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Michael Harvey

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Transfer students settle into GWU during a pandemic



By Michael Harvey

While college is a frightening step for any student who is taking the plunge into independence and an ever-adjusting social life, luckily most have the ability to only go through it once. For some students, that isn't the case. Students may take that plunge as a freshman at one school and then realize that it may have not been the best option for them via a variety of ways. Some students' opt-in to the community college route and then transfer following their two years there, while other transfer from another school because of personal, financial or physical gain.

Whether planned or unplanned, almost 4 in every 10 students, are likely to transfer colleges according to **U.S. News and World Report**. That can be because of a variety of things such as lack of desired academics, discontinuation of a sport or tuition changes. Overall, transferring after your freshman year isn't the most uncommon thing ever.

While transferring is a common occurrence throughout colleges, a pandemic contributing to these changes is not. It is common knowledge that 2020 has been far from anything that resembles a "normal" year, and this has affected a majority of people's college experience. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 in the middle of the spring semester, most colleges had to go online and end the in-person aspect of the semester. Instead of enjoying a study room in the nice student center, you are now sitting on your bed at home trying to get all of your assignments done. It definitely opens up your mind about what college can be. Now imagine trying to enter the

transfer portal as an athlete or pick a school based on their academics that will ultimately affect your future with all of this uncertainty. It definitely doesn't sound easy. That is why GWU-Today sat down with a few transfer students and asked them how the transfer process was during the pandemic and why they ultimately ended up choosing Gardner-Webb.

Sophomore John Roghelia is a transfer student who started out at Howard University in Washington D.C. Roghelia found out about Gardner-Webb because of a suggestion from one of his basketball coaches back home in Wilmington, N.C. While he enjoyed his short time at Howard, Roghelia believed that Howard really wasn't a good fit for him. "I originally chose Howard because of their strong psychology program, but I didn't feel that Howard was a welcoming atmosphere and for an outgoing person like myself, it was hard to fit in with people who weren't willing to socialize." Roghelia said. "In my short time at Gardner-Webb, I've definitely felt that it is a more welcoming place and a better atmosphere that fits me more. I've enjoyed the smaller, rural aspect that Gardner-Webb offers compared to Howard, which is in the city and much bigger."



Sophomore John Roghelia enjoying his time at Gardner-Webb.

When asked how difficult the transfer process was.

Roghelia provided a simple answer. "Gardner-Webb made the transfer process very smooth and the advisors I've met are great."

Sophomore Braden Smith offered comments similar to Roghelia's, but his transfer situation is far different. Smith started out at the University of Akron on a golf scholarship, but when Akron decided to cut their golf program amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, that left Smith in a confusing situation. "My path to Gardner-Webb differs from most. I started out at the University of Akron, which is in Ohio. Amidst budget cuts because of COVID-19, Akron cut their golf program after just my first year. I had the choice to stay and not play golf or try to find a school that offered golf during the pandemic. I chose the latter," Smith said. "I ended up emailing a bunch of schools on the east coast that offered Division I golf. Gardner-Webb was one of them and I ended up getting a response."

Much like Roghelia, Smith believes the transfer process was a smooth one. "Given that I didn't start the process until late-June, it was a little weird because of the housing situation, but it wasn't the school's fault. Akron put me in a tough situation, and Gardner-Webb accommodated me well. So, overall, I can say that it was a smooth transfer for me. I had two classes that didn't transfer over, but other than that Gardner-Webb made the transition easy."

Similar to Roghelia, Smith says that he thinks GWU was an excellent choice for him and he's glad he ultimately did it. "I've made a lot of really cool friends, learned to play disc golf, and classes have even been enjoyable. Compared to Akron, there is a better sense of community here and the smaller size contributes to that. When I

was at Akron, I could go through my entire day and not see a single person I know. Gardner-Webb is the exact opposite. It's hard not to see people I know everywhere I go, and it's really cool being a part of a community," Smith said.



Sophomore Matt Brown was put into a situation similar to Smith. Brown transferred out of Auburn University in Alabama due to the fact that he wasn't afforded the opportunity to play golf there. His passion for golf led him to reach out to Gardner-Webb, and he ultimately got the offer to play Division I golf. "I found Gardner-Webb through a little research and I reached out to them. Once I got offered, I went through the transfer process and I'm glad it wasn't too difficult. Just a lot of forms, but that is to be expected," Brown said.

Sophomore Braden Smith posing for a picture on move-in day with his dad.



While Brown hasn't got to enjoy Gardner-Webb to its fullest because of COVID-19, he says he has enjoyed his time at GWU. "COVID-19 has certainly affected my experience, but it has overall been good. I enjoy the smaller class size that Gardner-Webb offers, and I have adjusted to the smaller campus quite well. Plus, it has been nice to play golf again," Brown said.

Changing schools after getting yourself established is never a simple decision. But if you are unhappy and find that the school you are attending is not the greatest fit for you, you don't have to settle for four years of agony. Now that you have more clarity about what you want out of your college experience, you are even better equipped to find one that will meet your academic and social expectations, much like Gardner-Webb did for these three students. The change may be well worth it when you walk across the stage in a few short years.

Sophomore Matt Brown posing following a golf swing.