While some fresh LaGrange College grads welcome the chance to leave the books behind and move onto the career fast track, many others opt for a different path. For them, tackling the challenge of graduate school is the next step.

Meet Kristin Kozar ’05, Alonzo Harris ’04 and Jessica Terrell ’03, three LaGrange College alumni who made the leap and pursued their dreams through grad school. Find out what drives them and why they were willing to take an extra step—or, in some cases, several steps—to chase their dreams.
A HEART FOR HEALING

She slips on a freshly laundered white lab coat, and it is obvious that Kristin Kozar ’05 has found her life’s purpose. “When I put on the jacket, it makes it feel more real,” she says, referring to her dream of becoming a veterinarian.

Just days before, Kozar finished her first year of graduate study at the University of Georgia’s School of Veterinary Medicine. She is part of the class of 2010, 95 students selected from more than 800 applicants to the four-year program.

“We are more like family than classmates,” she explains. “We’ve developed a bond, because we’re here for the same reason. This is one of the most challenging times of our lives.”

Entering the vet school for a tour, she’s incredulous, yet proud, that her class completed 42 academic hours in only two semesters. “Everyone said the first year would be the worst,” she notes. Then, bubbly with anticipation, she says, “It’s such an awesome feeling to know that I’m one year closer to becoming Dr. Kozar.”

In the school’s Small Animal Teaching Hospital, one senses the tension and urgency found in any hospital emergency room. Patients are referred here by their primary veterinarian.

Inside one of the windowed surgical suites, an amazing scene unfolds. Surgeons, residents, interns, junior and senior students and technicians operate on a patient with the precision and care of the professionals found in human hospitals.

“In anatomy class we study bone structure, muscle groups and vital organs by working with preserved animal specimens. Here, the surgery suite is the classroom; we can’t wait to actually apply what we’ve learned to living, breathing patients,” she explains.

Next door is the Large Animal Teaching Hospital. There, Harvey, the resident blood-donor horse, stands ready. Inside a larger room with small holding areas, cows, horses, pigs, sheep, goats, alpacas and llamas await treatment. An enormous horse passes by on his way to radiology.

Though she finds school challenging, Kozar believes her undergraduate studies at LaGrange College prepared her for the pursuit. A biochemistry major, she credits Dr. Sue Duttera, a now-retired professor of chemistry, for creating a solid program of study during Kozar’s first year at LaGrange.

Now studying to be a veterinarian, Kristin Kozar ’05 looks forward to working with living patients, like Wyatt, a two-year-old golden retriever.

“Because of my biology classes with Dr. (Sarah Beth) Mallory, I was able to breeze through the cellular-molecular class at UGA. Also, thanks to Dr. Melvin Hall, I was well prepared for the coursework in biochemistry,” she says.

At LaGrange, Kozar established herself as a willing servant-leader, gifted honor student and faithful volunteer. She received multiple academic scholarships and devoted almost as much effort to local charities as she put toward academics.

Now, UGA reaps the benefits of Kozar’s dedication to serving others. She’s philanthropy chair of Alpha Psi, which organizes events to provide financial support to pet owners who otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford medical care for their animals.

She is secretary for the class of 2010. She’s the freshman representative for the Canine Club, which offers free spay or neuter services to shelter animals. And,

Pausing here with Harvey, Kozar has dedicated her future to caring for animals and educating their owners.
she's secretary of the Christian Veterinary Fellowship, an organization that supports the spiritual growth and the professional development of veterinarians.

Her natural passion for animals is rooted in her childhood. She played with more stuffed animals than dolls, and at a young age took a surprising interest in the well-being of her first pet, a dog named Half Pint. “Our vet, at the time, told my mother that I would make a great vet some day,” she remembers.

“I think the neatest thing I’ve experienced in owning pets and in pursuing veterinary medicine is that God’s love shines through his messengers. Animals constantly love us no matter the circumstances, which is a tremendous lesson for human beings.”

**MUSICAL LEGACY**

Like Kozar, Alonzo Harris ’04 revealed his professional inclination early. Before he could read, he performed with his brothers at the family’s church in Manchester, Ga., and he started playing drums at the age of seven.

By age 13, Harris knew his life’s purpose—to produce and compose music.

A summer job funded his first piece of recording equipment, and a corner of his bedroom became the perfect recording studio.

By 1988, the A-Boyz—Harris and his brothers Antipas, Alexander, Arceland, Andronicus and god brother Antonio—performed regularly at area churches, sharing their incredible sounds and abounding faith in God.

In 2000, they released their first audio CD, the “A-Boyz Project.”

That same year, Harris enrolled at LaGrange College to study creative music technology. He took classes in voice, piano and organ, which were somewhat challenging—because Harris could not read music. He quickly learned the basics and began studying music theory with Lee Johnson, Fuller E. Callaway Associate Professor of Music.

Johnson calls Harris the ideal student. “He was willing to begin where he was,” the professor says. “He was curious, disciplined and gentle of soul.”

