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### **Gardner-Webb Swimmer Majors in Athletic Training to Help Others**

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# Gardner-Webb Swimmer Majors in Athletic Training to Help Others

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Office of University  
Communications

January 21, 2016

## *Susie Ward ('16) Appreciates Opportunities for Community Service*

Susie Ward ('16) of Abilene, Texas, was looking for a college where she could swim competitively while working on a degree in athletic training. Gardner-Webb University offered both in a supportive community atmosphere.

“I met the team, saw the campus, met many Boiling Springs locals, and was able to learn about the expanding health sciences program at Gardner-Webb,” Ward recalled. “The people were some of the friendliest I’d ever met, and the swim team was everything I hoped it would be. All in all, God just worked things perfectly with this school, and I knew this is where I was meant to be. Each year I have returned, I am even more sure that I made the right choice coming here. I have grown in ways that have helped me to mature into a person ready to go make an impact in the world.”

Ward chose to major in athletic training after she had surgery to repair a shoulder injury. During her recovery, she learned more about the career.

“I became extremely interested in what was going on inside my body, and the entire rehabilitation process,” she reflected. “I talked with some of the physical therapists about different things they studied in college, and athletic training stuck out to me because it allowed me to do almost all the same things as a physical therapist, while working with an athletic population. I love sports, and I love being the person to help an athlete perform at the peak level—through treatment, rehabilitation, whatever is called for—and the challenge of figuring out what is needed makes it all the more fun to me.”

She contributes her success at Gardner-Webb to an encouraging faculty and the friends she’s made. Her friends pushed her to become a better swimmer, went with her to church, helped her grow in her faith, and spent late nights studying before finals week. The faculty strive to create stimulating class environments and give thorough feedback on assignments. The professors are also willing to work with her when she misses class because of a swim meet.

“The faculty will go out of their way to help any of their students. Many professors at Gardner-Webb will even provide their phone numbers on their syllabus, in case you have an emergency and need someone to help,” Ward explained. “As a student who came to

Gardner-Webb from halfway across the country, this type of concern and care was extremely comforting.”

The rigorous requirements of the athletic training program ensure that students grasp the information and are capable of applying their skills in a clinical setting, she observed.

“Our clinical experience, in my opinion, is the greatest asset in preparing us for our career,” she added. “We work with sports teams on campus and at a physical therapy clinic, orthopedic office and medical office in the local area, where we apply our skills under the supervision of our clinical preceptors.”

Her academic success has been enriched by opportunities to participate in community service projects.

“My most rewarding experiences at Gardner-Webb are all of the community service opportunities I have had while being a student here,” she assessed. “My first weekend as a freshman, my University 111 class helped paint rooms inside a local church. I’ve been able to participate in Relay for Life three years, and our swim team helped a local swim team’s young children improve on their stroke techniques. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed participating in Gardner-Webb’s Octoberfest (fall carnival for children) each year, and helped set up and direct the first Glow Run 5k to raise money for autism awareness, decorated a homeless shelter and served lunch to its residents for Christmas, and helped show middle schoolers around our campus and talk with them about college.”

She continued, “The school’s motto, ‘Pro deo et humanitate,’ for God and humanity, is something I have taken to heart in my time here. I feel the greatest reward comes when we serve others—and Gardner-Webb has never let me down on opportunities to help out.”