

Front Page News Story Archive

January 2020



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News Stories Posted Thursday January 2, 2020



Georgia College welcomes new dean of the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business

[College of Business](#) : Thursday January 2, 2020

Dr. Micheal T. Stratton has been appointed to serve as new dean of Georgia College's J. Whitney Bunting College of Business, effective July 1, 2020.

Stratton is currently a professor of management at the University of North Carolina Asheville. He has served as Unit Head for the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) and chair of the department of management and accountancy since 2014.

"I'm delighted Dr. Stratton will be joining Georgia College as our new dean for the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business," said Georgia College Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Costas Spirou.

"His commitment to student success is impressive," Spirou said. "I know he'll make important contributions to expand undergraduate student research, provide student leadership opportunities and increase faculty scholarship."

Stratton has worked at the University of North Carolina nearly 10 years. He began as

an assistant professor of management, later serving as humanities coordinator for the university's senior capstone course. As leader of one of the largest academic departments at UNC Asheville, Stratton spearheaded a successful AACSB reaccreditation in 2019. He brought renewed emphasis to student experiential learning with a mentoring program, consulting practicum for seniors and new study abroad programming. His work also yielded funding for faculty development and student scholarships.

Stratton is currently president of the Management and Organizational Behavior Teaching Society (mobts.org), which publishes the "Journal of Management Education." He served as chair of UNC Asheville's Faculty Senate and received the university's Asheville Distinguished Service Award in 2017, as well as the Asheville Board of Trustees Resolution for Service Leadership and Shared Governance in 2019.

As an active teacher-scholar, Stratton has published 18 articles and book chapters. He has presented at numerous academic and professional conferences. His work constitutes a cross-disciplinary approach to researching workplace behavior and its effects on stress, work-life balance and emotions, as well as injustice and technology.

"I am deeply honored to serve as Georgia College's next dean of the College of Business," Stratton said. "This is a great opportunity to prepare the next generation of citizen leaders in business and society. Providing a liberal arts education that leverages critical thinking with the essential technical skills needed in a globally-connected and technology-driven world will bring to fruition our shared vision for preeminence."

Stratton received his master's in public administration and Ph.D. in public administration and policy from Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the University at Albany, State University of New York. He has an undergraduate degree in integrated liberal studies from Western New England University.

News Stories Posted Thursday January 9, 2020



Diversity: Stacey Milner is a mother to all students

[Fraternity & Sorority Life](#) : Thursday January 9, 2020

This is part of an on-going series

Stacey Milner has been through many changes in recent years. At Georgia College, she worked as a secretary in the Registrar's Office, recruiter in Admissions, co-director of Fraternity and Sorority Life and director of the Cultural Center. Now, she's back as sole director of Fraternity and Sorority Life.

With the recent death of her husband, and her son attending college in South Carolina, the past year has not been easy. Yet—with an energetic 10-year-old at home and a demanding job—Milner stills finds time, and a doling of motherly wisdom, for every student she meets.

"I think about the conversations I'd want somebody else to have with my kid, if I wasn't there. I want to not only be a good example for my kids but for other people's too. At the end of the day, I want students to know I taught them what it means to value someone else."

“

I think about the conversations I'd want somebody else to have with my kid, if I wasn't there. I want to not only be a good example for my kids but for other people's too. At the end of the day, I want students to know I taught them what it means to value someone else.

- Stacey Milner

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Born and raised in Milledgeville, Milner's always had “very deep ties” to Georgia College. Her mother works in dining services and her aunt did as well. Her husband's mother was a faculty member in the School of Nursing for 30 years. Milner got her undergraduate degree in politics and her master's in instructional technology at Georgia College.

As if she's not busy enough, Milner's also finishing her Ed.D. in student affairs leadership at the University of Georgia.

Growing up, she had a diverse circle of friends. Looking at the world, she was not happy with the “status quo.” She didn't like being stereotyped. Nor did she like the way people fixated on racial identities. She knew she had to do better as a mom and teach her kids differently. Giving them the best meant showing them value in everyone, regardless of what they look like.

“It really is not about the color of their skin,” she said. “It's about the content of their character. All that matters is what values a person has. I could care less what your exterior looks like. I care about your interior.”

And Milner means it. She doesn't leave anybody out. While supporting underrepresented students with one arm, she's got the other arm wrapped around the shoulders of white students. In order for things to progress and get better, she said, “everybody has to be at the table.”

