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Gardner-Webb Honor Society Students Excel at National Convention

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Office of University Communications

April 30, 2014

Written by Alyssa Gutierrez, Communications Intern

Alpha Chi Students Win Collaborative Project, Individual Awards

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — Gardner-Webb University students have long prided themselves on their academic fitness. Recently, members of the Alpha Chi Honor Society flexed those muscles at the Alpha Chi 2014 National Convention held in St. Louis, Mo. For the first time in Alpha Chi's 92-year history, the organization offered a \$5,000 prize for the best collaborative, interdisciplinary project on the assigned topic of "The Future of Water." The Gardner-Webb team took first place.

The five-member GWU team featured individuals each focusing on different disciplines. Team members prepared a scholarly paper, poster and presentation titled, "Water, Economics, Ethics and Fracking: A Cost/Benefit Analysis of Hydraulic Fracturing." Junior Josh Johnson (environmental chemistry), sophomore Brooke Rampy (biology), senior Kristina Grayson (chemistry), sophomore Kevin Mills (economics) and junior Carson Shoupe (philosophy) all concentrated on their specific fields and worked together for five months on the project.

Professors from the Godbold School of Business, Department of Natural Sciences and Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy, all helped the students as mentors in their specific fields. Dr. June Hobbs, a GWU professor of English and Alpha Chi sponsor, served as the advisor for the group and helped in editing the final assembled paper and overall project.

The group addressed the impacts of hydraulic fracturing, a way to extract natural gas from water sources. Looking at the issue as a cost/benefit analysis, the students decided to see if the potential economic benefit was greater than the damage done to water sources.

"This is currently a hot topic in the U.S. due to the large reservoirs of natural gas trapped in shale formations," said Johnson, who served as the team leader. "Currently, hydraulic fracturing is the most efficient way to extract these gas deposits. Naturally we thought this would be a great topic to investigate."

Although most GWU members were initially hesitant to participate in a collaborative group project, the team bonded and overcame the stigma of just one person doing all the work.

“This project was different because of the quality of each of the students involved. Every one of us did our part, which created a constructive and productive atmosphere within the group,” said Johnson. “We all really trusted and cared for each other by the end. Our teamwork culminated in a great product, new friends, and a good little prize to boot.”

The group was overcome with emotion once Gardner-Webb was announced as the winner. Since Johnson was the group leader he had to compose himself quickly and deliver a short speech about all the work the group did. “I was happy and relieved all in one exasperated breath,” he added. “All of my words were fighting through the emotional intensity of the moment. All of the work put in to the project reached its pinnacle the moment ‘Gardner-Webb University’ was announced as the winner.”

Group members are still coming to terms with the impact they left at the convention. “The experience was a little surreal. I had to convince myself that I deserved to be there, but I quickly found out that GWU has prepared us to be critical thinkers,” said Grayson. “At the conference, if questions were asked after presentations, it was usually our group. I felt like we competed very well and were the most prepared group as a whole.”

In addition to the group project, several other GWU Alpha Chi members also made a name for themselves and their work at the national convention. With mentoring help from Dr. David Yelton, Senior Kate Oliphant won a graduate school fellowship for her paper titled, “Music in the Depths of Hell: An Outlet for Emotions, Entertainment, and Torture in Nazi Germany.” Senior Rachael Bradley, who was mentored by Dr. Kent Blevins, won a national Benedict fellowship for her paper, “Is Satan Really Evil?: Exploring the Character of Satan in the Old Testament and Synoptic Gospels in Comparison to a Few Modern Interpretations.”

Senior Michelle Cooper, who was mentored by Dr. Heather Hudson and is the chapter president of Alpha Chi at GWU, won the Exercise Science/Nutrition prize for her research on, “Wolff-Parkinson-White Syndrome in Two Division I College Athletes.”

Alpha Chi, which was founded in 1922, is a national college honor society that admits students from all academic disciplines. Membership is limited to the top 10 percent of an institution’s juniors, seniors and graduate students. Invitation to membership comes only through an institutional chapter. Some 300 chapters, located in almost every state and in Puerto Rico, induct more than 12,000 members annually.

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 specialized major and minor programs, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.