

## **Georgia Williams: Faithfully Preparing to Protect & Serve**

### ***HSEM Senior Honors Father in Pursuing Her Dreams***

When she arrived on campus as a sophomore, Georgia Williams hadn't settled on an area of study and was unsure about her future career path. When she learned about Concordia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM) program she felt a quick familiarity and wanted to know more.

"When I saw that they had a major in Homeland Security and Emergency Management, I was instantly interested," said Georgia adding, "The courses sounded so interesting and I was intrigued by the simulation lab. Concordia has amazing resources for this program. Once I started reading about the major, I couldn't stop."

Georgia's father had been involved in law enforcement in her hometown of Ashland, Oregon for more than 20 years. "The law enforcement family has been the family I've known and loved my entire life," said Georgia. "I began to realize that maybe the world I've grown up in is the field I want to study and work in."

### **Holding Court Coast to Coast**

Before she began pursuing the HSEM major—with a minor in Spanish—before she called Concordia home, Georgia's collegiate experience began on the other side of the country in New York City. She spent her freshman year playing for Columbia University's basketball team, going to SoHo for coffee, and shopping and eating in the shadow of the Empire State Building. "That place is incredible, it's like no matter where you are, the Empire State Building feels a block away," said Georgia. "You can always see it."

While Georgia loved her time in New York, she wanted to be closer to home but wasn't ready to walk away from her sports career. That's not surprising considering her athletic achievements. In high school, Georgia was a four-year letter winner in basketball and was a McDonald's All-American nominee. She also lettered in softball, cross country, volleyball, and track.

Coach Sean Kelly, head women's basketball coach at Concordia, had recruited Georgia when she was in high school and reached out to her again after hearing she was looking to transfer to be closer to family and friends. "The next day I committed to transfer to Concordia and play basketball here," explained Georgia.

### **Wickedly Prepared**

A crucial component to the HSEM program is to immerse students in real-world situations where they can put their analytic and critical thinking skills into action with the goal of yielding innovative solutions to what the department calls "wicked problems." Precisely for the fact that there are no easy answers to these problems, HSEM students gain invaluable experience from which they produce a significant portfolio piece beneficial in seeking employment after graduation.

Bandon Dunes is situated along the Oregon coastline which Georgia says makes it "...vulnerable to multiple threats." When asked which threat potentially rose to be a "wicked" problem, Georgia said, "We are expecting an earthquake/tsunami of 9.0 or greater in the near future along

the Cascadia Subduction Zone. This is the obvious catastrophic threat to the Resort.”

Aware of the threats they face, Georgia said Bandon Dunes, “...strives to create the safest possible resort for their employees, caddies, guests, and even the surrounding community.” Their awareness propelled them to update and implement a new emergency plan and Georgia worked with them to develop other potential solutions to their challenges so that they can be as prepared as possible.

Georgia, who is planning to start her career in government or law enforcement in Portland with her eye on one day working for the FBI, is grateful for the experience she had with Bandon Dunes. “This project has helped me learn so much all the way from developing an active emergency plan, to maintaining professional and consistent relationships, to national emergency efforts and resources,” she said.

An advocate for the role Concordia’s HSEM students can play in the community Georgia said she hopes the project she worked on will “spark similar opportunities for future students in the program.” “The HSEM program is great, and I hope businesses and agencies use these students as resources for them.” Georgia said her partnership with Bandon Dunes was “amazing” and that the project she worked on has better prepared her for starting a career.

### **A Driving Faith**

During the last year Georgia was confronted with the tragic loss of her father who passed away in the line of duty. She said losing him revealed the valued role of faith in her life and motivated her even more to fulfill her career aspirations.

“Concordia has amazing religious resources. Pastor Bo [Reverend Wes “Bo” Baumeister, Concordia’s Director of Campus Ministries] is amazing and really helped me through that time in my life,” said Georgia. “It has helped me realize what I am here to do and given me the strength to complete my degree and goals in the face of adversity.”

As a soon-to-be graduate, Georgia said if she had to describe her time as a Concordia Cavalier in one word it would be “rewarding.” “I have never felt more destined to do, study and succeed in something in my entire life,” said Georgia of the impact of her father’s death. “With help from my amazing professors, I have learned so much and I’m glad I can do something that would make my father proud.”

To learn more about Concordia University’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management program, visit <https://www.cu-portland.edu/academics/colleges/school-management/homeland-security-and-emergency-management>