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Office of University Communications

April 15, 2013

Event to Shed New Light on Victims, Survivors, and the Importance of Raising Awareness

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Right now, somewhere in the United States, someone is being sexually assaulted. In just two minutes, another person will become a victim of sexual violence or abuse. And Gardner-Webb University graduate counseling honors students are not okay with that.

In an effort to promote awareness of sexual assault and in honor of April's designation as Sexual Assault Awareness month, the Gardner-Webb University Chapter of Chi Sigma Iota, the GWU Graduate Counseling Program and the School of Psychology and Counseling will host a candlelight walk throughout the Gardner-Webb campus. The event will take place on April 30 at 8 p.m., beginning at the Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center.

“We really wanted our chapter to do some meaningful work on campus and in the surrounding community, particularly in the area of mental health,” said graduate student and Chi Sigma Iota member Jessie Dawson. “College campuses are a perfect arena in which to teach, inspire and empower people.”

According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), the 2013 National Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM) campaign focuses on healthy sexuality and its connection to child sexual abuse prevention. By providing tools and information on healthy childhood sexual development, adults can better identify risks, support healthy boundaries, and challenge negative messages.

“As counseling interns and future counselors, the number of people and children that we have worked with who have either been directly or indirectly affected by sexual assault or abuse is astonishing,” shared Rachel Bost, also a GWU graduate counseling student and Chi Sigma Iota member. “Based on the statistics, sexual assault and abuse is much more prevalent than we think, especially on college campuses.”

In addition to the walk around campus in which each candle will honor a survivor of sexual assault, participants will also hear from a guest speaker from the local Abuse Prevention Council's Domestic Violence Shelter.

“Statistics show that at least one in four college women will be the victim of a sexual assault during her academic career,” Dawson said. “Bringing awareness to this topic not only helps those who have been impacted by such events, but also opens the eyes of everyone by

empowering individuals to take a stand, recognize the reality of the situation, and help educate others.”

For additional information on this event, email Jessie Dawson at jdawson3@gardner-webb.edu or Rachel Bost at rbost@gardner-webb.edu.

Chi Sigma Iota is an International Counseling Academic and Professional Honor Society and membership in the Gardner-Webb Chapter is reserved for graduate students in the counseling program who have achieved academic excellence. To be eligible for membership, students must have completed six semester hours, maintain a 3.5 GPA or higher, and be a student in good standing.

The NSVRC’s mission is to provide leadership in preventing and responding to sexual violence through collaboration, sharing and creating resources, and promoting research. They envision a world where diversity is celebrated and all people are treated with dignity and respect and have full autonomy over their own bodies and sexual expression.