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GWU Student Relates Crafting Pottery to Discipleship Truths

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Office of University
Communications

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Alex Stewart ('17) Discovers and Refines His Natural Skills with Clay

By Bryton Mitchell, ('17) GWU Intern for Communications

Alex Stewart ('17) of Gastonia, N.C., decided to attend Gardner-Webb University to pursue an education in discipleship. Then, his sophomore year he met a student who introduced him to the art of pottery. "I made a friend named Devan Vandebark. He made some of the most beautiful mugs—perfectly poised and unique in character," he explained. "I realized then that handmade crafts are honest, personal forms—the products of divinely-endowed, creative minds at work. This simple beauty of life grasped my interest deeply, so I began to contribute to this tradition of beauty by learning the craft."

Stewart continued to major in discipleship and believes his studies will help him minister in less formal, everyday scenarios to the people he meets. He has learned that his two interests have a common theme. "As pottery is a patient activity, so is discipleship. As pottery is an art of gentleness, so is discipleship," he observed. "With gentle hands and the most positive of attitudes, you try to help the clay into a beautiful form. This is just like discipleship in which one person gently and lovingly attempts to help the other become what they were meant to be."

Due to Stewart's positive attitude and natural skill with clay, he has received support from Doug Knotts, chair of the Department of Visual Arts. Knotts worked with Stewart to create a specific art minor with an emphasis in ceramics. "Professor Knotts has equipped me with the technical skills I need to make great pottery that I am proud of and that is of commercial quality," Stewart assessed. Through Professor Knott's connections, Stewart has also studied with two famous potters in the Southeast, Mark Hewitt and Ben Owen III. "These have been incredible experiences and have matured my understanding of the pottery tradition and technical aspects of making," Stewart affirmed.

Stewart has also progressed his knowledge of the arts even further since declaring his minor. He was a part of the GWU study abroad trip to Florence, Italy, where students learned art history and viewed famous works of art. Along with that, Stewart is working on building his own kiln for his independent study class. He will construct a wood fired Anagama kiln (hole kiln), which is a type of kiln that has been developing in Japan for

hundreds of years. This style of kiln is known to be extremely efficient and produce beautiful pottery. “Japanese pottery is considered some of the finest in the world and has a lengthy tradition of excellence,” expressed Stewart.

Once Stewart graduates, he will work at his own pottery studio in Gastonia. “My studio is a renovated space that was a gift from my parents,” he said. “While I’m here at GWU full time, I work in the school’s studio and use the space in Gastonia as more of a gallery.”