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Office of University
Communications

May 5, 2016

Tavenner Black Dibert ('12) Serves as Pediatric Resident at University of Florida

When Tavenner Black Dibert ('12) says professors at Gardner-Webb University care about students, it's not just a nice sentiment. It's a statement based on fact and filled with gratitude for the science faculty, who offered additional classes to make sure she was prepared for medical school.

Tavenner Black at her
GWU graduation with
Dr. Cathleen Ciesielski

A pediatric resident at the University of Florida in Gainesville, she reflects on the significance of her undergraduate experience. "At Gardner-Webb, I had the opportunity to take classes like biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, anatomy and biochemistry, which are mandatory prerequisites for medical school," she shared. "But I also had immunology, cell biology, and pharmacology—classes the professors organized and taught due to student interest. It was these extra classes that made the most difference and set me apart during my four years in medical school. I am so thankful to all of the people at Gardner-Webb for preparing me to thrive in a very demanding environment."

Dibert knew she wanted to be a doctor from an early age. Her father practices family medicine in her hometown of Gainesville, Fla., and when she was a little girl, she would make rounds with him at hospitals and nursing homes. "Over time, I grew to appreciate the relationships my father had with his patients, and I also developed an incredible passion for science," she assessed. "Gardner-Webb helped encourage that passion with exemplary faculty and support."

Dibert's first introduction to Gardner-Webb was through tennis coach, Jim Corn. "Anyone who has ever met Coach Corn knows what a kind and wonderful person he is," Dibert stated. "I had never heard of Gardner-Webb University before, but I was so impressed with Coach Corn that I immediately began researching the school to find out more information."

She came for a visit and couldn't believe the sense of community she felt as she walked around campus. "Everyone at Gardner-Webb was so friendly, helpful, and excited to be there," she recalled. "Because I wanted to go to medical school, I sat in on an anatomy class and knew immediately that the education and preparation for medical school would be exceptional. I had a fantastic time on my recruiting trip and instantly became great friends

with the girls on the tennis team.”

The professors in the Department of Natural Sciences understood her busy tennis schedule and worked with her outside of the classroom to make sure she didn’t fall behind. They also encouraged her and provided additional learning opportunities. “Dr. Cathleen Ciesielski (former associate professor of biology) encouraged me to apply for the Women in Science scholarship given by GlaxoSmithKline,” Dibert elaborated. “I applied, and I was awarded the scholarship and had the opportunity to travel to the GlaxoSmithKline headquarters twice a year where I listened to lectures on new scientific discoveries. Dr. Ciesielski also encouraged me to run for president of the National Biological Honors Society. I ran, and I was named president during my senior year. She helped organize my letters of recommendation for medical school from the entire science department.”

She took Spanish to satisfy the University’s language requirement, but ended up studying abroad in Costa Rica, which gave her insight into the culture and honed her language skills. “It is fairly common for patients in Florida to only speak Spanish,” she observed. “I am so glad that I took this class in college and ended up pursuing a minor, so that I can better communicate with my future patients.”

Tavennner Black Dibert at her White Coat Ceremony

While the academic foundation she received prepared her to succeed in medical school, she values the people of Gardner-Webb more than anything. “Whether it was my incredible teammates, the friends I made in classes, Coach Corn, or my professors, I always felt overwhelming encouragement and support,” she affirmed. “Although my teammates live all over the world now, we have found ways to keep in touch through Skype, Facebook, or ‘What’s App.’ Nearly all of my teammates will be in or at my wedding. These relationships are invaluable to me. The people of Gardner-Webb became my second family, and they still are today.”