intimate atmosphere that fostered students' ability and willingness to think deeply and creatively."

Although she had always loved studying literature, Garahan didn't start out as an English major. She lacked confidence in her ability as a writer. "I took an American Literature survey course with Dr. June Hobbs, and I realized how much I would miss studying literature once I began my major classes in elementary education," Garahan shared. "Dr. Hobbs took an interest in me and suggested that I consider majoring in English, because she thought I was a strong writer. She was—and still is—an incredible mentor to me."

When she graduated from GWU, Garahan taught English at Forestview High School in Gastonia, N.C., for nearly four years. Then she obtained her master's in English along with a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from Virginia Tech (VT) in Blacksburg, Va. She taught first-year writing, worked as a writing center tutor, served as the assistant to the writing center director, and was a research assistant in an engineering education writing lab. While continuing her doctoral studies in rhetoric and writing at VT, Garahan serves as editorial assistant for the "minnesota review: a journal for creative and critical writing." She is also a research assistant for a VT sociolinguist and teaches a technical writing course.

She models her teaching methods after Hobbs and GWU professors, Dr. Janet Land and Dr. Shana Hartman. "I took four classes with Dr. Hobbs, and each one was a memorable experience that influenced my life in some way," Garahan observed. "Dr. Land was my senior thesis professor and was an incredible guide through the thesis research process. She adeptly maneuvers the line between giving students freedom to explore and knowing when to provide guidance. I've tried to be that kind of guide for my students during the

research process. In teaching methods courses with Dr. Hartman, I learned about myself as a reader/writer and I learned how to teach writing. Teaching writing at both the high school and collegiate levels has been the most rewarding part of my career, and the theoretical and pedagogical approaches I learned from and with Dr. Hartman continue to undergird my work.”

Further, the critical-thinking skills she developed in English courses at GWU gave her an advantage as she studied in graduate school and taught her own classes. “English courses tend to be discussion based, so students must take responsibility for their own learning,” she explained. “As such, they must read carefully, form their own opinions, and be willing to be wrong sometimes. While my professors guided and supported me, I was ultimately in charge of whether I took advantage of these opportunities to grow as a writer and a thinker. This initiative to continually learn has been invaluable in both my career as a teacher and as a graduate student.”