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Jacqueline Lyon ('93) Believes GWU Provided Foundation for her Career

In training to be an accountant, Jacqueline D. Lyon ('93) of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., learned how to keep track of every penny. Those same analytical skills help her uncover clues and track down criminals as a special agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). “My brain is wired differently. I question things,” Lyon explained. “If you can’t find it here, you have to go look somewhere else.”

Jacquelyn D. Lyon, 1993 alum, visits with Professor of Accounting, Dr. Earl Godfrey.

Because she relentlessly pursues answers, Lyon has helped solve some tough cases. One she helped to break involved a real estate development company that diverted millions of dollars from federally funded programs earmarked to build housing for low-income communities. An FBI agent since 2003, Lyon believes her education from Gardner-Webb University gave her the foundation she needed to pass the extensive testing required by the bureau.

“Because of my educational and professional background, my application was fast-tracked,” Lyon shared. “From the time I submitted the first application until I entered the academy, it was eight months. It usually takes two to four years. They told me I was a highly competitive candidate. I do believe it was my Gardner-Webb experience, because of the close relationships you form and the learning that takes place here.”

Originally from New Hampshire, Lyon also played basketball at GWU. She came for a visit after finding an old Gardner-Webb brochure belonging to her brother. “I wasn’t looking forward to battling the snow and cold to attend classes,” Lyon disclosed. “I was drawn to the warm weather, a Christian environment, as well as the size of the school.”

Even though she would be thousands of miles from home, she accepted basketball and academic scholarships to attend Gardner-Webb. Before long, she felt welcome and accepted. “It was a place where I felt safe and also felt connected to others on campus,” Lyon described. “My classes were challenging but not intimidating. The environment

allowed for personal expression and growth. The size of the classes fostered an environment of collaboration and sharing. You are not just a number at GWU, you are GWU.”

When she graduated with her degrees in accounting and business administration, she was unsure what to do. She wanted to work for the FBI, but playing basketball took a toll on her knees, and she was afraid she wouldn't pass the physical. She moved back to New Hampshire, enrolled in graduate school after receiving a full scholarship, worked five part-time jobs and obtained her MBA. She climbed the corporate ladder and became a Chief Financial Officer. After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, and subsequent financial scandals involving several corporations, she decided the time was right to apply to the FBI.

“I thought I wouldn't pass the physical, but I decided instead of holding myself back I could apply and let them turn me down,” Lyon reflected. “I began training so that I could make the minimum on the run requirements.”

When she was offered the job, she took a 60 percent cut in pay. “It's not all about the money,” she assessed. “This was something I dreamed of doing since I was 13 years old. It was a way for me to serve my country.”

Since taking the job with the FBI, she has worked in cases ranging from white collar crimes to street gangs. She has been recognized with the National Law Enforcement Award, as well as Merit Awards from the FBI for outstanding investigative work. She was also inducted into the Gardner-Webb University Gallery of Distinguished Alumni in 2014.

FBI Agents are allowed to retire after 20 years of service, so Lyon is already making plans for her retirement. “I will be embarking on my third career change,” she affirmed. “I have a passion for health, nutrition, fitness and sports. I intend to use my skills as well as the experience I have gained to embark on a career in that realm.”