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Office of University
Communications

June 21, 2016

Aaron Wilkinson ('07) Experienced Spiritual and Academic Growth at GWU

Aaron Wilkinson ('07) has a desk, not a pulpit and an office instead of a sanctuary. But as he works with students at Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU) in Marion, Ind., he strives to minister to them. He encountered some of his best role models as a student at Gardner-Webb University.

“Those who worked at Gardner-Webb showed me that you don’t have to be a pastor to minister to others and help people grow spiritually,” he reflected. “My admissions counselor went the extra mile. A woman who worked in the housing/discipline area of student services taught me grace when I made some dumb decisions in my first semester. Another staff member taught me how to love people and to approach life with calm and joy. Professors of Religious Studies, Dr. Eddie Stepp and Dr. Paula Qualls, modeled how to mentor others. These are all attributes of our most beloved pastors. None stood behind a pulpit, but all preached with their lives and deeply impacted my spiritual development. We should all see our jobs, whatever they are, as our ministry and our service to our Lord.”

Wilkinson has worked in Christian higher education for almost a decade. He is the new associate vice president of Adult Enrollment Services at IWU, and before that served as director of admissions for Wesley Seminary at IWU. “Christian higher education provides a place for those who do not have a relationship with Christ to encounter him in a safe way,” he asserted. “It provides those who had a nominal Christian experience the opportunity to connect with their faith and Savior in a more personal way. It provides those with a solid faith a place to stretch and grow that faith. And it provides to all a quality liberal arts experience that prepares graduates for the variety of experiences life will throw at them.”

A religious studies major, he discovered all the attributes of Christian higher education at Gardner-Webb. He grew spiritually, developed life-long friendships and was prepared for the academic rigors of graduate school. “I entered seminary well prepared to do graduate level work,” he assessed. “The Spiritual Disciplines course was influential in my own life as I went deeper with Christ. I still refer back to it at times. The Local Church Administration course also helped me think through the business side of ministry, which introduced me to skills that I use on a daily basis now. Courses like the Gospels, Revelation, and Wisdom

Literature expanded my understanding of scripture, which helped me see the church in a more catholic sense and helped me grow and mature as an individual. And the preaching course helped me gain additional communication skills.”

The professors in the Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy showed students they cared beyond the classroom. “I had four semesters of Hebrew with Dr. Qualls and two other courses, so she shaped me academically as well as personally,” Wilkinson shared. “Dr. Stepp also took a significant amount of time to mentor me, especially in my final two years at Gardner-Webb. He was probably the first person to ever encourage me to think about future doctoral work, and I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership at IWU.”

Wilkinson developed friendships through his involvement in campus activities. He was a resident advisor, worked at the Broyhill Adventure Course, participated in theatre, played Ultimate Frisbee, was active in student-led worship, and was a coordinator for FOCUS, a campus ministry involving teams of students who lead youth retreats locally and regionally. The former director of student ministries, Andrew Byers, was also a mentor to him.

“Andrew had a huge impact on my maturity as an individual and my growth in my walk with Jesus,” Wilkinson affirmed. “My friends lifted me up, stretched me, challenged me, and loved me. College is an important time in a person’s life. It can be very confusing as you try and establish yourself separate from your immediate family unit. The friends I had provided a community where I could wrestle with the person I was becoming. The Christian areas of campus life, like student-led worship and FOCUS, ministered to me and provided opportunities to serve in ministry.”