

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

2-23-2016

For Me, Community Made the Difference

Office of University Communications

Becca Leap

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications and Leap, Becca, "For Me, Community Made the Difference" (2016). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 987.

<https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive/987>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Gardner-Webb Publications at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@gardner-webb.edu.

For Me, Community Made the Difference

webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/for-gwu-senior-community-makes-the-difference/

Office of University
Communications

February 23, 2016

By: Becca Leap, Communications Intern

As a kid, Gardner-Webb University was one of my favorite places in the world. Playing tag on the quad, feeding the geese at Lake Hollifield, and splashing around in the University pool were treasured activities I looked forward to all year. I spent a week on the campus nearly every summer since my uncle, Mike Simpson, moved to Boiling Springs to pioneer Gardner-Webb's women's swim team in 1999. Still, though I've always fondly called GWU my "personal playground," I never expected to become one of its students.

In fact, it wasn't until I visited campus in April of 2012 that I decided to move from Sarasota, Fla., to Boiling Springs to study English. All of my cousins who had graduated from GWU were English majors, and they had all raved about the department. It seemed to me like a good place to start. The moment I stepped on campus, I felt the sense of community that many students, faculty, and alumni experience daily. It was that welcoming, inclusive environment that "sealed the deal."

Over the years, Gardner-Webb has become my home away from home. I've never had a class with more than 30 people in it. Smaller class sizes like the ones at GWU open the door for discussions that might not happen in larger classrooms. As a result, I've made a lot of friends that I probably would have never known if not for those in-depth class discussions.

Those friendships aren't the only rewards I've reaped from Gardner-Webb's cozy culture. The University's dedication to the liberal arts has created opportunities that I might have missed out on at another school. In my time here, I've participated in two of the school's theatrical productions. Taking part in such productions as a non-theatre major is considerably more difficult at larger universities, but Gardner-Webb's size creates opportunities for people from all of its many departments and programs. Because of theatre, I've been able to find my people at GWU—the ones who share my passions.

From faculty to staff to my fellow students, I remember countless times that the people around me made me feel loved, safe, and welcome. Much of this comes from the University's dedication to a Christian atmosphere. Even more than programs like Bible study groups and a weekly student-led worship service, The Gathering, the greatest embodiment of the Christian spirit at the University is found in the love everyone is so ready to give. So many times, offers of a hug, a prayer, or a cup of coffee from a friend or

stranger encouraged me when life got tough. That loving environment has encouraged me to branch out and take risks in both my academic and extracurricular life. When you feel like everyone is rooting for you, it's less scary to take the big chances.

Such risks have led me to unexpected places and interests. My junior year, I traveled all the way to Philadelphia, Pa., to present at an academic conference. The presentation began as a class project, but encouragement from one of my professors gave me the confidence to submit it for presentation. Until then, I didn't think my work had the potential to really go anywhere, but the caring professors at Gardner-Webb showed me otherwise. Even though I may not pursue academia as a career path, that conference showed me that I could be an authority in my field of study—something I wouldn't have realized without the support of a fully invested faculty.

When I look back on my time at Gardner-Webb, I feel proud to be part of a University family that has shaped me so much. I may have never expected to end up here, but now I can't imagine a life in which I didn't choose GWU. Because of that, I will never hesitate to tell a high school senior considering the University to take a chance on Gardner-Webb. Although it may be a little different from the average college experience, it's worth it to spend four years in a place that cares deeply about its individuals. It's because of the people here that I am who I am today, and that I can be proud of the person that will leave this campus come May.