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GWU Dual Degree Program Prepares Grad for Counseling Ministry

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Office of University
Communications

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*Andrew M. Woods ('14) Experienced Growth Intellectually,
Spiritually and Personally*

As a mental health counselor, Andrew M. Woods ('14) is prepared for the unpredictable, because each person's situation is unique and different. While he may not know what each day brings, he is confident in the education he received through the School of Psychology and Counseling at Gardner-Webb University.

“In counseling and ministry you can encounter more struggles through the people you work with than can be imagined, not to mention the personal struggles in your own life,” observed Woods, owner of Woods Family Counseling and Healing Care in Black Mountain, N.C. “It is impossible to implement all the information received through the dynamic classes of the Gardner-Webb program, but the classes are formative and impacted who I am and who I am becoming. I not only learned a lot of essential information that I draw from in my career and ministry, but the classes and teachers prepared me to become a person who can sustain and fruitfully practice counseling while being a husband, friend and son.”

Woods decided to attend the GWU graduate program, because he was looking for a dual degree in divinity and mental health counseling that included the Education Specialist (Ed.S.) component. He was also familiar with the faculty, because he earned his undergraduate degree in psychology and minor in religious studies from Gardner-Webb in 2009.

“At the time, Gardner-Webb was one of a couple schools in the state that offered an Ed.S. degree,”

Woods related. “This was very important, because now the Ed.S. is a requirement for the highest level of accreditation and required by the state for licensing as a mental health counselor. Other schools were behind the curve. Also, I knew from undergrad, that I would meet and work with high quality teachers who care about me as a person, care about their area of expertise, and integrate intellectual, spiritual, and personal growth into the educational process.”

Woods opted to enter the counseling field after working closely with people in a variety of experiences. “Jobs, internships, and mentors helped me discern that counseling and pastoral care fit me better than other potential options,” he disclosed. “Counseling is very

challenging to me, but I found that it is an energizing challenge. I believe life revolves around learning to love God, others, and yourself better. There are many ways to go about doing this in life. I have found that counseling is a constant source of encouragement for me to pursue personal healing and growth with God, others, and myself. And in my role as a counselor, I am suited to facilitate that same experience in other people's lives."

While he was working on his degree, he experienced transitions and hardships in his own life, and his Gardner-Webb professors also became role models. "I will forever remember and value the way professors met me where I was in life, cared for me as a person, and used a personal relationship with me to enhance classroom understanding and learning in real-life ways," he reflected. "All while expecting and motivating me to perform at a high level and grow into my potential. I left Gardner-Webb with a much deeper understanding of myself, my capabilities, grace, and God."

Woods believes that choosing a graduate program in mental health counseling involves more than considering academic success, passing the National Counselor Examination (NCE) test, and becoming licensed. "Those are all important pieces of the puzzle, but they are not nearly enough in themselves to bring personal, sustainable and professional healing into the brokenness of this world," he advised. "You need a program that pursues healing and growth in you and your peers. A program that is concerned with your psychological, emotional, spiritual, and social development as well as your intellectual development. The School of Psychology and Counseling at Gardner-Webb is such a program."