Whether at the Cultural Center or Fraternity and Sorority Life, Milner's student staff members are a diverse “rainbow coalition” of underrepresented and majority students. Her mission is to provide “a sense of belonging” for everyone.

The Cultural Center got so popular under Milner's reign, the little office at Blackbridge Hall became cramped. Students would drag chairs to the open door and sit in the hall to participate.

“It's very wonderful, because that means I did what I set out to do,” Milner said, “which was to provide an environment where they feel comfortable, they feel supported, they feel empowered and they always want to be here.”

“When you have students staring at the walls, trying to figure a way to create more space,” she said, “then I’ve done my job.”

In Fall 2014, Milner became co-director of Fraternity and Sorority Life with Tiffany Bayne. It was a perfect fit for Milner, who’s an enthusiastic member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. She was hired to support African-American students in Greek Life and help revitalize Divine 9 organizations on campus.

After a year, Milner was nominated by Kappa Alpha Order Fraternity as their pick for national advisor of the year. She was flown to Roanoke, Virginia, for the fraternity’s 150th celebration, where they gave Milner “red carpet” treatment.



Stacey Milner with Tiffany Bayne, when they co-directed Fraternity and Sorority Life.

“

I revel in a challenge. I do,” she said. “There’s something about challenging yourself, and I feel Georgia College has prepared me for whatever trajectory I find myself in. Whatever avenue opens up—I feel like I can walk through that door.

- Stacey Milner

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“I revel in a challenge. I do,” she said. “There’s something about challenging yourself, and I feel Georgia College has prepared me for whatever trajectory I find myself in. Whatever avenue opens up—I feel like I can walk through that door.”

“Sometimes it’s nice to bash the stereotype of being a woman of color,” Milner said. “I wasn’t afraid to put myself out there and say, ‘I’m willing.’”

Under Milner’s tutelage, the fraternity restructured its recruitment practices by adding a service project. Members took recruits to a horse farm to clear trails and wipe down stalls. It showed them which recruits were willing to work hard, while reinforcing the value of community service. Those projects were a “game changer” for the fraternity, she said, and allowed members to get to know new recruits better.

While co-director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, Milner also started Tunnel of Oppression at Georgia College. Students chose themes of marginalization and oppression and acted out scenes for audiences. It was held on the third floor of Atkinson Hall. Dark lights, black drops and video made it feel like people were moving

through a tunnel, participating in the action.

One year, performances were about police brutality with a bar altercation and gunshots. Others were about racism, LGBTQ+ harassment, bipolar disorders and date abuse. Students wrote their own scripts and designed stages. There were four actors, four scenes and three nights. Actors performed 64 times, and the results were often emotional. Rawness of scenes required counseling services be available afterwards.

"I've heard students gasp," Milner said. "It's transformational. It's such a small space. It's so intimate, you have no choice but to be affected by it, as if you're living it."

What makes Milner successful and popular is her willingness to step back and let students decide for themselves. Programs at the Cultural Center, therefore, were designed by students. They wanted real-world discussions about sex, gender and politics. One discussion group talked about being LGBTQ+ in a black community. Milner gave students the tools to facilitate discussions, keep them moving and communicate without "heat, animosity and tension."

A new mentor/mentee program, called LIFE, started recently at the Cultural Center. Faculty, staff and upperclassmen befriend new students. Student workers came up with the acronym LIFE (Leaders Igniting the Fundamentals of Excellence). They also decided on four cornerstones for the program: student involvement, selfcare, time management and campus resources.



President Steve Dorman presenting the 2017 Georgia College Inclusive Excellence Award to Milner.

"The program is to help students navigate Georgia College," Milner said. "Studies show if a student is engaged, involved and connected to the institution, they'll feel they belong here."

"And if they have that sense of belonging," she said. "you will see them thrive."

Helping students to thrive is what Milner's all about. College is the first time young

adults figure things out on their own. And that can be scary. Like a good mother, she wants to help them along.

But she also gives them room to spread their wings.

"We talk a lot in my office about you can't have success without failure. Students today are afraid to fail. That's our fault as parents. We've always been there to catch them. And, because we've always been there, they've never fallen and had to get back up on their own," Milner said.

"I believe in the mission of this institution," she added. "Georgia College is a place where everyone can learn to get back up on their own. It allows us the chance to explore."

