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Admissions counselor brings new take on scholarship interviews



Brooke Fortner and Collin Helms, admission counselors, prepare for the new interview process for Ignite Excellence. Photo by: Elizabeth Banfield

By: Elizabeth Banfield

“Funding for academic opportunities for higher education is one of the most important things when looking at a college,” said Collin Helms, Gardner-Webb admission counselor, as he discussed the importance of the Ignite Excellence Scholarship for prospective students and recruiting on campus.

Ignite Excellence is the most competitive academic scholarship a student can receive when coming to Gardner-Webb. This year, on Feb. 4, 5, 11 and 12, the University will welcome 220 students to campus to interview for this scholarship opportunity. The students are competing for one full tuition room and board, four full tuition and 50 \$3,000 honors scholarships. For those students who do not win full awards, there will be a \$2,000 participation scholarship.

While these academic scholarships have existed for years, formerly known as the University Fellows Scholarship, this year the interview days will look very different than years past. Helms has seen this scholarship from every

aspect, starting from when he was a perspective student going through the interviews himself, to being a student worker at the event and now as a full time admissions counselor heading up this year's event.

He explains that in the past, interview days have consisted of either a 15 or 30 minute individual interview, and that was all. "Moving forward this year – after reevaluating how can you gage a student and really feel like you know that that student deserves to be an Ignite Excellence scholar – [we thought] perhaps we should look at spending a little more than 30 minutes with that student, and really learn a little more," said Collin. "We are also looking for things like their leadership ability, how are they going to interact on campus and fit [in]."

The new format will include a 15 minute individual interview, as well as a group interview and a critical thinking analysis. "I think they will learn so much more about Gardner-Webb as a result of the new interview," said Helms.

Helms and Brooke Fortner, another Gardner-Webb admissions counselor, have been heading up the preparations for the students to arrive for their interviews. While they are the driving force, they admit that they couldn't have done it on their own.

"Truly it's been an army for the Ignite Excellence interview process this year, and we are just so excited to have everyone backing us up," said Fortner. "It pulls the whole campus together." Helms added that they have "literally used every resource on campus."

"I'm just excited to see everyone's hard work and everyone's collaboration come together for these next four days," said Fortner. She also said that she is excited to put faces to the names of these potential students after reading their applications. "I feel like we already know these students so much."



Brooke Fortner (left) and Collin Helms (right) prepare for the Ignite Excellence Scholarship interviews. Photo by: Elizabeth Banfield

The interviews will be held in the Tucker Student Center and is marked by well-dressed, nervously excited high school seniors waiting for their interviews to start. These scholarship days are where many current students can trace their Gardner-Webb story back to, and where these new students may start their own college chapter.