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### **GWU Physician Assistant Students Set to Graduate as University's First Top-Notch Cohort**

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# GWU Physician Assistant Students Set to Graduate as University's First Top-Notch Cohort

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Office of University  
Communications

November 5, 2015

## *PA Program's Students Praised for Excellence*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – The first Physician Assistant (PA) Studies cohort at Gardner-Webb University, set to graduate in May 2016, is earning honors from professional organizations and gaining respect from their supervisors in clinical rotations.

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Lawrence Herman

Known as preceptors in medical circles, these supervisors are experienced medical professionals who support students during hands-on learning experiences in a variety of healthcare fields.

Dean and Program Director Lawrence Herman, a certified PA himself, notes, “Our physician and PA preceptors rate each student on 18 different criteria, and the class average has been between 90 and 99 percent on every single metric. These are A to A-plus students. Dozens of preceptors have said glowing things about the high level of ability of these students. These students are incredibly well-prepared to hit the ground running upon graduation.”

The favorable recommendations include a general surgeon who describes a PA student as “prompt, energetic and fun to work with on a team.” A family medicine provider observes, “If all your students are as prepared as this one, you don’t need to change a thing.” Another offers, “relates very well to patients and health staff.”

In addition to praise from the medical community, individual students have been recognized for their achievements by the N.C. Association of Physician Assistants, the N.C. Medical Society Leadership College and the Physician Assistant Education Association.

“Physician Assistant has been consistently rated as the single best job in America today, and Forbes has rated PA as the best master’s degree for five years straight,” Herman says. “New PA graduates are in exceptionally high demand. Specifically chosen and trained to practice in medically underserved areas such as rural western North Carolina and upstate South Carolina, GWU students are receiving job offers with graduation more than six months away.”

Herman brings 22 years of experience to GWU. He also holds a Master of Public Administration in Health Administration and Health System Finance. Previously, he served as associate professor (with tenure) and chairperson of the Department of Physician Assistant Studies at New York Institute of Technology in Old Westbury, N.Y. He is also a past president and recently completed his term as chair of the board of directors of the American Academy of Physician Assistants, the only organization representing the 115,000 PAs and PA students across the country.

“I have taught in dozens of PA programs and I will stack our faculty up and compare them to any faculty in the country,” he observes. “I can tell you these are the best of the best and the result is going to be a top-notch clinician upon graduation.”

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Joel Stiles

Joel Stiles, a member of the first GWU cohort, agrees with the dean’s assessment.

“Having now been through four rotations and talking to other PA students, the PA program at GWU ensured that I was more than adequately prepared and I feel competent,” he says. “I’m very pleased with the program at Gardner-Webb. I don’t think I could have had a better PA school education and environment to achieve success.”

Completing the Master’s of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) has been his goal for several years. A graduate of Southern Wesleyan University, Stiles previously worked for a national home infusion provider. Working with patients in their homes gave him an opportunity to work with several PAs, and he was impressed with the care they were able to provide.

“I decided to make a career change and was interested in pursuing a profession as a PA,” Stiles explains. “Due to prior commitments in life and five children, I had to put that dream on hold. After much life planning and preparations, I was finally accepted in 2014 to GWU PA school and here I am – living the dream.”

The PA program enrolled its first class in January 2014 will enroll its third class in January 2016. The full-time program is 28 months in length with 16 months of didactic instruction followed by 12 months of clinical rotations in hospitals, clinics and private practices throughout the Southeast. The didactic curriculum uses a traditional classroom setting augmented with real-world patient problems in a team-based learning environment as well as hands-on skills training. Clinical rotation sites include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, women’s health, emergency medicine, general surgery, mental health, and one elective. In addition, students rotate through an underserved U.S. community.

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Sarah McManus

Sarah E. McManus is a member of the second cohort currently in the third semester of didactic and set to graduate in 2017. The class begins its clinical rotations in May. McManus completed her undergraduate studies at N.C. State University and considered going to medical school.

She decided on PA school because the job would allow more time with the family she hopes to have someday and she likes the flexibility of a PA, who can work in a variety of medical settings. She chose the PA program at GWU because of its small class size and Christian values.

“I love the small town Christian atmosphere,” McManus shares. “Everyone is kind and helpful and they really make you feel like they are lucky to have you.”

Morgan Warthan is also a member of the second cohort. A 2013 graduate of the College of Charleston, she says there is a vast amount of knowledge to learn in the classroom and agrees with other PAs who told her the amount of information to soak up is “like drinking water from a fire hose.” However, she says the professors offer support and encouragement to make the material manageable.

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Morgan Warthan

“The class size and individual attention sets the Gardner-Webb program aside from others,” Warthan explains. “For example, last week was one of the more stressful weeks of didactic, and a professor approached me and a fellow classmate and said, ‘It is going to be okay; do your best and it will all be fine. It is beautiful outside, go get some fresh air and come back to re-evaluate the work.’ This is just a small example of the daily love we are given from the program.”

*Pending graduation of its first class, the GWU program, one of only 200 PA programs in the U.S., received provisional accreditation status in September 2013 from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).*

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).*