News Stories Posted Monday January 13, 2020



First-generation student immerses herself in GC's offerings to gain practical experience

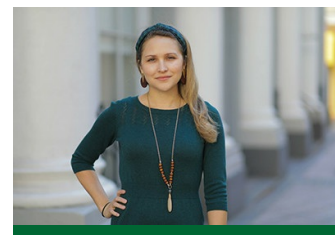
[Alumni](#) : Monday January 13, 2020

Candra Clason Garrett, '12, is ambitious. As a first-generation college student, she took advantage of all that Georgia College had to offer, so she could get the most out of her four-year experience, while managing a 4.0 GPA in her major.

Today, that same initiative is paying off, as she applies what she learned from the classroom and leadership programs to her profession.

As a senior user experience (UX) designer with Launch XD, Garrett thrives in her career. She performs company research and digital audits as well as market/industry benchmarking.

"When I'm in the design phase, I am conceptualizing new design approaches to solve clients' business goals and simultaneously win over key users of the product or



Candra Clason
Garrett, '12

service,” Garrett said. “No matter what phase of the project I am in, I am continuously collaborating with the client and applying my knowledge of human behavior along the way.”

It was the study of human behavior that helped form the cornerstone of her career.

“Through advanced research and methods coursework—the psychology lab—I was able to conduct primary psychological research on my own topics of interest for five semesters,” said Garrett. “This is something most students don’t get to do until graduate school, so I felt privileged to have the opportunity and guidance. I gained so much knowledge and confidence through this coursework.”

The psychology department offered her countless opportunities to grow in leadership, knowledge and practice through the guidance of Dr. H. “Lee” Gillis, chair, Department of Psychological Science.

“My communications class with Dr. Gillis continues to be a fascinating and relevant topic, because it’s an important soft skill in every professional context no matter how the times or technology change,” said Garrett. “The textbook from that course is still on my shelf today.”

Garrett also benefitted from Georgia College’s small class sizes.

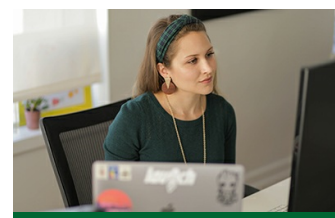
“Dr. Gillis took the time to get to know me and offered me unique opportunities to grow and expand my horizons,” she said. “We continue to stay in touch, and I’m grateful to know him.”

Garrett was also in the Honors program—engaging students with big, enduring ideas central to human thinking and existence including freedom, equality, democracy and others. Her class time was spent discussing each week’s reading or theme.

Candra Clason Garrett at work as a senior user experience (UX) designer.

“Hearing other people’s perspectives and forming one’s own informed opinion is a great start to thinking independently,” she said. “Through open class discussions, I was able to develop and test my thoughts and voice in a safe space. That gave me courage and confidence to do so out in the world.”

Outside of the classroom, Garrett was a student ambassador and a member of the Georgia Education Mentorship (GEM), Leadership Certificate Program (LCP), Psi Chi, Psychology Club, Dean’s Advisory Board, Swimcats and intramural sports.



Candra Clason Garrett at work as a senior user experience (UX) designer.

“In many cases, such as the LCP, GEM and Dean’s Advisory Board, I was encouraged by caring professors who wanted me to have unique opportunities to grow,” she said. “I’m so thankful they pushed me to do more.”

Garrett recalls many of the leadership principles of LCP.

“One in particular still often comes to mind: Effective leaders challenge the process,” she said. “I remind myself of this when my questioning causes some ripples.”

GEM provided her with the opportunity to meet some of the state’s most influential leaders, including her mentor Georgia College Foundation Trustee Alex Gregory, retired president and CEO of YKK Corporation of America in Marietta, Georgia.

“He taught me a lot about kindness and deference being a top priority no matter how far up the ladder you climb,” she said. “Alex Gregory is one of the kindest, most considerate people I’ve ever met. I think of our interactions often.”

“The most meaningful meeting I’ve had was with former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalyn, at the Carter Center,” Garrett said. “I still have the photo that Alex Gregory took of the three of us.”

As a member of the Dean’s Advisory Council, Garrett collaborated with students to discuss and solve matters impacting the College of Arts and Sciences.

“I recall insightful interactions with many professors and staff at Georgia College. I think this is why GC is so special,” she said. “You have close access to really smart people who want to encourage you in your learning and success at school and beyond.”

The concepts Garrett learned at Georgia College have been applied in her profession.

