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Gardner-Webb First-Year Students Begin Literacy Project with Lasting Impact

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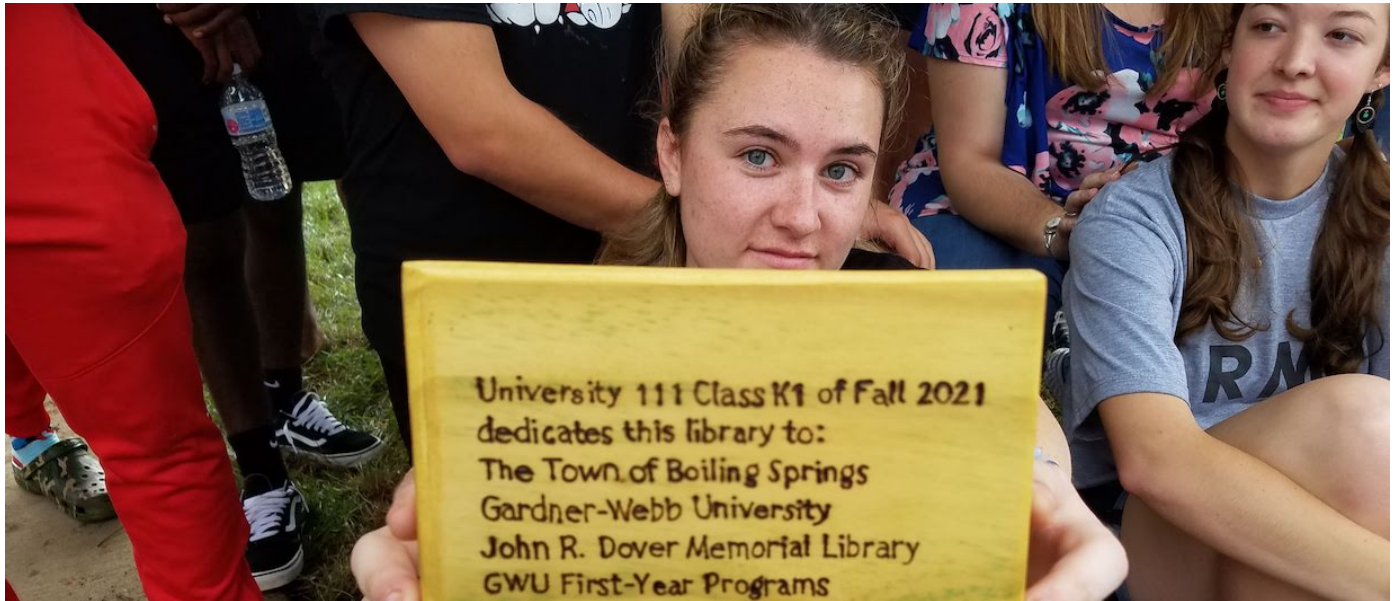
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FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMS

Gardner-Webb First-Year Students Begin Literacy Project with Lasting Impact

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 16, 2021



Katie Hartley's UNIV 111 Class Places Little Free Library at Boiling Springs Town Park

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Students enrolled in University Life (UNIV 111) at Gardner-Webb didn't expect to dig holes or mix concrete as part of the course, which is designed to help first-year students balance academic achievement and personal growth. However, while focusing on time management and critical thinking skills, the students develop community by joining in a service-learning project. When their teacher is Instruction Librarian Katie G. Hartley, it follows that their volunteer activity is related to books and reading.

Hartley is teaching her first Gardner-Webb UNIV 111 class this semester. She's enjoyed the experience and was excited to guide the students through their semester service project: Building and placing a Little Free Library at the Boiling Springs Town Park.

"I've wanted to do a little library for a while, because it's such a great enrichment project for any community," Hartley affirmed. "It's something tangible that they can go by and visit and see people interact with it. It was great to see so many of the students go above and beyond with their involvement. My student with the broken foot got down on the floor and was painting the bottom of the library. Also, watching the guys try to figure out the best way to dig a hole (for the library post) was a great experience that will stay with me forever."



The boys took turns using a hole digger, shovel and pick to carve out a hole deep enough for the pole. Other students mixed the concrete to pour in the hole, helped hold the library in place while the concrete set, and put dirt and mulch back around the post.

The Gardner-Webb library box will be registered with the non-profit [Little Free Library Association](https://littlefreelibrary.org/) (<https://littlefreelibrary.org/>) and placed on its online map. The concept is simple: Take a book, leave a book. Some take more books, and some leave more. Hartley said through an agreement with the Boiling Springs Town Council, her classes will provide upkeep on the box every year. The town owns the space, and her students will maintain the books and the actual library unit.

Boiling Springs Town Manager Justin Longino watched the students install the library. “It’s going to be a great addition to our park,” he noted. “People who are visiting the park or just walking by can come up here and grab a book. We are excited about partnering with the University. It’s something small, but a great thing to partner on.”

One requirement of the Little Free Library Association is that recycled materials are used to build the box. Hartley said she went dumpster diving in an area where there was a new build to find the post, wood, glass, shingles and other items needed.

While learning about college life, the first-year students embraced the Little Free Library project. Lexi McCall, of Morganton, N.C., said she liked doing a project that would be helpful to people. Elijah Foust, of High Point, N.C., wanted to include a fantasy book in the assortment and was also interested to see the completed project and people using it.

Oscar Vargas, of Bound Brook, N.J., was hoping to choose an informational, how-to book for the collection. “I’ve had (a Little Free Library) in the town where I am from, and I’ve seen it work for people who couldn’t afford to have books,” he said.



▲ Janelle Dupont, of Huntersville, N.C., chose a Stuart Little book for the GWU Little Free Library.

Janelle Dupont of Huntersville, N.C., compared the library project to a community garden she did in high school. “It was a place where people could communicate, get to know each other and bond over whether you were picking stuff for a recipe or flowers,” she related. “I think this is a great way to be a part of the community.”

As Dupont looked at the finished project—a red and black box in the shape of a schoolhouse decorated with bulldogs and paw prints—she declared, “I think we did a really good job with it. We can spread happiness to kids. I got a ‘Stuart Little’ book, because that was my favorite growing up.”

Samori Greenidge, of Bermuda, chose a funny children’s book for the library. He was also proud of what the class had accomplished. “I like art and I like to paint; it was definitely fun painting that,” he acknowledged. “The more important part of it, is the books that are going to be in there for the kids who come to the playground.”

The first Little Free Library book-sharing box was built in 2009 in Wisconsin by Todd H. Bol. It was a tribute to his mother, a teacher who loved to read. He filled it with books and put it on a post in his front yard. His neighbors and friends loved it, so he built several more and gave them away. Now, there are 100,000 registered Little Free Libraries in all 50 states and 108 countries, from Argentina to Zambia.



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More than 165 million books have been shared, increasing book access for readers of all ages and backgrounds. Todd Bol passed away in 2018 from complications of pancreatic cancer. He was dedicated to Little Free Library's mission and was known for saying, "I really believe in a Little Free Library on every block and a book in every hand. I believe people can fix their neighborhoods, fix their communities, develop systems of sharing, learn from each other, and see that they have a better place on this planet to live."

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