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# GWU Honors Student Association Continues Big Sweep Tradition in West Jefferson, N.C.

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Office of University  
Communications

September 22, 2017

*Group of 72 Students and Faculty Join Volunteers to Clean a Section of the New River*

**By Sthefany Flores '18 GWU-Today Staff Writer**



Kyle Bradley, Dr. Tom Jones and Liz Jacques walk in the  
campground next to the New River in West Jefferson, N.C.

Photo by Lisa Martinat

The Gardner-Webb Honors Student Association (HSA) participated in its annual Big Sweep camping retreat Sept. 8-10. For almost three decades, students in the Honors program have cleaned a section of the New River in West Jefferson, N.C. “We found less waste than the last few years and I think that’s a good thing,” observed Dr. Tom Jones, professor of biology and associate dean of the Honors program.

When GWU first participated in Big Sweep in 1989, it was a joint effort between the Honors program and the Department of Natural Sciences. “When we first came, there were about 27 students and faculty attending,” Jones said. “This year there were 158 volunteers and 72 students and faculty from GWU.”

He said one of the benefits is the bonding that occurs on the trip and another is service learning.

“We have gotten so large that we have four

University 111 classes, so a lot of [the students]

get to meet each other here,” Jones elaborated. “[Big Sweep] is also a very good introduction to Pro Deo et Humanitate (for God and humanity)—and it’s not thankless.

They appreciate what volunteers do. I think that service learning is important. It’s good for students to see how student leadership develops and you want to see what skills they have and how they can be utilized.”




Photo from Chelsea Blount

Students and alumni point out other qualities they enjoy through their participation in Big Sweep. GWU Alumni Chelsea Cutler ('12) and Amy Snyder ('13), both visited the campsite where the HSA was stationed.

“Big Sweep is about learning how to get out of [your] comfort zone, how to rely on other people, how to work as a team and to just try something new,” Cutler said. “I think every

year there are more and more people who have never camped, never made campsite burritos, and [those] things are just becoming lost with how much we stay inside.”

Snyder added, “I think the relationships that you build are very important. You get to know a person really well when you are all sharing a tent together, or when you flip them out of the canoe accidentally.”



Photo from Chelsea Blount

The new generation of Honors students also seems to share the same sentiments. Freshman Austin Hughes said, “I would love to return to Big Sweep again. I feel like every chance that I get to participate, there is more of a chance for me to learn and grow as a person.”

Although the HSA did not receive an exact weight of what was cleared from the river, the group found several large pieces. They picked up 13 tires—including a tractor tire—a tarp, a gutter, and several bottles, cans and other waste.

*For more information about the Honors Student Association, contact Dr. Tom Jones (tjones@gardner-webb.edu) or HSA President Hayden Corley (hcorley@gardner-webb.edu).*

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