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Cortney Kerley Beckler ('11) Teaches Variety of Subjects at Non-profit Center

Cortney Kerley Beckler's job as a teacher at the non-profit St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families in Hyattsville, Md., demands versatility. Not only does the 2011 Gardner-Webb University graduate rely on her mathematics education classes, she also recalls her liberal arts studies.

"Gardner-Webb's academic programs were rigorous and prepared me to be confident with the high school math material that I would be teaching," she observed. "Because I am thrust into teaching so many different subjects, it is very important that I know a little about everything. For instance, I have even taught a little art history and U.S. history, which is very different from my major of mathematics."

The St. Ann's Center offers housing and support for mothers and their children. Beckler found a job at the school after transferring to Maryland with her husband, Brandon, who serves in the military. She works with young ladies in the Teen Mother-Baby program, teaching all levels of math and technology in the accredited high school and GED program housed at St. Ann's.

"On a normal day, I can go from teaching Algebra 1 to Geometry to Algebra 2 to Technology to GED math all in a couple hours," she explained. "Our school day also consists of learning SAT words and reviewing geography. Some days the girls bring their babies or children by my classroom after school, and I get a chance to sit in the floor to play blocks or color."

Beckler, a native of Hickory, N.C., received a University Fellows Scholarship when she decided to come to GWU. She was not new to the college, because her father earned a Master of Business Administration from GWU, and her grandfather attended the School of Divinity. An uncle also graduated from the University, and several of her older friends from high school were attending GWU.

"I wanted to keep my options open during the college search, so I applied and interviewed at many different schools," Beckler recalled. "When I interviewed for the

Cortney in South Africa

University Fellows Scholarship, I enjoyed meeting professors and students and felt at home on campus. After my scholarship interview in February or March, I had multiple different professors remember me by name on the first day of classes the next August.”

She also appreciated the University’s Christian foundation. “Gardner-Webb creates a culture of learning, as well as a community of believers. The same students that attend classes with you may also worship with you on Tuesday night at the Gathering (GWU’s student-led worship service). Many professors are also believers, and it’s not rare to see them promise to honor God in the class syllabus.”

After receiving her degree from GWU, Beckler lived in South Africa for six months and volunteered to teach math at the LEAP (Langa Education Assistance Program) Science and Maths School. Some of the poorest teens in South Africa attend the school and receive a quality charter school education. After that experience, she taught Algebra 2 in a public school system in Florida for a year. She also found time to begin working on her master’s degree. Being in a traditional classroom setting gave her a new appreciation for her GWU professors.

“I can’t say enough good things about how well the professors prepared me for my career in teaching,” she affirmed. “When I started officially teaching full time at an urban school in Florida, I was so much more prepared and ready for what I might face than my other first-year peers. I was also a member of FOCUS, a team of GWU students who lead youth retreats locally and regionally. This allowed me to interact with teenagers on an almost weekly basis by leading Bible studies and activities. The combination of the two prepared me to be a high school math teacher.”

Gardner-Webb’s tight-knit community and the support and encouragement of professors, Tammy Hoyle and Dr. Jason Willis, also contributed to her success. At one point, Beckler had a scheduling conflict with two classes she needed being offered during the same semester, day, and time.

“One class was taught by Mrs. Hoyle, and she set up a video camera in the back of the class so that I could take both classes,” Beckler said. “Dr. Willis prepared me very well for my student teaching semester, as well as for my future career. He was also my student teaching advisor and made sure that everything went smoothly during that experience. I am extremely grateful for both their influence and effort. At larger schools, students tend to just feel like one in a sea of faces, but Gardner-Webb allows students to feel important and valued.”