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Office of University
Communications

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Nathan Lile ('16) has Experienced Academic and Personal Growth

He glides through the water with both grace and power. Each movement is calculated to precision. He stretches the capacity of his physical strength—hoping to shave seconds off his competition time. Much like the work he does as a computer science, philosophy and theology major, Nathan Lile ('16) of Waynesville, N.C., understands the importance of sequence, structure, and succession.

The captain of the swim team at Gardner-Webb University, Lile has learned how to tweak elements of his technique for maximum performance, becoming the first GWU men's swimmer to qualify for the NCAA Division I Swimming & Diving Championships in two events: the 50 Free and 100 Free. He knows the significance of secondary factors; diet, sleep, and strength training can change the outcome of a race. In many ways, his activities in the pool paralleled the results he observed through his experiences coding computer programs as part of his targeted undergraduate research.

"The cool thing about programming is that a lot of it is optimizing," Lile explained. "As far as I'm concerned, that falls into debugging. There are always going to be some ways I can optimize the program, some things I can change, and different ways I can code the data. It's not always perfect, that's for sure."

As an undergraduate research scholar, Lile wanted to investigate aspects of computerized artificial intelligence, a branch of computer science dealing with the simulation of intelligent behavior in computers.

He appreciated the opportunity to evaluate which areas of his major he is most interested in pursuing after graduation—computer science or philosophy, or perhaps even a unique combination of the two. "I loved the idea of having five weeks to devote completely to this topic and do more programming than I've ever done," he shared, "and learn something completely new, something people do their master thesis on. The experience did help me figure out what direction I might want to go after college. Artificial intelligence goes well with cognitive science, and that blends well with both philosophy and computer science, so it really showed me what I enjoyed and where I should focus."

While Lile could have chosen to attend another university, he was drawn to Gardner-Webb because of the welcoming atmosphere. “I was trying to decide between several different schools,” he recalled. “As I was agonizing over the decision, I came to the realization that I had been most at home when I visited Gardner-Webb. I felt like I belonged, before I had committed to the school. No other school had the hospitable, Christian atmosphere that I experienced here. Gardner-Webb was a community that treated me as a valuable person.”

He also found that the University’s size
equals greater options for students.

“Gardner-Webb is a school where if you’re willing to take the initiative, you can do pretty much anything you want,” he assessed. “The opportunities I have been given I could have never gotten anywhere else. When I need help in class, I can meet one-on-one with my professor. When I have to travel for swim meets, my professors are understanding. I was given the chance to pursue summer research, as well as participate in meaningful roles in the clubs and organizations that interest me.”

He is treasurer of the Alpha Chi National Honors Society, and he was co-team leader for the Alpha Chi Collaborative Research Project. He serves on the Student Athletic Advisory Community and is a member of Sigma Zeta Honors Society and TAK Honors Society. For two years, he has been a team captain for Relay for Life, an event that raises money for cancer research.

For Lile, education means more than job preparation. He chose majors that would develop his interpersonal skills with a nod to his pragmatic side. “Computer science and philosophy are both challenging majors that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, originality, synthesis, and logic,” he asserted. “My decision to study computer science was also a practical decision. A computer science degree can open up solid career options. However, I think education’s focus should be developing better people who can contribute to a better community. That being said, I am absolutely confident that the things I’ve learned at Gardner-Webb can translate into a successful career or transition seamlessly into a graduate school.”

Lile’s advice to someone considering Gardner-Webb? “Make sure you set up a meeting with a professor in the discipline you are interested in studying,” he offered. “I think meeting the professors who will be teaching you is a huge advantage that Gardner-Webb can provide. And, unlike larger schools, when you come back to school, they will remember you and will be the people teaching you every day.”