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Office of University Communications

August 22, 2012

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Katie Spiro is rarely at a loss for words. This rising junior at Gardner-Webb University is working on a double major in communications and political science. But just a few weeks ago, she was given an award that made her speechless.

Spiro, a GWU track and field athlete, recently completed a summer internship in Washington, D.C., involving more than 90 international students for eight weeks of learning and networking. When the program concluded, she was astounded when her name was called as the recipient of the 2012 Director's Choice Award for All Aspects of the Institute on Political Journalism.

“There were 90 top-notch kids from all over the country and even the world,” Spiro shared. “I was thinking, this person sounds phenomenal but it could apply to anyone here. When they called my name, I looked around in shock. I'm not much of a crier, but there were some tears. It was one of those moments that is definitely a highlight of my life to this point. To have my experience topped off like that—it's hard to describe. There aren't words.”

Spiro, whose hometown is Sylva, N.C., was accepted into an international program called the Fund for American Studies and was enrolled in the Institute on Political Journalism, held in Washington, D.C. The eight-week program is designed to help students get professional, hands-on training in print or broadcast journalism, public relations and politics. Participants in the program attend classes at Georgetown University in the evening hours, and during the day, they work as interns for major news and communications organizations. Through the program, Spiro was matched at the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC), the largest consumer financial counseling non-profit agency in the country.

While serving as communications intern NFCC, Spiro handled social media updates, online tool kit assembly, and website promotions. “Blogging was my favorite part of my daily routine for NFCC,” she said. “I was required to scour the Internet for well-articulated and legitimate financial information, and I was simultaneously becoming more financially literate.”

Her time at Georgetown gave her a firsthand university comparison opportunity and Spiro says it made her love Gardner-Webb even more than she had before. “The one-on-one attention we receive at GWU is truly second to none,” she said. “I learned so much from my time at Georgetown and loved the opportunity, but while I was in D.C., my [GWU] political

science professor, who lives in Maryland, invited me to come have dinner with his family. My roommates couldn't believe that a student would have that sort of personal time with their professor. That is a perfect example of the uniqueness that helps define Gardner-Webb."

In addition to receiving a diploma from Georgetown and the director's award, the experience firmly rooted her decision to pursue a career in political journalism. She encourages her classmates to take advantage of every opportunity, even if it seems out of reach or even impossible.

"Dream big. If anyone wants to do something big, or perhaps do something that will lead to something big, I say go for it," she encouraged. "This is your prime time. This is the time when you can mess up a bit and there's time to recover and it won't hurt you too much. Thankfully this summer was a hit for me. So go for it."