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### GWU Undergraduate Research Program Offers Student Opportunity to Complete Dream Project

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# GWU Undergraduate Research Program Offers Student Opportunity to Complete Dream Project

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Office of University  
Communications

October 14, 2016

## *Christian Jessup Takes on Star Wars Film Score Composition as Undergrad Research Scholar*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – The power of a film to convey specific sentiments is often intensified by the musical score that accompanies its scenes. Emotionally-charged moments can be emphasized or diminished through the use of instrumentation, volume, and pacing; each nuance influencing the audience’s interaction with the film and its characters.

One Gardner-Webb University student is aiming for a career as a film composer, and he recently took advantage of an opportunity to participate in the GWU Undergraduate Research Scholars program, where he fully explored the unique role of music in film. As a result, Christian Jessup ('17), a music composition and communication studies double major at GWU, developed a completely original score for the 1977 blockbuster, *Star Wars*.

“After I talked with my adviser, Dr. Bruce Moser, we both agreed that *Star Wars* was the best film to go with. Go big or go home,” he laughed. “We knew we could choose a random theme, and who knows, that may have been better because then people wouldn’t know the music as well. But the film offers such a diverse range of emotions. I think one of the biggest things I got out of this project was a diversity in composition that I didn’t have before.”

In studying the original *Star Wars* score, written by John Williams and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, Jessup immediately

Photo Credit: Twentieth Century Fox

noticed classical influences of composers Richard Wagner and Igor Stravinsky. “I would listen to [Williams’] score and think, “That sounds like *Rite of Spring*,”” he offered. “I realized I could insert a classical piece into the *Star Wars* score and not tell much of a difference, because those influences had that much of an impact on the final product.”

He also approached the project with the benefit of hindsight. Although the original film became a sensation, it was in subsequent films that well-known character themes—like the one Williams later developed for Darth Vader—were introduced. “My idea was to look at the film from the perspective of a series,” Jessup explained. “I evaluated which characters

were important enough that we need to start off with that theme. That became the secondary-research side of the process, and writing the music itself was the primary research.”

Since a film composer often doesn’t have the final say in the product, Jessup’s project mentor—Dr. Bruce Moser, assistant professor of music—served as the director, helping guide the project and offering feedback consistent with the typical production process.

“I hope when I graduate to begin working in film scoring,” he continued. “Having two-and-a-half hours of full-orchestra music that I’ve written on my resume is going to be incredibly helpful as I apply for jobs. I think in the end that will make a huge difference in showing employers what I’ve done.”

Jessup’s original score will be unveiled during a campus screening of the *Star Wars* film on Dec. 8 in Tucker Student Center. While he is thrilled at the opportunity to showcase his work, he is grateful to have been offered a chance to develop and execute such a substantial project while still an undergraduate student.

“We have some of the most brilliant professors in the world. I’m amazed by them and I realize once again that Gardner-Webb is an amazing school with top-notch faculty and staff,” he reflected. “In your classes, each professor is going to get to know you. I’ve developed personal relationships with all of my teachers, and I know I’m establishing lifelong connections.”

Click [here](#) for the full WGWG.org interview with Christian Jessup:

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*