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Office of University Communications

May 16, 2014

Sports Photographer Heather Pendergraft Receives Opportunity of a Lifetime

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Her hair danced in the breeze as she smiled for the photo. She is not used to being in front of the lens, but is instead much more comfortable behind it. However, on graduation day, journalism major Heather Pendergraft obediently posed for the obligatory pictures with family and friends. She smiles not only because a significant milestone has been reached, but also because her achievement is bringing with it two significant internships throughout the summer and fall.

Pendergraft, from Stanley, N.C., said even though graduation was looming, she wasn't worried about what was coming next. She understands that some opportunities cannot be planned in advance. Instead of worrying, she focused on honing her craft and becoming an accomplished sports photographer.

"I learned to let go of things and let God handle it," Pendergraft shared. "Every opportunity I have received in photography has come unexpectedly. My job was to be ready for it."

Photo courtesy Heather Pendergraft

She traveled to New York City with other communication studies students during spring break. Dr. Bob Carey, chair of the GWU Department of Communication and New Media Studies, served as a team leader for the trip and connected his students with some of his professional contacts in the city. One of those individuals was Brad Smith, the director of photography at *Sports Illustrated*.

"With Dr. Carey's connections, we were able to visit the *Sports Illustrated* offices and meet Brad Smith," Pendergraft explained. "While we were there, Dr. Carey told him I had an interest in sports photography. So we were talking to him and it kind of turned into an interview for me. He encouraged me to fill out an application for an internship."

Throughout the next couple of weeks, she refined her portfolio, and followed up with both Smith and Dr. Carey. She already had a summer internship lined up with the International

Photo courtesy Heather Pendergraft

Mission Board (IMB) in Richmond, Va. “We decided I should continue with my plan to work with IMB this summer, and then head to New York in the fall to be with *Sports Illustrated*,” Pendergraft shared.

Both of her internship opportunities will focus on clerical duties and providing needed office assistance. However, she doesn’t mind. Pendergraft said there might be opportunities for her to go on assignment with *Sports Illustrated* and she is ready to learn all she can.

“I’ve wanted to work at *Sports Illustrated* since I started photography. It’s always been my dream,” she expressed. “I’m in awe of the fact that I actually met their director of photography and he wanted me to apply for an internship. Then, after he saw my portfolio he was even more interested.”

Pendergraft credits Carey as a tremendous mentor and teacher. She believes Gardner-Webb University was instrumental in positioning her for a career in photography, even though she started out as a psychology major. “I would tell new students to step out of their comfort zone and do something new,” she advised. “You’re not going to regret it.”

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.