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### **GWU Honors Student Experiences Growth Through Challenging Academics**

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# GWU Honors Student Experiences Growth Through Challenging Academics

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Office of University  
Communications

April 29, 2016

## *Kevin Mills ('16) Wins National Award for Senior Thesis Project*

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Kevin Mills ('16) came to Gardner-Webb University on a scholarship that rewarded his academic achievements. But during the Freshman University 111 class designed to help first-year students transition to college life, Biology Professor Dr. Tom Jones said something that caused Mills to rethink his priorities.

“His advice was, ‘Don’t let your sole goal during college be keeping a 4.0. Take courses with professors who are challenging and who have reputations for being hard teachers.’” Mills shared. “I would not have taken some of my favorite courses without this advice: Dr. June Hobbs for rhetoric, Dr. David Yelton for Western Civilization 2, and Dr. Jones for general biology. Come to Gardner-Webb if you want to study at a place where professors will know you by face and name. They will do everything possible to help you succeed, as long as you are willing to work hard.”

In addition to the academic lessons, Mills said his professors also gave him opportunities to grow as a person, and he also took on several leadership roles, including Honors Student Association vice president, Alpha Chi vice president, Delta Mu Delta president and Senior Class Senator.

“I value the relationships that I’ve built with professors on campus,” he noted. “They have pushed me to become the best student I can be and have given me opportunities to lead and try things that I never would have tried. My time at Gardner-Webb was impacted for the better by some amazing teachers, and I will miss them greatly.”

Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts Dr. Chris Nelson allowed him to serve as stage manager for two plays during his freshman year, without any previous theatre experience. In that role, Mills was in charge of sending emails, taking notes of blocking and missed lines, running designer meetings, getting the cast to the stage on time, calling cues, and other tasks. “It was a huge responsibility and I never would have done it, and I would have missed out on an amazing growth experience if it wasn’t for Dr. Nelson asking,” Mills said.

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Dr. June Hobbs, director of undergraduate research, encouraged him to be a part of the Alpha Chi Honor Society collaborative research project during his sophomore year. “I was a little nervous to be working with

juniors and seniors, but our project on fracking came together really well, and we ended up winning the national competition,” Mills reflected.

For his senior honors thesis, Mills chose to use his skills in accounting and finance to conduct research that would benefit Gardner-Webb University. The project won a best presentation award at the national Alpha Chi Convention. “I spoke with Wayne Johnson, the Associate Vice President of Operations, to see if there was anything that he had that I might be able to help with,” Mills offered. “He was considering changing the University meal plan format, and asked if I would be able to evaluate one particular potential change. This was a perfect opportunity to use cost accounting and finance in a real-world scenario.”

Since his graduation, Mills has been working at the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) in Charlotte, N.C. His goal is to become a certified bank examiner, a job that evaluates regulatory compliance, internal auditing and financial reporting for a banking institution.

“My business classes prepared me with a foundation for learning additional technical skills after graduation, but the most valuable portion of my education has come from the core classes that I have taken, particularly the hard courses,” Mills observed. “These courses have taught me how to think, how to evaluate, and how to learn. These skills will serve me even if I decide to work far outside the field of business.”