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Office of University
Communications

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Anna Pashkova ('16) will Pursue Registered Dietitian Credentials

Majoring in exercise science at Gardner-Webb University gave Anna Pashkova ('16) an opportunity to explore a variety of health-related careers before deciding on the one that was right for her. Because the program incorporates biology, chemistry and psychology, most of the pre-requisites for graduate school are covered.

“I wasn't sure which career I wanted to be in when I started, but knew I would figure it out as I began to learn more about different areas,” she shared. “Exercise science also allowed me to focus on learning primarily about the human body and to apply biology and chemistry concepts to real-life scenarios in the everyday and active lives of people. Adding a chemistry minor to this major only required three more chemistry courses and opened doors to an ever greater variety of graduate schools and future careers.”

Pashkova, of Iowa City, Iowa, was a member of the Gardner-Webb University volleyball team, earning academic and athletic honors from the Big South Conference. The supportive, family-like atmosphere she experienced on her first visit to campus helped her commit to a school located more than 13 hours from home.

“I wanted to go to a large university at first, but quickly learned that the small class sizes and faculty who are familiar with each student is much more beneficial to my experience and growth,” Pashkova assessed. “My first exposure to a Christian community was when I came to Gardner-Webb and it has only been a positive experience for me. The selflessness and positive attitude of the people I've met has made a big impact on me and made me want to adopt some of their unique, caring qualities. I've also learned a lot about Christianity and it has developed me into a more diverse and understanding person.”

She also believes taking classes in the University's liberal arts general requirements has helped develop her interpersonal skills. “One of the most beneficial things about the liberal arts foundation is being able to communicate to almost anyone about a variety of topics,” she affirmed. “This is especially true when dealing with co-workers and patients, who can come from many different backgrounds. It also teaches critical thinking skills and the ability to view issues from different points of view and to work together with a wide variety of people.”

She's found that the Gardner-Webb faculty challenges students to learn, while offering encouragement and support. When Pashkova missed class because of an athletic event, Dr. Heather Hudson, dean of the School of Preventive and Rehabilitative Health Sciences, met with her separately to review class material. Dr. Benjamin Brooks, associate professor of chemistry, was also willing to help when she missed class.

“All of the faculty in the School of Preventive and Rehabilitative Health Sciences is extremely responsive to students' feedback and always looking for ways to continuously improve the program and classes within it,” she confirmed. “Associate Professor of Exercise Science Dr. Jeff Hartman, as my advisor, has taken a lot of time to answer numerous career- and class-related questions.”

With advice from the faculty and her studies, Pashkova has narrowed down and pinpointed her career interests. She has chosen to pursue a master's in nutrition and work toward becoming a registered dietitian.

“I realized how powerful nutrition was to my health and also to my performance as a volleyball player,” Pashkova observed. “At the same time I began reading and watching stories of people overcoming disease and illnesses through food.”

During her internship in Cardiac and Pulmonary Rehabilitation at Carolinas HealthCare System Cleveland in Shelby, N.C., Pashkova met a registered dietitian. After learning more about her job, Pashkova began searching for graduate schools.

“I found programs that accept students with an undergraduate major other than nutrition to pursue a master's degree while at the same time acquiring the required clinical hours to be able to sit for the registered dietitian exam,” she noted. “Almost all of these program pre-requisites lined up with the courses I had already taken through exercise science, so this transition made it very easy for me to apply to continue my nutrition education.”