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Tabitha Hamilton ('11) Follows her Family into Education

Tabitha Hamilton ('11) comes from a family of educators in Blair, Neb. As a young girl, she played school with old supplies collected from teachers in the Christian school where her father taught health and physical education. However, during high school, sports and missions became more important to her than teaching.

“Not wanting to be like most of the Hamilton family who are teachers, I thought I would become a nurse. Little did I know that God wanted me to be a teacher,” Hamilton reflected. “My love of sharing the Gospel, teaching, children, and sports all came together when I finally told God, ‘OK. I’ll do it Your way, not mine.’ I chose to be a physical and health education teacher so that I could use those talents that God gave me to share his love with the kids.”

She started looking for a Christian college where she could run track. Her grandparents live in Gastonia, N.C., and recommended the NCAA Division I program at Gardner-Webb University, which is less than an hour away from them. Hamilton sent in a track and field questionnaire and was recruited to the team. Her decision began a new family tradition. “When I came to visit, I really liked Coach Brian Baker and the track team,” she explained. “My younger siblings, Stephanie Hamilton ('14), Titus Hamilton ('16), and Clay Hamilton ('18) attend or have attended Gardner-Webb and also been on the track and field team.”

They followed their big sister, because she told them GWU is a place where professors help students succeed. Being more than 16 hours from home, Hamilton had a difficult time adjusting her first year at the University. She made the transition with the help of the faculty in the Department of Health, Sport & Physical Education and Vice President of Student Development, Dr. Delores “Dee” Hunt—affectionately known on campus as “Doc Hunt.”

“Doc Hunt and Dr. Ken Baker took me under their wings and gave me some much needed guidance,” Hamilton affirmed. “Dr. Shonna Snyder, Dr. Jeff Hartman and Mrs. Sara McNeely all made me feel like family. Anytime I needed anything I knew I could go to them, and they would help me and give me sound advice. I value the relationships I built and the quality of education I received. I still stop by the campus and talk with Doc Hunt, Jessika Raduly (assistant director of housing for administrative services and marketing)

and Dr. Baker. I know I can go to my former professors about anything.”

Not only does she get advice from her professors when needed, Hamilton uses many ideas she learned at Gardner-Webb in her own classroom. She’s been teaching at a high school in North Carolina, but is moving to Nebraska to teach at a rural K-12 school. “One of the tools that I use all the time is from Dr. Snyder. In her class, she made us develop a ‘health resource kit,’” Hamilton related. “It is an expandable folder where we put activities, worksheets, tests, quizzes, homework, websites and other items for each aspect of health: alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, sexual health, nutrition, mental and emotional health, fitness and exercise. I use that kit all the time when planning lessons. It was not fun to create while in school but I am so glad that I have it now.”

Tabitha Hamilton works with children during a mission trip in Spain.

She also values the influence of Dr. Joseph Webb in the Department of Communication & New Media. “Dr. Webb taught Technology in American Society, and he was an awesome teacher who made the class enjoyable, even though I did not know anything about the material,” Hamilton observed. “His teaching style and the way he made the class challenging and enjoyable has impacted the way that I teach today.”

Working in education gives her time to fulfill her other goal of going on mission trips. “I have been to Trinidad and Tobago more than 7 times,” Hamilton stated. “I try to go there every summer, because I have built so many relationships. I’ve been to Haiti, India, Costa Rica and Spain. I love using my summers to share God’s love internationally. I also use sports as a way to share the Gospel.”

She believes the Lord gave her the ability to teach, and the professors in the Department of Health, Sport & Physical Education developed her skills. “Without their support then and continued support today, I wouldn’t be where I am,” she asserted. “I love teaching and love that I had the chance to be a part of that department at Gardner-Webb.”