

ACADEMICS

GWU Alumni and Professor Share Byline for Research Published in Scholarly Volume

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON MAY 17, 2023



Dr. Jennifer Buckner Utilizes Innovative Project to Study Language

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—A common goal shared by the faculty at Gardner-Webb University is to offer opportunities for undergraduate research. Students learn how to conduct an intensive study through initiatives such as Life of the Scholar (<https://gardner-webb.edu/news/students-present-research-in-annual-event/>), a committee established in 1977 to promote individual scholarship, and the Undergraduate Summer Research Scholars (<https://gardner-webb.edu/academics/enrichment-programs/summer-research-scholars/>) program, which provides grants for research.

Additionally, some faculty members utilize research as a hands-on approach to learning. This was the case in the fall of 2019 when Dr. Jennifer Buckner asked her students to identify and study language in a discourse community—a group of people united by the way they communicate. This project for ENGL 363: Grammar and Style goes beyond traditional classroom assignments. The students shared their experience and nine of them—now GWU alumni—are published authors.



▲ Dr. Jennifer Buckner

The alumni are Benjamin Flournoy (employed at GWU and a May 2023 graduate of the GWU English master's program), Katie Furr, Sarah Johnson, Katie Lewis, Angela Meade, Hannah Ray, Garrett Simpson, Kate Vriesema, and Ally Ward. They wrote Chapter 17 (<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/soundwriting/chapter17.pdf>) in the volume, Amplifying Soundwriting Pedagogies: Integrating Sound into Rhetoric and Writing (<https://wac.colostate.edu/books/practice/soundwriting/>).



▲ Benjamin Flournoy was one of the students who helped author the scholarly article. He received his Master of Arts in English in May 2023.

If you're wondering what soundwriting is, that's exactly how the students felt when Buckner introduced the unconventional project, which collects data from interviews and the community's written texts and presents it in an audio format. In a recording that accompanies the chapter, the students talk about almost dropping the course. However, with Buckner's guidance and encouragement, they stayed and finished their projects.

Soundwriting is composing with sound. "Putting together a piece that will be listened to rather than read," explained Buckner, associate dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and professor of English. The process combines storytelling, research and writing with packaged audio recordings that include interviews, natural sound effects and interactive dialogue. Listen to the group reflection on the experience [here](https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/soundwriting/media/17/reflection.mp3) (<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/books/soundwriting/media/17/reflection.mp3>).

Two of the alumni recently shared how the project has influenced their work since earning their bachelor's degrees. Flournoy remembered that when Buckner assigned the soundwriting project, the process was intimidating because of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training it required. "Dr. Buckner was incredibly supportive and worked with us individually to make sure that we were obeying ethic guidelines and confidentiality of information," he affirmed. "Her guidance gave me the confidence I needed to step into the world of independent research."



▲ Hannah Ray said the research experience in Dr. Jennifer Bucker's class helps her approach her job with confidence

Not only did that experience help when he was working on his Master of Arts in English, the project sharpened his perspective on the different ways people use language. "I noticed that if you begin to ask why we refer to things in certain ways, you can learn a lot about your own community's ideas, biases,

and even agendas,” he offered. “The experience has helped tremendously as I’ve continued my academic career.”

Ray said because she had completed the project, she was more confident in her job. As the creative director for “High Point Discovered,” she communicates the stories of High Point, N.C., through online blogs, social media, a print magazine, podcast and other media. “I spend most of my days interviewing subjects, adapting to different discourse communities, working towards being an active listener, synthesizing a wide variety of information, and directing my team to produce multi-modal deliverables to communicate and connect across discourse communities,” she assessed. “In a way, we have even developed our own discourse community at ‘High Point Discovered’ for how we talk about our city.”

In addition, Ray expressed her thanks to Buckner for the undergraduate research experience. “Having the opportunity to undertake a project of this scope with IRB approval and publication potential is so gratifying,” she observed. “I am so thankful we were able to contribute to the larger academic conversation.”

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina’s recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to nine colleges and schools, 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/>).