The Harris family legacy runs deep at LaGrange. College alumni include brothers Alonzo, Antipas, Alexander and Andronicus, and their parents, James and Carolyn. “We watched our parents work hard. They both completed master’s degrees through the Evening College,” he says. (Youngest brother Arceland is currently enrolled at LaGrange, studying business management and music.)

While at LaGrange, Harris split his time between his academic studies, recording and performing with his brothers.

By 2001, the A-Boyz had transitioned from boys to young men. As they created a whole new genre of music, inspirational, urban soul, they took on a new name—A7.

Wait a minute. A7? Six brothers? Harris explains, “The ‘7’ honors the presence of God as the seventh group member, and, in Hebrew, it represents completion and maturation.

“We believe that we’re called to go into the world and bring the good news. Since ’7’ represents the presence of God, we hope that when people see us perform, they’ll also see God.”

In 2004, after graduating from LaGrange, Harris auditioned and was accepted to the prestigious New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Mass., where he studied contemporary improvisation, earning a Master’s degree while continuing to perform with his brothers.


A7 kicks off an international tour this summer. “Answer the Call,” represents the brothers’ compassion for struggling families, both in the United States and in other nations. “We feel the need to respond to the suffering of the homeless and people in storm-devastated areas like New Orleans,” he says. “It’s about using our voices collectively to encourage, motivate and inspire people.”

Why focus the music and their message in this way? “Because that’s what was ingrained in my soul at LaGrange College. Use your talents and your mind to help others,” he says.

Last year, Harris was offered a faculty position at State University of New York at Oneonta. He believes his teaching style is very much like that of his mentor, Lee Johnson, and his musical philosophy carries the imprint of teacher Ran Blake.

Harris teaches fundamental theory, piano, urban contemporary music (a class he created) and an audio production.
class. He’s also the faculty advisor for the gospel choir.

“I’m teaching what I was taught at LaGrange College and in graduate school,” he says.

What grounds him amid teaching, composing, producing and traveling?

“Faith. What you believe will show up in who you are and what you do—spiritually, socially, emotionally.”

“GIRL PREACHER”

It is difficult to be in the presence of the Rev. Jessica Terrell ’03 for long without sensing faith—and hearing laughter. Her self-effacing, fun-loving, gentle approach captivates everyone—from children to seasoned citizens.

“Laughter is such a joyous feeling,” she beams.

During Wednesday night supper at her church in Covington, Ga., she collects hugs and high-fives, weaves prayer with gratitude, and shares the love of God with each soul she has been called to serve.

Terrell, a religion major, graduated cum laude from LaGrange College. The projects she completed as an undergraduate along with an internship her senior year at Greenville (Ga.) United Methodist Church prepared her for advanced studies.

“I was constantly in the library. At LaGrange, I learned how to execute research, select resources and present my findings,” she says.

She received a full scholarship from Duke Divinity School and finished her Master of Divinity degree (a three-year program) in 2006.

At Duke, her accomplishments were impressive. On a mission trip to Africa, she studied the role of the church with regard to the political, social and religious oppression of the people there. “My objective was to compare what had happened centuries before with what is happening there today, to see what would lead to genocide.”

For her senior project, Terrell co-authored a resource manual about gender and the ministry called Continuous Blessings. She served as co-director of the Divinity School’s Women’s Center, and she was among the first students to receive certification for a concentration in Gender, Theology and Ministry at Duke.

With her graduate degree complete, Terrell initiated the process for receiving full rights and ordination within the United Methodist Church. Simultaneously, she considered several ministry options.

She accepted the opportunity to serve as Associate Minister at First United Methodist Church of Covington, in Covington, Ga. She admits, “I had lots of butterflies, but I remembered that God is in all decisions, and this is what I have been called to do.”

Though the United Methodist Church recently celebrated 50 years of ordaining women, Terrell was amused when church members lovingly dubbed her “GP,” for “Girl Preacher.”

As GP, she provides pastoral counseling, leads Bible study, preaches sermons, prepares liturgy, visits members who are sick, manages the staff and sometimes drives the church van.

Terrell admits her toughest moments come when church members lose loved ones. “There is so much to celebrate about a life, but so much grief over losing that life. We can find hope and comfort in God.”

During a brief visit, the Rev. Terrell gave thoughtful consideration to these questions:

Why do bad things happen to good people?

“Many of our members were greatly affected by the tragedy at Virginia Tech. I tried to help them understand that we live in a still broken world; sin still exists. But sin no longer has the ability to reign over us. God is sovereign.

“That’s why the church is so important. We are the hope in the midst of a troubled world.”

Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?

“Sometimes we have to wait on God; God knows the desires of our heart. Waiting is incredible and incredibly frustrating!” she says, from past experience. “However, in God’s prevenient grace, God’s at work even though we don’t know it.”

As a minister, do you have a stronger relationship with God?

“Our relationship with God is an ever-evolving one. I see God in different ways because I tread in places I haven’t been before.

“God prepares us for the ministry that needs to be done,” she reflects. “We believe in itinerancy, and we go where we’re needed. In the process, God is present.

“God is with us in our daily lives. Our heart is God’s home.”