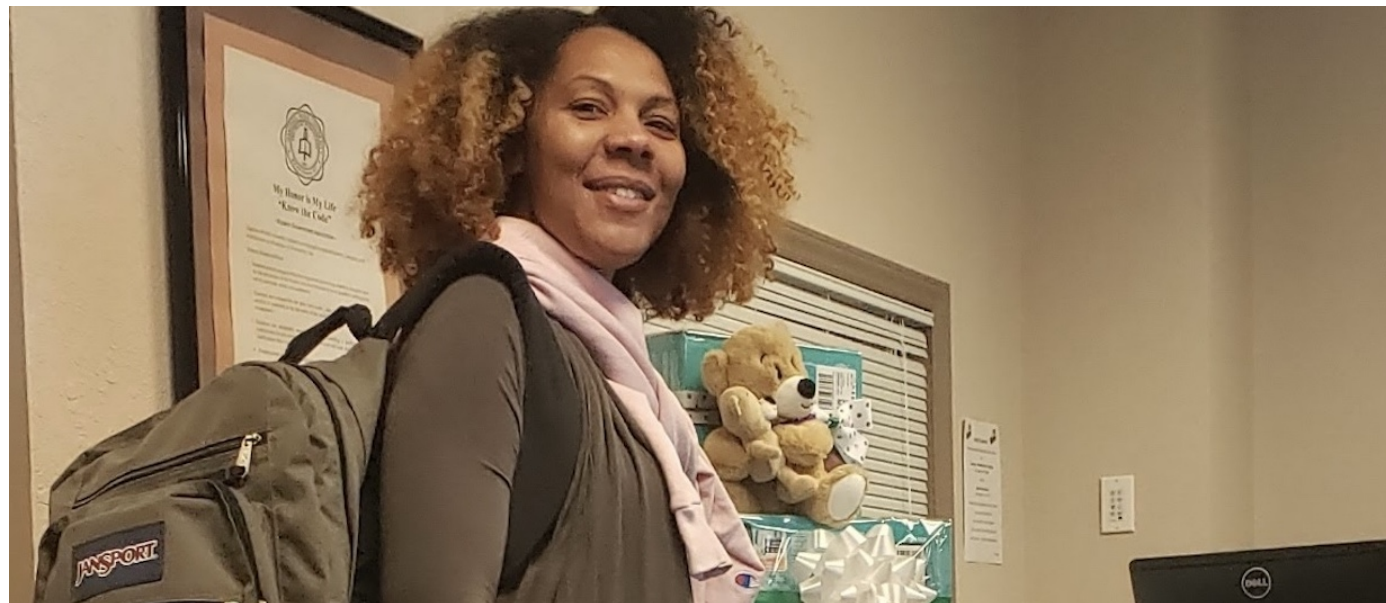


Celebrating Motherhood, Maternity and Matriculation

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▲ Alexandra Arrington's cohort members surprised her with diapers and wipes in one of the class meetings at the Charlotte Campus.

Gardner-Webb Doctoral Student, Alexandra Arrington, '22, Thankful for Family Support While Pursuing a Degree and Managing a Career

Wife, mother, academic and entrepreneur—Alexandra Arrington, of Charlotte, N.C., finds contentment and success in all these roles—and she and her husband are expecting their third child. She is also in her final year in the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership (DEOL) program at Gardner-Webb University.

"I will be finishing in December 2022 with a newborn in tow," she observed. "We don't have to fit into a specific professional box. We can make opportunities that work well for us so that we are not completely sacrificing ourselves or completely sacrificing the needs and wants and desires of our family. I have been really grateful to be able to be in a position to hold all those things at once in a way that facilitates thriving for myself, for my family, for professional pursuits and for academic pursuits."

To accomplish her goals in each area, Arrington relies on the support of her husband and two daughters. "I have a delightful spouse, who is good about helping us to organize our life in ways that are manageable," she emphasized. "I couldn't do it without their moral support and making space and room for me to be able to do things."

She also receives support from her extended family and appreciates the legacy of her paternal great-grandparents. "They underpinned the value of education in our family," she stated. "So it's like even

now, I think about GG Mama (paternal great-grandmother), and what she would say if I was not on top of my game like I should be and that undergirds me and helps me to push forward. My grandfather is really active in my academic pursuits, and we talk about what I'm learning and how I'm doing."

Besides her love for learning, Arrington is also an educator. She's an adjunct at Johnson C. Smith University; works part time at Queens University in teaching digital equity; and as a consultant, she provides diversity, equity and inclusion training for individuals and organizations.



▲ Alexandra Arrington's family are her greatest supporters.

The Gardner-Webb DEOL program appealed to her because of its flexible schedule and content, which aligns with her educational background in interpersonal and organizational communications, African American studies and career development counseling. Shortly after she began in January 2020, her mother and paternal grandmother passed away within a week of each other. In her grief, she wasn't sure if she could keep going, but after talking with the DEOL chair and receiving his encouragement and the support of her classmates, she stayed in the program. "I also like to think that I was making my mom proud by continuing," Arrington asserted.

Her doctoral consultancy/practicum project combines her interests. "I am looking at the impact of black leadership on organizational culture and practices," she explained. "If you look at Fortune 500 companies over the last 50+ years, there have been 19 leaders of color and these are out of hundreds of CEOs, C suite (executive level) and board leaders. There are only five currently and two women out of the five that lead these top multi-billion dollar international companies."

Her research analyzed the opportunities available for leaders who are African American or identify as Black. She also looked at the type of leadership practiced by leaders of color and how it differed from other top-level leaders. She partnered with Hue House (<https://www.itshuehouse.com/>) in Charlotte, a local creative startup marketing and advertising firm led by three young, energetic African Americans. They strive to create opportunities for artists who identify as Black, Latino and other underserved or minoritized groups.

David Butler, one of the Hue House founders, said Arrington was instrumental in giving them the frameworks to think about the culture they wanted to create within the company. “She helped us delineate what traits we saw as part of our strategy for our for-profit business and how those things were aligned or different related to our non-profit organization,” he reflected. “She provided space and facilitated conversation that allowed for us to brand and shape our formal on-boarding processes alongside a code of ethics and conduct as well.”

Moreover, Arrington and her classmates saw firsthand how the concepts they were learning applied even during a global pandemic that nobody saw coming. “One of the prominent takeaways from our program is that leadership is an activity and not a role,” she assessed. “We have come to know and understand and connect with the fact that you can lead from wherever you are in an organizational hierarchy—in your home as a parent, a mother, or at any level, any position.”

They learned that leaders should focus on inspiring and influencing, having integrity and working ethically. “That has revolutionized how I understand, approach and cultivate leadership among folk that I work with and work for,” she affirmed. “I am ever grateful for the many concepts that I have been able to bring out of the academic learning and the book reading and apply to practice. It’s been an exciting journey.”

Learn more about the DEOL program.

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.