“Understanding people is critical to the success of my designs,” she said. “Being in a variety of programs at GC exposed me to many different people and perspectives, which has served me well in my career. I also gained a lot of awareness and confidence in my skills and abilities through these programs.”

Garrett applies her background in psychology and liberal arts to her profession daily.

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“Five semesters of psychology lab research have taught me how to think critically, craft experiments, interpret sometimes murky data, succinctly communicate and practically apply findings to the real world. I use these approaches regularly in my career.”

- Candra Clason Garrett

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“Five semesters of psychology lab research have taught me how to think critically, craft experiments, interpret sometimes murky data, succinctly communicate and practically apply findings to the real world,” she said. “I use these approaches regularly in my career.”

Now that Garrett has obtained experience in working with leaders at Georgia College and is in a fulfilling career, she addressed Georgia College’s psychology students a few years ago about finding their desired profession. Her advice about the importance of great leadership remains the same.

“Consider the leaders you’ll work for as much as the job,” she said. “Find leaders who are dedicated to growing and challenging you. They will help you find the next ‘right’ job for you and take your career in directions you never thought of before.”



Assistant principal of the year overcame barriers

Alumni : Monday January 13, 2020

Growing up an extreme introvert didn't stop Joy Warren Antone, '97, '00, '02, from following her dreams of becoming an educational leader. She's been in the field 23 years, currently as assistant principal for eighth grade at Samuel M. Inman Middle School. She was named Assistant Principal of the Year with Atlanta Public Schools in October.

"I will say that growing up, I always dreamed of becoming a teacher," she said.

Being an educator came naturally to Antone, who comes from a long line of educators. Her mother, father, grandfather and grandmother were teachers. In addition, one aunt and two uncles were principals. They taught her the value of being an educational leader.

Georgia College played a significant role in helping Antone gain confidence, learn how to collaborate with others and become a leader.

"I sharpened my abilities through dealing with other students in group projects and leadership courses," she said. "My professors helped me acquire confidence and people-building skills."



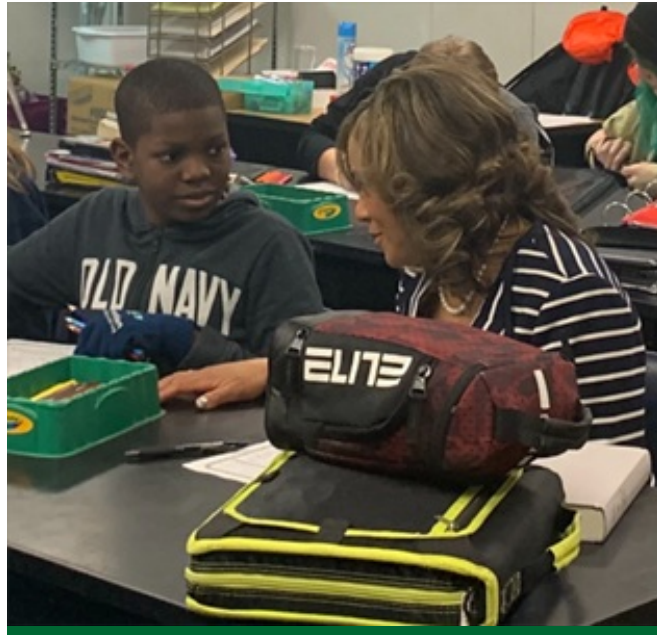
Photo credit: Jarvis Merritt, Jarvis Merritt Photography. Joy Warren Antone, assistant principal,

Every day, Antone puts her leadership skills to the test. She frequently collaborates with principals, district level administrators, teachers, students and community members.

eighth grade, Samuel
M. Inman Middle
School

Antone appreciates how her professors respected students as upcoming educators and leaders and stressed how students could gain respect as professionals.

“It’s all about how you’re viewed in the public eye,” she said. “I remember my professors talked about being professional, even down to how you dress. So, when you walk into the classroom, you should act and dress like a leader. This has carried me through the tough times as a leader, because you will encounter challenges that can break you down. You just need to remain professional and maintain your integrity. It will help you with a lot of thorns as it has for me. I think that that goes a long way.”



Joy Warren Antone works with a student in class.

A recent staff survey indicated her biggest quality was her professionalism, which she attributes to her education.

When Antone attended Georgia College, Dr. Charles Love, a former school principal, taught her what it meant to be placed in challenging situations.

