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Gardner-Webb Junior Develops Research Skills to Succeed in Medical School

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Gardner-Webb Junior Develops Research Skills to Succeed in Medical School

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 19, 2020



Grace Burgin, '22, Studies the Effect of Fad Diets on Fetal Development

Grace Burgin, '22, enrolled in Gardner-Webb University as a nursing student, but after studying fetal development and receiving encouragement from her professors and friends, she changed her major. The junior from Iron Station, N.C., decided to pursue a degree in biology with a concentration in biomedical sciences. Her goal is to become an obstetrician/gynecologist.

"I'm super passionate about women's health and being able to provide them with the care they need," Burgin affirmed. "In the current medical climate, many female reproductive health issues are misdiagnosed or dismissed as complaints about the typical menstrual cycle. I want to learn and be able to take these complaints seriously, in order to get women the care they need regarding their reproductive health and their pregnancies."

To develop her analytical skills, Burgin applied for a grant from the GWU Undergraduate Research Scholars Program. "Conducting this study prepared me for the outside research that is required of medical students to be up-to-date on treatments and methodologies," she noted.

She was one of 11 GWU students who were accepted into the program. Each student was paired with a faculty member and spent 40 hours a week for five weeks working on a project. Dr. Meredith Rowe, assistant professor of biology, was Burgin's mentor.



Burgin chose to research the effects of fad or popular diets on fetal nutrition and development. "I wanted to do something with maternal-fetal health," Burgin shared. "Then, in my nutrition class, we did presentations on fad diets and how they can impact a person's health. I became curious about finding out how being on a fad diet, such as the Keto Diet, while pregnant could impact the viability, health, and future of the developing baby. The diets I specifically looked at were the Keto Diet, the South Beach Diet, the Paleo Diet, vegetarianism/veganism, and intermittent fasting."

She conducted a scientific literature review, reading research articles on how specific nutrients impact fetal development. Then, she read articles to determine what nutritional deficiencies might be caused by the fad diets. Finally, she looked at how those deficiencies might affect the development of a fetus.

"I discovered an overwhelming amount of research articles exist on the topic," Burgin related. "The main challenge was knowing when to stop and move on to the next piece of my research. My mentor, Dr. Rowe, was extremely helpful and gave me really good advice on how to do just that."

She and Rowe met once a week, and Rowe answered her questions and gave suggestions on how to make her research better. "Not only that, but she also made sure I was taking care of myself and my mental health during this process," Burgin asserted. "I was really surprised to find out how even the trace minerals that many people haven't heard of can have major impacts on fetal development if the mother is deficient. A balanced maternal diet is vitally important to pregnancy outcomes."

Photos by Sarah Garrison / GWU Student Photo Team

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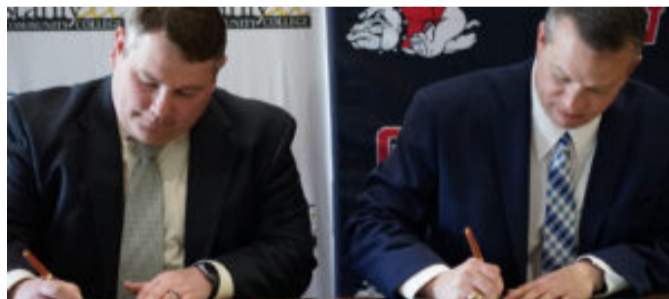


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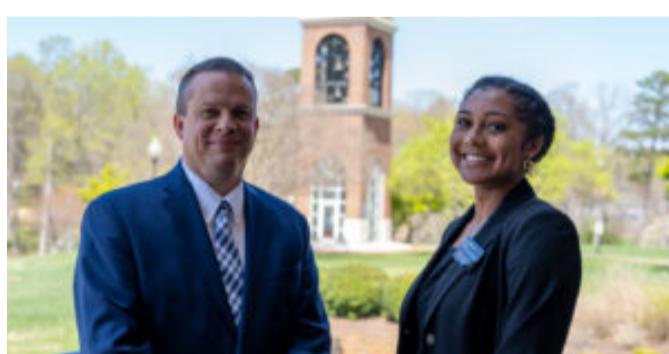


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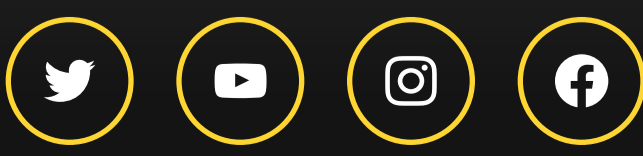
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