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### Alumna Discovered Passion to Study and Teach as GWU Undergrad

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# Alumna Discovered Passion to Study and Teach as GWU Undergrad

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November 4, 2016

## *April Hoelke Simpson ('09) Pursues Doctorate in Biblical Studies*

When April Hoelke Simpson ('14) studied Greek and Hebrew, she was fascinated with how the languages enhanced her understanding of the biblical text. Her professors at Gardner-Webb University recognized her scholarly potential even before she did. "I originally planned to become a career missionary and chose mission studies as my concentration," Simpson shared. "My coursework unlocked a love for academia within me. I developed new skills for exploring the biblical text more deeply, and the courses I took invigorated a passion in me for continuing my education and committing myself to the ministry that occurs in the classroom as a professor."

She also found that the University's small class sizes allowed students to learn from their professors and each other. "There is a greater opportunity to participate in class discussions and to benefit from the dialogue," Simpson assessed. "The faith modeled by my professors set a tremendous example for me. Several of the friendships I made during my time at Gardner-Webb have also been important to my faith development. These friends and I have grown together in our faith, teaching and learning from one another as our friendships have grown through the years."

After earning her bachelor's degree, she completed a dual Master of Divinity (MDiv) and Master of Arts (MA) in Religion at Gardner-Webb. She was a member of the GWU graduate admissions staff from 2011-2016 and when she received her master's, taught as an adjunct. "Together, the MA and MDiv gave me a broad foundation in religious studies and a specific knowledge in biblical studies," Simpson observed. "Among much else, the MDiv taught me to understand all of life, including the academic setting, as ministry. The MA afforded me the opportunity to write a master's thesis, which gave me experience in completing a large-scale research project."

She is a PhD student in the religious studies program at Southern Methodist University (SMU). Her area of study is New Testament, and her goal is to teach biblical studies. "I consider teaching as a calling. If I am able to teach at a liberal arts Christian college or university, I hope to carry out that calling by modeling an integration of faith and study for students," she offered. "At the same time, I understand that not all students—even at

Christian schools—come in with the same faith commitments. As part of my calling, I hope to guide all students to a greater understanding of the biblical text, and by extension the major faith traditions associated with it, regardless of any student’s faith commitments.”