“Dr. Love shared that sometimes you're placed in certain situations where they want you to come in and clean things up,” she said. “He presented how we would get through those types of situations. Just having shared that type of wisdom and knowledge was extremely valuable. So, when I became a teacher, I applied his practices in my classroom.”

During the course of her career, Antone has reached out to seek Love’s advice.

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“I love being able to work with a student and get down to the core of what's really bothering them,” Antone said. “I try to help them remove obstacles or get them help as much as possible. I just love to see those students turn themselves around. I advise them to begin believing in themselves and make better choices.”

When she took the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator—a personality inventory—she scored high in intuitive thinking and goal setting. Antone discovered she’s a collaborative leader. That’s why she seeks input from others, making continual adjustments to ensure her students are successful.

“I’ve always sent out surveys to my staff for feedback on my own performance, so I can better support them,” Antone said. “We’re also looking at best practices by visiting other schools that are performing well like ours.”

In addition, she meets regularly with aspiring leaders in the school to create, activate and review instructional practices and initiatives.

“We review each initiative to determine: where we work, if we need to get started, if we’re moving too slow with it, if we need to do some additional work to get things on track, and then we monitor them and discuss the next steps and success rates,” Antone said. “As a team, we design a plan.”

She cares about her students and keeps each one in mind when evaluating them and teachers.

“We’re making decisions about how we move forward with each student,” Antone said. “I also do a walkthrough of the teachers’ classrooms and provide feedback to teachers for improvement of instructional practices. Then, we arrange conferences so that we can talk about those things they were doing well and opportunities for growth.”

She meets with new teachers to underscore the influence they have on children and the importance of choosing their words carefully.

“What we say and do can make or break a child—they’ll remember that forever, all the way to adulthood,” Antone said.

Her team also teaches social-emotional learning, so students learn how to navigate through problems and get along with other students. This prepares them for life. Student ambassadors pay forward what they’ve learned, as positive guides for others.

Although Antone has many high performing students, there are those who struggle, as well. Proper structures are in place for each student at every level.

“I ask those students who struggle what they plan to do



Joy Warren Antone (center) is honored as Assistant Principal of the Year for Atlanta Public Schools.

in the future and what's blocking them from being successful?" she said. "And, I always tell them, 'It's not about these four walls here. This is about your life.'"

Antone's biggest challenge is when her middle school students struggle with reading and writing. She tries to identify and remove barriers and help students with disciplinary problems.

"I love being able to work with a student and get down to the core of what's really bothering them," Antone said. "I try to help them remove obstacles or get them help as much as possible. I just love to see those students turn themselves around. I advise them to begin believing in themselves and make better choices."

She feels there's always an opportunity to motivate those who don't perform well and to guide those who do move even closer towards their goals.

"My greatest joy is working with students and building that relationship with them," Antone said. "They know when you care and that matters when you strive to push them towards being their best."

News Stories Posted Wednesday January 22, 2020



Under 30: Natalie Sharp

[University Communications](#) : Wednesday January 22, 2020

Name: Natalie Sharp '13

Age: 27

Major at GC: English (literature concentration)

Why did you choose Georgia College?

When I started college, I was 17, so it was important to me to go somewhere that I could define myself without getting lost. GC struck that balance for me, and I really enjoyed my campus visit.

Did you have a favorite professor or class?

Definitely. The two classes that stand out for me most now are hip-hop literature and culture with Dr. Beauty Bragg and America's diverse cultural heritage with Dr. Stephanie McClure.

What is your favorite Georgia College memory?

Once, I wrote a terrible rap over the beat of Childish Gambino's "Freaks and Geeks." (I cannot emphasize enough how bad the rap was.) I don't know if there's still that recording booth on the bottom floor of Norlin Library, but it was really fun to go into the booth and record it with some of my friends. My choice for favorite memory is tied between that and performing at Poetry Jamz at Blackbird Coffee way back in the day, where I would get a white mocha and pretend it wasn't going to keep me up all night even though it definitely would.



Natalie at the Fulbright Eastern Europe-Eurasia Orientation in Lawrence, KS last July

What have you been up to since graduating?

So much! After a few years out of school, I decided to keep the whole poetry thing going and earned an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Colorado Boulder. I lived in Denver during the three years of my program, which put me in contact with the robust poetry community out west and a bunch of really awesome multi-talented artists. I started dancing again a few years ago, which I didn't realize I needed until I was back at it. My favorite recent project I've completed was a text projection installation last winter at the Dairy Arts Center. I never envisioned myself getting to present something so strange and beyond what I would consider to be my primary artistic specializations.



