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### Gardner-Webb Seniors Share Thoughts About Campus Experience

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**GWU COMMENCEMENT**

# Gardner-Webb Seniors Share Thoughts About Campus Experience

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON MAY 3, 2022



## Students Reflect on What They've Learned and Describe Their Plans for the Future

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—This week, members of the Gardner-Webb University undergraduate Class of 2022 will celebrate the accomplishment of earning their bachelor's degree. As they look to the future, they remember their first days on campus, meeting new friends and settling into their new home.

### Jaasiel Forde



- ▶ Jaasiel Forde has been accepted into graduate programs at Seton Hall and Texas State.

Jaasiel Forde, who will receive her Bachelor of Science in economics and finance, thought back to her initial reaction when she arrived on campus to play Division I women's soccer. "My first-time visiting Gardner-Webb was the day I moved in," she shared at the Senior Pinning Ceremony.

"What I saw online at my home in Trinidad and Tobago, did not prepare me for the culture shock I received when I first entered the Gaffney (S.C.) to Boiling Springs area driving to Gardner-Webb University. My dad wanted me to have the 'American experience' of packing up an SUV and driving to college, and so we did an 8-plus hour drive from Orlando, Fla."

Forde was afraid that she would feel out of place, but living on the second floor in Myers Dorm, there were nine other first-year women's soccer players. They immediately became a little family, she said. She also joined the International Club and met students from all different corners of the world. The Black Student Association created a haven for her, and the fear she entered with evaporated.

She has been accepted into graduate programs at Seton Hall University and Texas State.

## Thomas Manning



- Senior Class President
- Thomas Manning is a member of the N.C. Film Critics Association and the Southeastern Film Critics Association.

Unlike Forde, Thomas Manning knew all about Gardner-Webb, having grown up in Boiling Springs. He is the son of alumni, Noel (who also works at GWU) and Beth Manning, and grandson of Dr. Robert Lamb, founding dean of the Divinity School. "I've been wandering around campus in some way, shape, or form since 1999," Manning related. "As I have continued to grow and learn about life and the world, I've been reminded of how important it is to surround yourself with people you love, and people who love you."

Manning, a communications and English double-major, is senior class president and a member of the N.C. Film Critics Association and the Southeastern Film Critics Association and since 2019 has worked with the Arts and Faith Ecumenical Film Jury. He is the co-host of the weekly television and radio program “Meet Me at the Movies.” He is a regular contributor to the entertainment website, Elements of Madness, writing reviews and conducting interviews with various filmmakers from diverse career backgrounds.

Manning has also ventured into filmmaking, working as executive producer and first assistant director on the feature-length documentary “The Dancin’ Bulldogs: A 16 Seed’s Journey to the NCAA Tournament” (2020). This multi award-winning doc tells the story of the 2018-2019 Gardner-Webb Men’s Basketball team, the first men’s basketball team in school history to reach the NCAA Tournament. Manning has also worked for five years with the Gardner-Webb sports information department on the video production team for athletic broadcasts and webcasts.

## Sarah Goode



- ▲ Sara Goode has an internship with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Charlotte, N.C. Photo courtesy of Mary Klein
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The community aspect of life at Gardner-Webb will be missed the most by Sarah Goode, an English major with a creative writing concentration. After graduation, Goode will take part in an internship program with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in Charlotte, N.C., where she will work as a training and systems development intern.

Goode described how she's made friends with people from different departments, and even though some of her friends have graduated, they have stayed in touch. "I have learned the necessity of community," she asserted. "Though I am a rather independent worker, I have learned the value of having mentors and friends to teach me lessons I had never considered, to bring my attention to areas I had overlooked, and to encourage me when I was exhausted or stressed. I was especially shaped by the ministries on campus and the local church I attended. These Christ-centered communities kept my gaze fixed on what was most important."

## Johanna Quezada Salazar

Johanna Quezada Salazar, of Dallas, N.C., is a first-generation student, who is fluent in Spanish and English. She will receive her Bachelor of Science in international business. Reflecting on her four years at Gardner-Webb, she observed how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the Class of 2022. "We definitely did not have not a normal college experience, or I guess defining normal would be not going into a nation-wide lockdown," she stated. "Yes, of course, the unbelievable happened, but we adjusted."



- ▲ Johanna Quezada Salazar is a first-generation student graduating with a degree in international business.

At the highlight of COVID, she was hired to be a resident advisor for the commons. The job developed her leadership skills. She has also been a part of the Student Government Association since her first year. "I was a scared freshman who didn't know many people and figured there wasn't any harm in running for a senator position," she related. "Because of that decision, I have been given so many opportunities as a student representative."

As a member of Phi Beta Lambda, Salazar recently won first place in the business ethics competition at the state leadership conference and will be competing at the National Leadership Conference on June 24-27.

## Kayla Donnell



▲ Kayla Donnell completed four internships during her senior semester.

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Music business major Kayla Donnell of Jamestown, N.C., completed four internships during her final semester. She balanced her hours between the Durham Performing Arts Center, Don Gibson Theatre, Elizabeth Baptist Church and Mark O'Connor Enterprises. "I communicated with all my bosses that I had four internships," she explained. "Each one of them worked with me throughout the whole semester."

She discovered a new appreciation for the marketing field as she promoted Broadway shows through digital content. Donnell said she's nervous and excited about her future. "I've received emails with interview opportunities," she related. "So, it is in God's hands."

## Bryant Potts

Gardner-Webb's smaller campus also appealed to Bryant Potts, of Charlotte, N.C. A communications major, concentrating in video and film, he began researching GWU when the men's basketball team reached the NCAA tournament in 2019. He decided to transfer to a campus where he could develop his skills through various internship opportunities and make new friends.



▲ Bryant Potts shared his portfolio at the Department of Communication, Art and Design Senior Show.

Throughout his time at GWU, Potts has captured video and photos of events on campus. He has also participated in the CrossFit Club and intramural competitions in basketball and soccer. “I signed up in 2019, and since then, have bonded and connected with people in sports,” he said. “My experience at GWU has been enjoyable with the campus being smaller and making it easier to meet others.”

He said his internships have given him hands-on experience and helped him improve how he communicates and connects with people. “The real world is all about knowing people and that is the most important thing that I can take from college,” he affirmed.

Potts hopes to obtain a job at a YMCA or recreation facility to use his skills to promote the organization through video or photography. He also wants to start his own photography business with the ultimate goal of working for a professional sports team.

## Share Your Commencement Photos, Congratulations

The University encourages attendees to use the hashtag “#GWUGrad22” for social media posts including photos, tweets, and Facebook status updates. The commencement ceremony on Friday, May 6, at 7:30 p.m. will be live streamed on [The University Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/) (<https://www.facebook.com/gardnerwebb/>) and [YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGP4wUtKfrvrbjicSFyGnNw). (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCGP4wUtKfrvrbjicSFyGnNw>).

*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.*