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**GARDNER-WEBB ONLINE**

## GWU's Teacher Assistants to Teachers Program Helped Student Obtain Co-Teaching Opportunity

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON DECEMBER 27, 2021



### Jacqueline Johnson Grace, '22, Working on Bachelor's Degree While Serving as Associate Teacher

*By Sarianna Miranda-Rosado, '24, Intern for Communications*

After 22 years as a teacher assistant, Jacqueline Johnson Grace is in her first year as an associate teacher in Salisbury, N.C. A student in the Gardner-Webb University Elementary Education Teacher Assistants (TA) to Teachers program, Grace decided to go back to school in 2019 for her degree after serving as a long-term substitute teacher in a fourth-grade classroom. "After that year of subbing and seeing how the students grew, I felt going back to school was what I needed to do," she shared. "My principal at the time told me what I couldn't see: 'I am a teacher.' I didn't know it until then. I have what it takes to move minds."

When she learned about the Gardner-Webb program for teacher assistants, she realized it was a great opportunity. In addition to the courses, boot camps prepare soon-to-be teachers for edTPA and the Foundations to Literacy Licensure Exam, which are requirements for teaching in North Carolina. Gardner-Webb helps teacher assistants by partnering with her district, Rowan-Salisbury Schools, and giving scholarships. Most importantly, the program being offered online worked with her busy schedule. "Had it not been online, I wouldn't have been able to be a part of the program," she asserted. "There would have been no way for me to work and go to class daily."

Additionally, being in the TA to Teachers program opened a door for her to co-teach in a new program that Rowan-Salisbury Schools calls the LAB school. "I am paired with a Master Teacher," Grace

informed. “I attend professional development workshops and receive training in reading and math. I’m paid as a first-year teacher and earn a two-year teaching contract next school year.”



While the online format makes the GWU program accessible, Grace still had to tackle balancing school and work. Through trial and error, she discovered a schedule that worked for her. “There were nights I was up late trying to do homework because I had to cook supper, then be present in class,” Grace acknowledged. “I learned the best thing to do was to work on as much homework as I could on Friday after work, almost all day on Saturday and some on Sunday.”

She is grateful for the faculty members who have helped her reach her academic goal. “The best part of my educational journey is having so many influential professors who genuinely care about you,” affirmed Grace, who will graduate in May 2022. “They want to know how you are, and if you need to talk to them, just let them know. They provide students with a comfortable environment that is conducive to learning and help promote intellectual and spiritual development. They have truly been the best part of this journey, as well as Ms. Wendy Turbyfill (GWU data and licensure manager), one of the most amazing people there.”

Through the demands of being a caregiver, doing schoolwork and working full time, Grace receives the most gratitude and congratulations from her family. “My sons tell me how proud they are of me, and my 3-year-old tells me she wants to be like me,” she related.

Her Gardner-Webb experience has helped her grow as a professional and define her goals. “My passion is to make a difference,” Grace declared. “I am passionate about helping kids learn new things and gain confidence. I want to be a teacher as I believe the children are our future, and it’s important that I provide them with the tools to lead their lives in a positive way.”

*Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina’s recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and*

*inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*