Buildings around sunset in Yerevan, Armenia

You received a Fulbright scholarship with the University of Colorado Boulder. What will you be doing or learning on the trip to Armenia?

While I'm here in Armenia, I teach English at a local library. I work primarily with adult learners (though I have teenagers once a week, and it turns out they're not nearly as terrifying as *My Chemical Romance* made me think they'd be). The classes I teach are free and interdisciplinary—for instance, one of the classes I'll be doing over the next 10 weeks is learning public speaking through the arts. I love this type of work, because I'm enthusiastic about free and accessible (in terms of money/facilities/time) education. Since English skills are considered an asset in many places, it feels like I'm meeting a need. Additionally, I have a lot of creative freedom to design and implement my syllabi, so I can bring in works that showcase modern applications of English and are more engaging for participants.

As for me, I'm currently learning Armenian and Russian and doing my best to be present in this unique experience. My secondary Fulbright project involves investigating methodology to leverage WhatsApp, Viber and similarly ubiquitous chat

apps for online education outside of the traditional university sphere. I'm also participating in the National Geographic-Fulbright Sciencetelling Bootcamp, which helps scholars more successfully transmit their research and findings to the public.

How has your education at Georgia College helped you become who you are today?

I think my time at Georgia College introduced me to professors and mentors who lit the fire under me to be better than I was, peers who showed me what friendships actually look like and many phenomenal trans and non-binary people, women and Black folks who stood unapologetically in their power. A lot of that meaningful contact would have been

impossible for me in my hometown. GC and Milledgeville at large are the sites of my first real interactions with activism and direct action—lessons that I draw from even now. I think I would have been swallowed in a sea of external opinions that drowned out my voice somewhere larger, but the campus was big enough that I met plenty of people, who didn't think like me. Its intimacy forced me to define myself in my own terms. That's really important these days, when it's tempting to make myself smaller, so that I don't inconvenience anyone. I learned to think critically, to speak up and to hold the door open when I can. I'm proud of those values, and I'm proud of and grateful to the people who guided me toward them.

Do you have any future plans once you are finished with your MFA?

I'm done with my MFA (whoo, Class of 2019)! But, I do plan to keep making weird art, being loud about injustice, sweating more than everyone else on the dance floor and working to provide open access to education for as many people as possible.

Follow Natalie Online



Teenagers at the Yerevan American Corner playing a Thanks-giving trivia game with Natalie

Website: staysharpstudio.com | **Twitter:** [@nostagenamenat](https://twitter.com/nostagenamenat) | **Instagram:** [@fulbwriter](https://www.instagram.com/fulbwriter) | **LinkedIn:** [Natalie Sharp](#)

News Stories Posted Monday January 27, 2020



Physics professor wins Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award

[Chemistry, Physics, & Astronomy, Department of](#): Monday January 27, 2020

Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge, assistant professor of physics, was recently named the 2020 recipient of the University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award—bestowed for “a strong commitment to teaching and student success.”

Mahabaduge is the third Georgia College professor in three years to earn this prestigious recognition. Associate Professor of Economics Dr. Christopher Clark received the award in 2019 and Associate Professor of Teacher Education Dr. Betta Vice in 2018.



Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge

“We received many outstanding nomination portfolios this year,” wrote USG Executive Vice Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer Dr. Tristan Denley in the award letter. “When the review committee met to discuss the nominations and finalize their recommendations, they voted unanimously to recommend you as this year’s winner.”

The Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award is one of six annual Teaching in Excellence awards presented by the USG Board of Regents. Mahabaduge will be honored, along with other recipients, at the Scholarship Gala Feb. 21 in Atlanta.

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It’s not only a recognition but a validation of the work I do. Some things I do are different from the approaches a traditional lecturer might take.

- Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge

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“It’s not only a recognition but a validation of the work I do,” Mahabaduge said. “Some things I do are different from the approaches a traditional lecturer might take.”

It’s these unorthodox approaches to teaching that helped him win the award. It all started in 2016, the year Mahabaduge came to Georgia College. A former student, alumnus James Dillon Vogt, approached the new Sri Lankan professor for a favor. Vogt had heard of Mahabaduge’s doctoral research at the University of Toledo in Ohio and post-doctoral research at the University of Colorado’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL).

