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Office of University Communications

August 21, 2014

Upperclassmen Volunteer Week Leading up to Freshmen Orientation

Each academic year brings a fresh wave of first-year students unfamiliar with the college lifestyle and the nuances of Gardner-Webb University. This transitional moment is precisely when upperclass mentorships can be the most impactful to a new students' success.

During the week prior to this year's orientation, a combined volunteer group of 26 Peer Leaders and 43 Big Brothers/Big Sisters gathered on the Gardner-Webb campus for a variety of team-building, leadership training and social exercises. Their goal is to be a friendly and helpful resource as they welcome freshmen to the campus for a first-time college experience.

"Connections are what we are all about here," said Jessica Herndon, director of First-Year Programs. "We're aiming to get first-year students acquainted with the University—helping them find a place and feel like they belong."

Peer Leaders are upperclassmen who co-teach the Dimensions of University Life (UNIV 111) and First-Year Experience (UNIV 101) courses, and make themselves available throughout the school year, while Big Brothers/Big Sisters serve as student mentors during the week of orientation.

"What drew me to become a Peer Leader the most stemmed from my own freshman experience," said Gardner-Webb Senior Matt Wyatt. "I had the privilege to be in a 111 class and got to make a lot of close friends. I wanted to get involved to give freshmen some of that experience. I got into the heart of campus and what it means to be family."

Gardner-Webb Junior Jonathan Goldenberg felt compelled to become a Big Brother after a challenging first-year experience. "I knew that I could do a good job reaching out to new students," he said.

The purpose of Gardner-Webb's First-Year Experience Program is to help develop a freshman's personal and academic success skills, stimulate intellectual curiosity and interdisciplinary thinking, encourage assimilation into university culture, foster a sense of community, nurture their faith, and facilitate service-based leadership.

"Big Brothers/Big Sisters for 2014 have been a fabulous group of upperclassmen who have given a week of the end of their summer break to come volunteer and show the new students all about Gardner-Webb," said Karissa Weir, director of Student Activities, Campus

Recreation and New Student Orientation. “They basically open the front door of their home [Gardner-Webb] and invite new students in with the hope of them making a home here, too.”

To find out more about First-Year Programs, or if you’re interested in becoming a future Peer Leader or Big Brother/Big Sister, contact (704) 406-2297.