

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

3-15-2017

Research Experiences at GWU Helped Alum Jumpstart Career as Biologist

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Research Experiences at GWU Helped Alum Jumpstart Career as Biologist

webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/research-experiences-at-gwu-helped-alum-jumpstart-career-as-biologist/

Office of University
Communications

March 15, 2017

Benjamin Humphrey '15 Studies Ways to Protect Freshwater Mussels

Before graduating from Gardner-Webb University, Benjamin Humphrey '15 was hired on the spot during an interview with the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (WVDNR). After starting the job, he asked his supervisor why she knew he was the right choice. "Her response was, 'When I asked you about the research you conducted, you were able to clearly explain it on the spot without hesitation. You sounded excited to talk about it,'" Humphrey recalled.




Photo courtesy of
Rebecca Hutton

Although the job was temporary, it opened a door and provided experience for Humphrey's current job as a malacologist with Research, Environmental, Industrial Consultants Inc. (REIC) in Beckley, W.Va. A malacologist studies mollusks, which are invertebrates like snails and mussels. At Gardner-Webb, Humphrey studied aquatic snails in the Broad River and discovered that one species of snail, *Elimia*, had different shapes of shells. "Working with Dr. David Campbell at GWU on my independent research equipped me with the tools, skills, and experience I needed," Humphrey assessed. "He was instrumental in jumpstarting my career, and I will always be grateful."

Humphrey also appreciated the influence of other professors in the Department of Natural Sciences. "The greatest value of my GWU experience was the small class size that allowed me to connect with the faculty in ways you cannot at a large university," he reflected. "Dr. David Judge's invertebrate zoology class introduced me to this fantastic field of study. Dr. Stefka Eddins' environmental chemistry class prepared me to work in the environmental consulting business. Dr. Joseph Oyugi's ecology, vertebrate zoology, and conservation biology classes were fundamental in preparing me for the future. I still open those textbooks when needed. And Dr. Tom Jones, his botany class was challenging but always exciting."

At REIC, he conducts freshwater mussel surveys to determine the well-being of these creatures that filter water. According to



Benjamin Humphrey '15 in scuba gear

REIC literature, 38 of North America's 300 species of mussels are now extinct with another 77 considered critically impaired, making mussels the most imperiled group of animals in the country. "I wanted to work as a biologist to protect, preserve, and conserve the rich

array of biodiversity of North America,” Humphrey shared. “In five years, I would like to be working as a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.”