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Deaf-Blind Student Reflects on His Gardner-Webb Experience

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Deaf-blind student reflects on his Gardner-Webb experience

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Photo by: Jennifer Ortiz

By: Jennifer Ortiz

SIDEBAR

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Within the Gardner-Webb community, one can find many outstanding students that take advantage of the opportunities before them and dare to reach higher. Patrick Vellia has been one of these exemplary students since spring of 2012, and he will leave his mark when he graduates this December.

As an infant, Vellia was diagnosed with vision loss and was later diagnosed with hearing loss at the age of four. As the youngest of five children, he is the only one in his family who has vision or hearing loss. His family communicates with him through finger-spelling—meaning that they spell out words on the palm of his hand using their fingers.

Fortunately for Vellia, Gardner-Webb's Noel Program accommodates students with disabilities. He said the Noel Program has equipped him with what he needs to succeed as a student.

"I know it's one of the best in the state, so I've heard. Here, they're pretty good with interpreting services. Tech services doesn't always match the Noel Program," joked Vellia in reference to the Internet around campus.

Vellia continued to say that he has three full time interpreters to help him communicate with professors in and out of the classroom. He said that Gardner-Webb has its own brail printer, which makes it easier for him to access his textbooks.

Despite the communication barriers he has with many of his peers, Patrick Vellia has made many connections with students of different disciplines. "I can connect with all students that know ASL, not just those in the major. Finger-spelling is enough for me, since that's all my family can do," he explained.

He elaborated on a special connection he made with Joe Macgregor, a member of the men's swim team here at Gardner-Webb, explaining that Macgregor has helped him get back in shape through swimming.

"Joe came by last year when he could, and he gave me tips to improve. This year he trains me on Thursday nights," said Vellia.

With the help of Macgregor, Patrick has managed to improve his stamina. He's now able to swim 1000 yards in less than 45 minutes.

He says he also tries to stay in shape by cycling on a tandem bike and running. Vellia will participate in the Color Run this Saturday, September 4.

In a couple of months Vellia will make his way to New York City for a service project with a group of students from Gardner-Webb. There, he will participate in the Terry Fox Run, a race and fundraising event for cancer research.

Patrick Vellia involves himself with the Gardner-Webb community as much as he can. Last year he played a role in the production of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*, and he went on a mission trip to Honduras as well. He has also been an active member of Joyful Hands.

Vellia has made the most of his Gardner-Webb experience. He says that he will miss his Gardner-Webb family and the friendly atmosphere come graduation.

"I don't have anything concrete set up other than my plans for a triathlon. I want to start working in January, but I don't have a job lined up yet. I want to start working with the National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program," said Vellia about his plans after graduation.



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1 COMMENT



Richard Francois

NOVEMBER 11, 2014 AT 5:39 PM

Wow! That is amazing that a deaf and blind person can learn and if a person with those disabilities can learn anyone can learn.

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