

Fall 2017

\$9.00

# WINGATE

## Tomorrow



16

## Finding her passion; changing her world



**GLOBAL IMPACT**  
This fall, the University is hosting 30 new international students from 17 different countries. That makes 141 total international students with F1 visas studying at Wingate. Our international students represent 45 countries from around the globe.

**CATALYST**

"She truly is Wonder Woman. I am constantly amazed at how she manages to be a full-time student, work in the library and be an RA, while also doing selfless things for others. She lives out faith, knowledge and service every single minute of every single day."

Courtney Bailey's nomination of her classmate Leyli Garryyeva for the University's Unsung Hero award may sound like hyperbole, except for the fact that one faculty member after the next sang Garryyeva's praises at the spring Honors and Awards Celebration.

A math major with minors in economics and finance who is headed to William and Mary to study computer science and public policy, Garryyeva won the senior award in mathematics and the Jerry and Alice Surratt Award, presented annually to the graduating senior who has made the most significant contributions in the area of international education through scholarship and service. She was recognized as a member of the University's Honors Program and a member of Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges.

She started the university's successful Model United Nations Club and was commended for her research on hyperbolic geometry and on the progress in human rights as a result of CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women).

Even without the accolades, it's hard to disagree with Bailey's assessment of Garryyeva: "She's changed Wingate over the past four years."

Softspoken and unassuming, Garryyeva would rather focus on how Wingate has changed her, a process that she says couldn't have happened without the connections she made with her professors.

"You have these small everyday conversations that lead to big decisions," Garryyeva said. "You ask for advice, they give it to you, and you have to decide how to apply it."

She says she found support at every turn. "I'm really thankful for all the different

offices at this school," Garryyeva says. "I was able to walk into each office, and if I asked for advice or help, I would always get some sort of help. That was very important for me, being away from home by myself."

A native of Turkmenistan, Garryyeva finished high school at age 15 and completed a two-year degree in economics and finance. She worked as an accountant in a bank for six years before taking advantage of an international program called Prep4Success that opened the door for her to study in the United States.

### Interacting with others

Curious and versatile by nature, Garryyeva took the advice of her SAT prep coach to major in math rather than business, with the idea that she could then study a range of topics, from economics to engineering. The broad approach to education also helped lead her to Wingate.

"One of the reasons why I chose a smaller school was that I would be able to interact with people from different fields," she says.

That she did. Working as a resident assistant pushed her to meet people she would not have otherwise encountered, as did her job at the Ethel K. Smith Library. Her freshman Gateway class and her English 110 and GPS 120 courses fed her interest in global issues and led her to push for a Model U.N. Club. With the help of assistant professor Jacob Wobig, the organization was underway by the fall of her sophomore year.

"We went to our first conference, and we were learning as we were going," she says.

"There were just four of us, but people were surprised that it was our first time. They said we were doing amazing, and that gave us confidence."

Whether the group was tackling issues such as Ebola and water sanitation from the perspective of Switzerland or studying Mongolia's history and its role in the Korean peninsula, Garryyeva says Model U.N. was an incredible learning experience.

"You're learning about the country, the

problem, how to negotiate, about bringing an idea and implementing it," she says. "I found myself coming up with some ideas in a conversation with other people that I had not thought of before hand."

Her enthusiasm spread.

"She gave students like me the amazing opportunity to learn more about international relations, foreign affairs and world problems – not to mention the added bonus of going to New York City and sitting in the U.N. headquarters," Bailey says.

She says that over the past four years, Wingate's campus has had more political dialogues and lyciums on difficult topics – and that Garryyeva played a big role in engaging other students in global issues.

"Even though Leyli isn't the only person that brought about these changes, she was certainly a huge force behind them," Bailey says. "She sparked a passion for changing the world on our campus. So many students care now. They're engaged."

Again, Garryyeva credits "amazing faculty that are supportive and understanding" with helping her excel. She says working alongside Wobig to analyze CEDAW data was eye-opening and inspiring.

"It was very rigorous, but I learned so much about statistics," she says. "He took his time to explain the things I didn't understand and he introduced me to upper-level statistics, which made me realize there is so much more to learn."

Garryyeva says majoring in math at Wingate was the perfect choice for her.

"I absolutely enjoyed it," she says. "I realized it was exactly what I wanted to do. It was hard at times, especially the proof-based classes, but at the end of the day, when you realize you are doing something you love, you just keep pushing."

"Wingate really gave me my passion by helping me learn about myself and what I want my future to look like."

After her three years at William and Mary, Garryyeva plans to pursue her doctorate and wants to use her math background and interest in public policy to advocate for human rights.

Bailey has no doubt that Garryyeva will change the world, and will do so through her service to others.

"I don't think there's a single person on this campus who doesn't know Leyli," Bailey says. "She always greets everyone with warm hugs and smiles, she remembers everyone's names and asks about their families, and she's always there to lend a helping hand whenever anyone needs it."

"If you need homework help, she'll be there. If you need a shoulder to cry on or someone to vent to, she'll be there. Her thirst for knowledge has enriched both her life and the lives of those around her. We're all better students, teachers and global citizens because of knowing her."

—Luanne Williams