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Gardner-Webb Football Player Embraces His Calling in the Nursing Profession

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Office of University Communications

May 7, 2013

Ashanti McPhee Defies Barriers in the Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN) Program

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – He's a tough guy on the football field.

As a GWU Runnin' Bulldog, he plays offensive center. Snapping the football from the line of scrimmage and safely delivering it to the quarterback is a primary responsibility. After those split seconds have passed, he must analyze how to best defend his quarterback as he provides necessary blocks and offensive coverage.

Ashanti McPhee is physically imposing and underneath his helmet and pads, one would never suspect that he is one of the only Gardner-Webb football players to embrace a calling into the nursing profession. This Orlando, Fla. native came to GWU to play football, and never expected he would enter a program so heavily populated by the female gender.

"I initially was interested in marine biology," McPhee shared. "I took a biology class to see if that was an area that I should explore. I realized that learning about biomes and animal environments wasn't that interesting to me. Then, we started studying material about the human body; the different systems, how they function, how they interact together to make the body work. That's when I knew this was something I wanted to pursue."

After completing a year of his core requirements, McPhee entered the Gardner-Webb Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN) program. His instructors speak highly of him and are impressed with his abilities in both the classroom and within his clinical rotation. Although he knew being male was not necessarily common in the nursing profession, he believes his gender can ultimately help him. "Even in my clinicals, people tell me, 'We love having you here,'" he explained. "I guess it is because of my size, it's easier for me to help lift and ambulate patients. There seems to be an increasing demand for male nurses."

His football teammates were understandably surprised when he chose to enter the nursing program, and McPhee said he definitely has endured a certain amount of teasing, ribbing, and tongue-in-cheek banter. At the same time, he knows they understand the challenging nature of the curriculum. "If I can get through this program, I want to try to help other guys who might be shy about it or scared to be ridiculed," McPhee said. "As a football player in the nursing program, I see a chance to help people. No matter who you are or where you come from, if you work hard and have a passion to do something, you shouldn't be afraid to do it."

McPhee is convinced that his year in the nursing program has assisted him immensely as a student athlete. “Nursing definitely helps me think more critically on the field,” he reflected. “With nursing, there are a lot of context clues that help you figure out what is happening. I’ve learned to develop that skill and pick up on clues and that has transferred into how I think on the field. And I’m more dedicated to learning on the field, just like in the classroom.”

He admits that he must access a different element of his personality when he is playing football. Those who witness McPhee on the field will likely never see the nurturing, caring and compassionate side of him. “In football, if the opposing team sees a weakness, they’ll take advantage of it,” he explained. “But when I’m working with a patient, I truly enjoy giving them a medication or a drink when they are thirsty, or doing something positive to help them in their time of need. That aspect is very satisfying to me personally.”

With his first year in the ADN program now complete, he is more confident than ever that he made the right decision for his future profession. “With nursing, there’s a lot that we know that allows us to take care of people,” McPhee explained. “But there’s still so much that can be discovered. That mystery and potential for ongoing discovery definitely keeps my attention and makes me excited about what my future holds.”

Gardner-Webb University salutes nurses everywhere in recognition of National Nurses Week, May 6-13. The University is proud of the hundreds of nurses who were trained at GWU and who now serve in a wide range of capacities all over the world. GWU offers a variety of nursing degree options, including Associate Degree of Nursing (ADN), Bachelor of Science-Nursing (BSN), Master of Science-Nursing (MSN), Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP), and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degrees.

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).