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Summer Scholar's Research Combined Her Majors in Political Science and American Sign Language

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Summer Scholar’s Research Combined Her Majors in Political Science and American Sign Language

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 9, 2020



Paige Butler, '21, Studied Accessibility of Emergency Operation Plans for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

While Paige Butler, '21, of Jacksonville, Fla., worked on her Undergraduate Research Project when many government offices were closed because of COVID-19 restrictions, she appreciated having Internet access. At the same time, though, she realized the technology that helped her might not be easily accessible to people with certain disabilities.

Butler chose to study how the emergency operation plans in North Carolina counties comply with standards in the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). She was one of 11 Gardner-Webb students who applied for and received a grant from the GWU Undergraduate Research Scholars Program to explore the topic over the summer. The students worked 40 hours a week for five weeks on their projects, which they hope to present in a professional forum. Each one had a faculty mentor or collaborator who guided them through the project. Butler’s mentor was Dr. Elizabeth Amato, assistant professor of political science.

“This topic interests me because it allows for me to research both of my passions here at Gardner-Webb—political science and American Sign Language (ASL),” Butler shared. “As an ASL and political science double major, president of the ASL Club on campus, and the executive parliamentarian in Student Government Association, I have been able to find ways to integrate the two things that I love. However, this research topic has allowed for me to be able to feel like I am making a difference in ensuring a safer future based on equal access. Without laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, countless individuals would be killed due to the lack of accessibility that happens during an emergency.”



In addition to finding information online, Butler interviewed three emergency management directors. One of them was also the county’s ADA coordinator. She asked them about their job responsibilities and their perspectives on ADA compliance. “One thing I was surprised to find out is that North Carolina has a department that is designed to provide services to the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community,” Butler noted. “In other states, services are typically handled through the various departments of the state. This puts the responsibility of access on the shoulders of those seeking services. Deaf people need access to communication through trained interpreters in order to gain information about these services. Not all states require interpreters to be certified or to go through any training at all. Obstacles like these are only the beginning of the uphill battle and under representation that the deaf community faces.”

Her faculty mentor, Amato, supported her throughout the process. “She has helped me through countless Zoom call meetings, critiqued emails before I send them to directors, and came up with more key words to help my research efforts. Dr. Amato has helped me to understand the endless possibilities my passions hold for my future.”

Butler is writing a paper with her findings and will provide it as a sample of her work when she applies to graduate schools. “I have plans to move back home to Florida and earn my master’s in public administration,” she asserted. “I hope to become an Emergency Management Director like all the wonderful people that I had the opportunity to interview. This research topic has opened my eyes to the possibility of a new career choice. Emergency Management encompasses everything I have always wanted from a career. Before applying to summer scholars, I envisioned myself becoming a city manager or going into political campaign management. Now, I have a clear vision for what I want my future to look like. No matter where I go, I have faith that the Lord is always guiding my footsteps.”

She concluded, “Even though coronavirus has taken so much from so many individuals this year, I have been blessed to conduct my research in a time of peak technological advancements. This time is truly a testament to how easy it is to adapt to a new normal. We have come along way as humans, but we also have a long way to go. I am happy to be a part of this change and to be a part of Gardner-Webb.”

[Learn more about majoring in American Sign Language.](#) >

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Photos by: GWU student: Lisa Martinat Price

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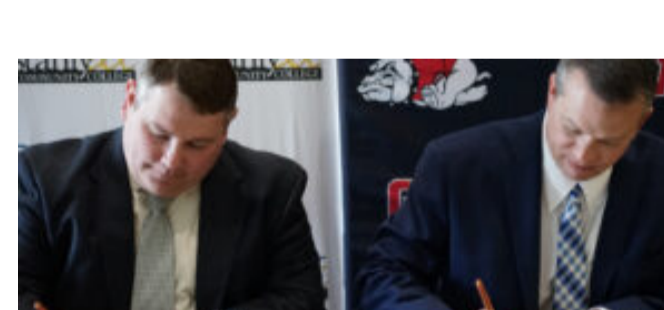


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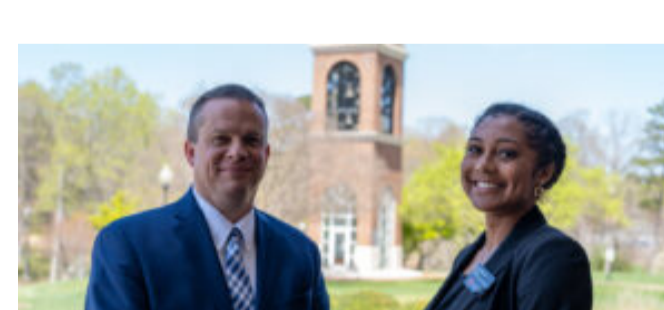


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