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Office of University
Communications

October 5, 2016

Kate Oliphant ('14) Aspires to Teach Music on a College Level

Kate Oliphant ('14) displayed musical ability as a toddler, often surprising her mom by playing random notes on a piano that sounded like songs. She took piano lessons in first grade, drum lessons by third grade and guitar in the seventh grade. The guitar is what brought her to Gardner-Webb.

“When I was looking at colleges in high school, I knew I wanted to go to a small, Christian, liberal arts college with a fantastic guitar teacher,” Oliphant shared. “Gardner-Webb fit every one of those characteristics. Since I was from Northern Virginia right outside of DC, though, I most likely would not have known about this opportunity unless my private guitar teacher hadn’t suggested it. Jason Pickard, one of his peers from college, was the guitar professor at GWU.”

She came for a visit and knew she didn’t need to apply anywhere else. “The students were incredibly nice, welcoming, and genuine,” she recalled. “The campus was beautiful. The guitar professor was amazing. Most importantly, though, I felt an overwhelming call from God that this was the place he wanted me to be.”

Oliphant’s father told her if she was determined to major in music, she had to choose a second major. “After taking a Western Civilization general education class with Dr. Donna Ellington, my heart was set on majoring in history,” she affirmed. “I consider every single class that I took in the GWU history department to be incredibly memorable and special. From Medieval Europe with Dr. Donna Ellington to World War II with Dr. David Yelton to Civil Rights with Dr. Joseph Moore, each professor and each class brought a new perspective, style, outlook, and a whole lot of reading.”

Her music professors also taught her to be thorough in her work and give 100 percent to the performance. “Dr. Paul Etter helped me to be prepared and okay with going outside of my comfort zone,” Oliphant assessed. “Dr. Mark Cole taught me that it is important to stand up for yourself. Jondra Harmon imparted on me the importance of stage presence. Their lessons have been invaluable to me inside and outside of the classroom.”

Her scholarly work at GWU won national and local awards for research, but also gave her an advantage in graduate school at East Carolina University (ECU) in Greenville, N.C. “Pickard did an excellent job preparing me for the rigors of graduate level guitar expectations,” she emphasized. “He encouraged me to find my own musical voice and not simply mimic what was expected of a piece. And Dr. Yelton’s Introduction to Historical Studies is one of the most beneficial classes I’ve ever taken. He walked us through how to properly research, cite information, analyze sources, and more. Because of him, I was able to coast through the Introduction to Graduate Studies class at ECU while most of my classmates genuinely struggled.”

While she appreciates the knowledge she gained, the most enduring aspect of her Gardner-Webb experience was the close-knit university community and its Christian environment. “Whether it was the custodian who brought my roommate and me home-baked goods and prayed with us,” she affirmed, “or Dr. Patricia Sparti, who to this day, actively encourages and loves me even from a distance, or my many wonderful friends who would go on late-night snack trips to the gas station with me, almost every person on that campus actively touched my life and made it better. Sometimes it was little things like in my New Testament class when the professor began each lecture with prayer. Other times, it was tremendous sermons at the student-led worship service that would leave me in awe of the incredible God we serve.”

Oliphant earned a Masters in Music Performance at ECU with a concentration in classical guitar. She was a graduate assistant, received awards and was a member of the guitar ensemble and the South American ensemble. She is an adjunct professor in the music department of Pitt Community College in Winterville, N.C. “Five years from now, I would like to be pursuing my doctorate, potentially in ethnomusicology or musicology, so that I can teach full-time at the collegiate level,” she offered. “It is my hope that I can be like the inspiring professors I had at Gardner-Webb University.”