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UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Each Member of Gardner-Webb's Delegation to National Alpha Chi Convention is a Winner

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON APRIL 1, 2022



- ▲ The four students who won top prizes at the Alpha Chi National Convention. From left, are, Caleb Etchison, Kimberly Cole, Grace Burgin and Allyson Butts. Not pictured is Michelle Lominac, who was a member of the group project.

Students Bring Home Top Prizes in Scholarships and Collaborative Research Competition

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—At the Alpha Chi National Convention and centennial celebration, delegates from Gardner-Webb University made their own history. Held recently in Austin, Texas, all five students from GWU were recognized with an award and a monetary prize. Moreover, two students from GWU—Caleb Etchison and Allyson Butts—won the top two national awards. The other three winners, Grace Burgin, Kimberly Cole and Michelle Lominac, won second place in the Collaborative Research Competition.

Dr. June Hadden Hobbs, professor of English and director of undergraduate research, co-sponsors the group along with Dr. Bruce Moser, associate professor of music. She said this is only the second time in chapter history that a member has received the prestigious Gaston Scholarship. The other winner was Christian Jessup in 2017. Additionally, each Alpha Chi chapter is allowed only two applicants for the 12 national scholarships and both students who applied from GWU won.

“The students who went to the convention this year were unusually committed and very well prepared,” Hobbs praised. “One thing I noticed about all of them was their willingness to accept constructive criticism and use it to improve their work. The Alpha Chi motto is ‘making scholarship

effective for good.' All of these young people exemplify that motto. They will make a difference in the next 100 years."

Etchison, of Gastonia, N.C., received the \$3,000 Gaston Scholarship for his discussion of an original orchestral piece that was performed on campus last fall. A music composition major, the title of his research was "Motivic Development in The Psalm of Taios." His faculty mentor was Moser, who suggested that Etchison write the paper to describe the work he had put into composing the music. "My project was an overview of how motivic development played a key role in composing this piece, showing how three motives that stem from the main theme go on to be the building blocks of the entire composition," Etchison explained. "I didn't expect to win anything with a paper about motivic development, and I was blown away that I placed high enough to win the Gaston scholarship. I was honored to be considered so highly alongside such excellent students and topics."

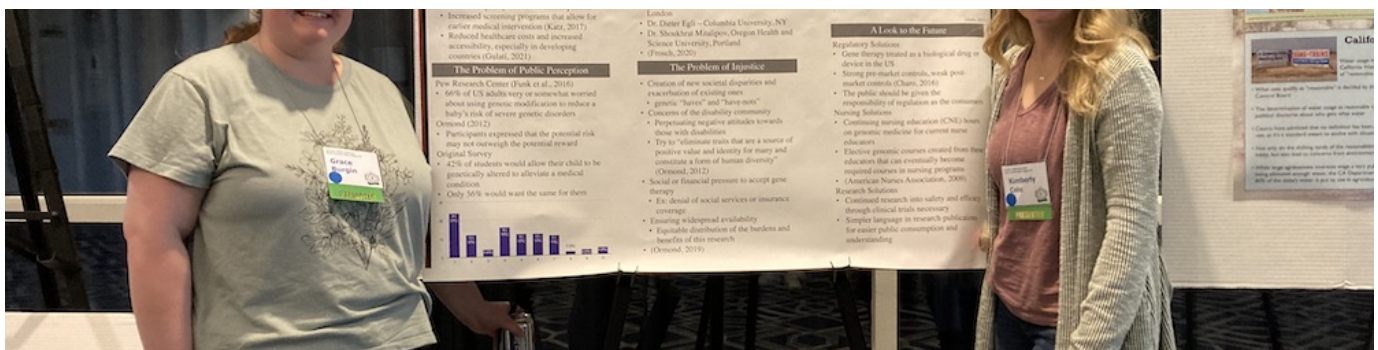
While Moser was excited for all of the students to receive recognition for their hard work, he said Etchinson's win validates his highly developed compositional craft and keen ability to explain creative concepts in an understandable way. Moser stated, "I couldn't be prouder of how well he represented himself, the department, and our university."



▲ Allyson Butts



▲ Caleb Etchison



▲ Grace Burgin, left, and Kimberly Cole

Butts, of Concord, N.C., a junior who is working on her bachelor's in exercise science and master's in strength and conditioning, won a \$2,000 Nolle Scholarship for her paper titled "Who Is Sherlock? Sidney Paget and Conceptions of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes." Her faculty mentor was Assistant Professor of English Composition Matt Duffus. Butts said the paper grew out of her appreciation for art and curiosity about illustrations of Sherlock Holmes in a magazine. "My research looked at how the work of a British illustrator named Sidney Paget influenced these adaptations," Butts

informed. “I argued that these images worked as a second source of narrative content. While English is not my primary discipline, I think this honor is a testament to the value of liberal arts education and the ways in which Professor Duffus encouraged me to hone my critical and creative thinking.”

Duffus commended Butts for her dedication to revising and editing her research. “Allyson continued working over Christmas Break and completed three more rounds of revision early in the Spring semester,” Duffus noted. “That she wrote such an excellent essay in a field outside her major, and while juggling many other responsibilities, is a testament to her hard work and intellectual abilities.”

The theme for the Collaborative Research Competition was “Next Century, New Era,” and the team won a \$2,500 prize for their project on genetic modification. When she heard the theme, Burgin had the idea for the project and posed it to Lominac and Cole. “In my field, something that is developing quickly is genetic modification technology,” observed Burgin, a biology major with a concentration in biomedical sciences and a minor in health sciences. “I knew I would be able to discuss the history of discovering DNA and gene regulation within the cell, how gene editing is happening now, and the potential applications for the future. My individual presentation was based on my sophomore Honors thesis. Kim’s nursing discipline allowed her to look at healthcare applications, and Michelle’s political science discipline allowed her to examine how this technology would be regulated and societal implications of its use.”

Lominac, a political science major with minors in business administration and criminal justice administration, was unable to attend the convention. She researched and wrote about the potential problems of injustice that could arise from human gene modification, how the public currently views the matter, and laws and regulations on biotechnology.

“From this project, I learned how valuable collaboration is because it provides an opportunity to consider multiple people’s unique perspectives on a given issue that I wouldn’t have considered otherwise,” Lominac shared. “Both Grace and Kim brought their own knowledge and specific outlooks to the table where we were able to discuss with one another and incorporate each other’s ideas to gain a comprehensive understanding of our topic.”

Their project required about six months of work as teams were asked to identify a problem or formulate a hypothesis and conduct the necessary research. They were required to submit a research report by March 1. The title page listed each team member, their classification and discipline, as well as a research overview describing how the team planned, divided, and conducted its collaborative project. A multidisciplinary panel of judges evaluated the research report, poster, and a 10-minute oral presentation with a four-minute question and answer period during the convention.

Cole said she was genuinely surprised when they were announced as second place. “Going into the project my main goal was to develop my research skills, because a project of this size was different than anything I had done before,” she reflected. “I had felt that I had already won because of my growth, but being announced as second place was surreal and a moment I will never forget.”

About Alpha Chi

Alpha Chi (<https://alphachihonor.org/>). National College Honor Society was founded in 1922 to recognize and promote academic excellence among college and university students of all disciplines, to encourage a spirit of service and leadership, and to nurture the elements of character that make scholarship effective for good. With some 300 chapters, located in almost every state, the organization inducts approximately 10,000 members annually.

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](https://gardner-webb.edu/). (<https://gardner-webb.edu/>).