Mahabaduge’s group set a world record at NREL—one he still holds—for the most efficiency in a solar cell. Vogt asked the young instructor if he’d teach a course on renewable energy outside of class, one-on-one.

Mahabaduge didn’t hesitate. It required extra time and voluntary course overload, while organizing a new research lab. But Mahabaduge knew he could keep up with solar research by teaching Vogt. Word of his generosity spread and, soon, 10 more physics seniors were taking the special-topic course.

“I have given several presentations at Teaching and Learning conferences, where I say ‘Every good love story starts with a ‘yes,’” Mahabaduge said. “My love story with teaching started with saying ‘yes’ to that student.”

The class resulted in Georgia College’s first solar-powered golf cart. That project led to a student-led renewable energy workshop for kids, which became an annual event. For four years, Mahabaduge’s physics students have explained complex physics to elementary school children with fun, hands-on experiments. Next month, they’ll install solar panels at a Baldwin County school.



Alumni Dillon Vogt and Anderson Kendrick driving Georgia College's first solar-powered golf cart.

These activities garnered Mahabaduge some attention. He was chosen for USG's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Fellows program in 2017, and the Governor's Teaching Fellows Program at the University of Georgia in 2019. Dr. Mary Carney, co-director of SoTL, said Mahabaduge was "exceptional among this group" of outstanding faculty from across the state and is "exemplary of the highest level of integrating research and teaching to achieve great student

outcomes."



Baldwin County first and second graders learn about renewable energy from Mahabaduge's physics students.

New courses Mahabaduge developed—in areas like solid state physics, thermodynamics and renewable energy—have put the university's physics curriculum on par with the rest of the nation, said Dr. Kenneth McGill, former chair of chemistry, physics and astronomy.

Mahabaduge praised two important mentors in his life. Dr. Kithsiri Jayananda, his undergraduate advisor at the University of Colombo Sri Lanka, where Mahabaduge got his bachelor's degree in physics, and Dr. Alvin Compaan, a recognized researcher in solar energy, who accepted Mahabaduge in his research group at the University of Toledo, where he got his doctorate.

A Georgia College student once asked Mahabaduge why he doesn't make more money with a job in California's Silicon Valley. The answer is simple: Mahabaduge wants to take the teaching and research knowledge he's been given and give back.

Every year, he helps students win summer REUs (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) at universities nationwide. In December 2019, Mahabaduge took physics senior Bo Cavender to China for a month—exposing him to graduate-level research and equipment not available at Georgia College. In addition, Mahabaduge just got back from visiting the University of Sri Jayawardenapura in Sri Lanka, where he established an exchange program with Georgia College.



Dr. Mahabaduge and senior physics major Bo Cavender at the Great Wall of China in December 2019.

It's gestures like these and personal attention that make Mahabaduge beloved among his students.

Growing up, Mahabaduge learned patience and good teaching from his father, who taught English. Sinhalese is his native language. Most Sri Lankans are afraid at first to learn English. This is similar to non-science majors who take introductory physics. Mahabaduge must address student fears first, before he can teach. His experiences with a new language help him sympathize with students who struggle.

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He has a clear desire to reach out to all students, evident from his almost-stubborn attempts to ensure students have a clear understanding of each concept.

- Recent graduate Aidan Burleson

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One former student, recent graduate Aidan Burleson, wrote in his nomination of Mahabaduge: “He has a clear desire to reach out to all students, evident from his almost-stubborn attempts to ensure students have a clear understanding of each concept.”

More than the award itself, Mahabaduge said he appreciates these reflections from students. He's humbled by the support from Provost Costas Spirou, his department chairs and colleagues. He thanks Graduate Librarian Jeff Dowdy for coming to his

classes and teaching students how to conduct research.

Every step of the way, he sought assistance—from the Office of Grants and Special Projects; the Center for Teaching and Learning; C-bEL (Community-Based Engaged Learning); and MURACE (Mentored Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors). Mahabaduge acquired about \$100,000 from various campus sources to start and fund his research lab.

The best advice he can give other professors is to “knock on every door” and utilize all resources Georgia College has to offer.

“That is the importance of Georgia College, and why I chose to teach at Georgia College, the focus on undergraduate research,” Mahabaduge said. “In physics, every action has a reaction. Others have taught and mentored me. Now it’s my turn to give back and give my students the same experience.”