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### **Gardner-Webb Alumna Passing on Love of Music to Elementary Students**

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# Gardner-Webb Alumna Passing on Love of Music to Elementary Students

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Office of University  
Communications

February 10, 2016

## *Samantha Collins ('14) says GWU Faculty Prepared her for all Aspects of Teaching*

When asked to reflect on her experience at Gardner-Webb University, Samantha Collins ('14) realizes her thoughts center on one word: Relationships.

“I formed friendships. I met my husband, Kenny. I made relationships that will last a lifetime,” she elaborated. “To my professors, I wasn’t a number or just another student. I took a core class early in my college career—the only class I had with this one professor. During my senior year, I saw him around Boiling Springs, N.C. Not only did he remember that my major was music education, he also remembered that I would be student teaching around that time. I believe these kinds of professors are a huge part of what makes Gardner-Webb so unique.”

She could sense Gardner-Webb was going to be a special place from her first visit to campus. “The atmosphere at Gardner-Webb was different than anything I had experienced at any other school,” she explained. “Everyone we met took a genuine interest in me. It was obvious that Gardner-Webb was a close community. When applying to schools, there were other universities where I rarely spoke to a real person throughout the process. At Gardner-Webb, my admissions counselor cried with me when I didn’t think I would have enough financial aid. She also rejoiced with me when we made it work. I didn’t experience anything like that at any other school.”

She was also drawn to the University by the Christian community. “The environment at Gardner-Webb supported my beliefs and my values,” Collins revealed. “Whether I was in class, in the dorms, or at lunch, I had the opportunity to fellowship and worship with other like-minded believers. The community involved learning from professors who were seasoned Christians. It was such a blessing to know these professors were praying for me and encouraging me in my spiritual journey.”

Originally from Savannah, Ga., Collins is teaching music at Springmore Elementary School in Boiling Springs. She also works part time at Gardner-Webb as the yearbook advisor. Collins knew from a young age that she wanted to be a teacher. In middle school band, she discovered a passion for music and decided that would be her specialty. Her classes at Gardner-Webb prepared her to teach any type of music class and work with any level.

“I am certified to teach band, orchestra, or chorus in K-12,” Collins affirmed. “I am more marketable because of this preparation. My education classes helped me develop and refine my philosophy of teaching, which became the basis for the environment of my classroom. All of my classes gave me a safe place to make mistakes and develop my skills. I entered my first year of teaching with a solid knowledge of the North Carolina teacher evaluation system. I was evaluated using this tool before I even started student teaching, so by the time I was officially observed I had no doubt what was expected of me.”

Faculty in both the Department of Music and the School of Education shared valuable information on the latest education practices.

“I always felt like I could go to the music faculty with questions or any other issue I was dealing with,” she observed. “And the faculty in the School of Education challenged us to become the best teachers we could be. Dr. Jason Parker is an outstanding professor in the School of Education. In our classes, he used a different technology tool to present the lesson. He stayed up on current events in education and was very realistic about today’s classroom. He set an incredible example for us as future teachers.”

She also appreciated the way Dr. Mark Cole, director of athletic bands and assistant professor of music, pushed her to excel academically and musically.

“Dr. Cole was the marching band director when I became drum major,” Collins informed. “This role was a great time of learning for me and he believed in me even when I didn’t believe in myself. Dr. Cole continues to be an excellent mentor and resource as I have begun my teaching career.”

Ultimately, her students at Springmore are the beneficiaries of the teaching methods she learned at Gardner-Webb.

“My fourth-graders spend a good part of the second semester learning to play recorder,” she related. “This was a focus of my elementary music education class. Playing the recorder allows the students to practice reading music, and it prepares them for other instruments they might play in the future. My students look forward to this all year and have great success playing the recorder.”

She continued, “My third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders keep music notebooks—a practice

that came from one of Dr. Parker's education classes. This has become one of my favorite things. Students' notebooks include notes, learning strategies, vocabulary, and reflection. These notebooks are used to track learning and understanding, but are also used to foster discussion. I love being able to make connections and give individual feedback by writing in my students' notebooks."

As she works with her co-workers, students and their families, Collins values the life skills acquired from taking classes in Gardner-Webb's liberal arts core curriculum. "The classes helped me develop the problem-solving skills that I use daily in my job," she affirmed. "I had the opportunity to hear and discuss different thoughts and perspectives, learn how to communicate my thoughts and ideas, and think critically. I also believe the focus on liberal arts helped prepare me for graduate school, if I choose to go that route in the future. I feel like I truly received a well-rounded education."