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Gardner-Webb Alum Pursues Advocacy for the Disabled

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Office of University
Communications

October 9, 2015

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb alumna Kristian Champion ('11) graduated with a class of newly trained disability advocates this September as part of Partners in Policymaking, an eight-weekend political leadership development program.

Photo by: NCCDD

Provided by the N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities, the program helps advocates bring the disabled population into the political forum to positively shape the public policies that affect them.

At Partners in Policymaking, Champion—whose paralysis was caused at birth by spina bifida—learned about networking, community organizing, and how to draft and propose new legislation. “In order to bring about change, you have to know how politics works,” Champion explained. “This program has trained me to become a leader, and most of all, it has given me so much knowledge to share with the world to advocate.”

Along with her cohort, Champion had the opportunity to propose mock legislation to state leaders and advocate for accessibility for approximately 16 percent of the population in Rutherford County, N.C., classified as disabled.

“I have enjoyed the political side of learning how to network and link up with individuals who care about the same issues as me and creating a policy that benefits everyone,” Champion said. “Partners taught us that joining boards, councils, or committees within our community can bring about a change.”

Champion graduated from Gardner-Webb with a bachelor’s degree in public relations before being crowned Ms. Wheelchair North Carolina 2012 and Ms. Wheelchair America 1st Runner-Up 2013.

Champion crowned
Ms. Wheelchair NC
in 2012

“Gardner-Webb was the building block for my advocating skills,” Champion said. “Mrs. Cheryl Potter in the Noel program always listened to my ideas and point of view, and that meant so much to me as a freshman and young adult in society. The University presented me with opportunities and helped me overcome challenges I never knew I would face with my disability.”

For more information on Partners in Policymaking and the N.C. Council on Developmental Disabilities, visit nccdd.org.

The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities works collaboratively across the state to assure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity and inclusion in all areas of community life.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University offers a comprehensive academic experience that introduces students to the diverse world of ideas and to the people who think them, preparing them for professional success and for productive citizenship.