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### Grad Found a Home on Gardner-Webb Campus

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# Grad Found a Home on Gardner-Webb Campus

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Office of University  
Communications

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## *Merideth Byl ('16) Preparing for a Career in Medicine*

When Merideth Byl ('16) of Tucson, Ariz., began her college hunt, she wanted to find a Christian school where she could take pre-med and biblical studies. Using a college search engine, she discovered a place called Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs, N.C., met all her criteria.

“I was ready to get out and explore and figured that college was a great time to do that. I checked out the Gardner-Webb website and found myself continually checking it to get updated on the news stories,” she recalled. “It was not until I actually came on a visit to Gardner-Webb that I decided I wanted to come to school here. Gardner-Webb is not just a college with Division I athletics and state-of-the-art facilities. Gardner-Webb is a home. Gardner-Webb is my home. I am so incredibly thankful for that Internet search I did to stumble upon this gem.”

Encouraged by the welcoming faculty, staff and students she met on her first visit to campus, Byl ventured across the country to join the GWU community. She also decided to enrich her academic experience by applying for the Gardner-Webb Honors Program.

“Gardner-Webb’s community is unlike any other place that I have experienced. The people here have provided a safe, encouraging environment for me to grow and discover,” she observed. “It was the acceptance of this community that helped me gain confidence in who I am and that my thoughts and ideas matter. The honors program was a pivotal part in the development of my confidence.”

A heptathlete on the track and field team, Byl’s honor thesis was a study of female athletes to determine if there was a correlation between their self-efficacy in romantic relationships and their self-efficacy in sports. She examined the athletes’ stress levels through a behavioral relationship efficacy test and measured their cortisol levels through saliva samples.

Her peers and professors in the honors program have challenged her to grow as a scholar and as a person. “I would strongly encourage anyone that is considering the honors program to apply, because the experiences you can gain are invaluable,” she encouraged. “The confidence that Gardner-Webb has instilled in me has empowered me to pursue my dreams of becoming a physician.”

Byl, who was elected Homecoming Queen, works as a Student Recruitment Ambassador for Undergraduate Admissions and is president of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. A biology major with minors in chemistry and psychology, she plans to enter the Master of Business Administration program at Gardner-Webb. Her future goals include attending osteopathic medical school. The American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine says this medical practice uses prescription drugs, surgery, and technology to diagnose disease and evaluate injury. But it also offers a system of hands-on techniques designed to support the body's natural functions. It is a holistic approach to medical care that emphasizes a partnership between doctor and patient.

Dr. Tom Jones, her biology professor and the honors program associate dean, introduced her to the concept of osteopathic medicine. Because her own philosophy lines up with the holistic approach, she researched the field and decided it was something she wanted to pursue. Her science courses, as well as GWU's liberal arts foundation, have prepared her for graduate school.

"Part of the liberal arts education requires us to take classes in all different subjects. When students are exposed to different subjects, as opposed to just a one-track major, they are forced to think outside of the box," Byl offered. "Even though I am a science major, my English classes have been the most helpful in teaching me how to think critically and synthesize material. The world is not all one subject, so why should our educational approach be?"

While Gardner-Webb provides a comprehensive educational experience, she has also found it to be a place for spiritual growth.

"Gardner-Webb's Christian community is the foundation for what makes this place so special," Byl reflected. "This community collectively strives for the selflessness that Jesus taught us. That is why the faculty is willing to stay after hours to hold study sessions for their students, why roommates fold your laundry to make your day easier, and why people here value one another. This school has provided me the environment to learn how to love people and love learning."