

# Front Page News Story Archive

February 2020



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# News Stories Posted Thursday February 6, 2020



## Baby's health condition spurs fight for Gracie's Law

[Alumni](#) : Thursday February 6, 2020

Just over a year ago, Gracie Joy Nobles was born with Down Syndrome and a hole in her heart. It was her fight for life that inspired her parents Erin Nobles, '06, '13, and David Nobles, '06, to use their leadership skills to push a House Bill (HB) bearing their daughter's name through state legislation. If this bill becomes a law, it would enable Georgians with disabilities to be placed on the organ transplant list.

After Gracie was born, she developed congestive heart failure and stayed in the hospital for 17 days. During that time, Erin and David endured many sleepless nights and emergency room visits.

At three months of age, she underwent surgery to fix her heart. Gracie recovered and went home.

"It was like living a nightmare," said Erin. "She was so sick and frail during that time in her life."

For about four months, the Warthen, Georgia, couple kept a bag packed in the car—just in case.

“It was a very unstable time in our life,” said David. “You really couldn’t live from day-to-day. It was by hour-to-hour and minute-to-minute, because Gracie could be fine one minute and then overloaded with fluid the next. Then, we’d have to go back to the hospital.”

Erin, a nurse practitioner, had to quit her job to care for Gracie, while David worked as a community supervision and field training officer with the Georgia Department of Community Supervision.



Erin and David Nobles speak to GC nursing students.

The couple began to think about the consequences if Gracie had needed a transplant, she wouldn’t have been able to get one, as she has Down Syndrome because, Georgia law doesn’t allow for disabled residents to be placed on the organ transplant list.

Erin and David researched the situation and discovered Evie’s Law. Enacted in 2019, this law enables Louisiana residents with disabilities to get on the organ transplant list. They contacted Evie’s father for guidance and began the legwork for what would become Gracie’s Law to end organ transplant discrimination among Georgians with disabilities.

In 2019, David contacted State Rep. Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville), who stated he would introduce Gracie’s Law to the Georgia House of Representatives during the 2020 legislative session. The legislation, cosigned by State Rep. Mack Jackson (D-Sandersville), was introduced and assigned as HB 842.

Thrown into the legislative process, Erin and David, quickly realized they could apply the leadership skills they learned at Georgia College to fight for Gracie’s Law.

“Being in nursing at Georgia College and a member of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, you really are trained to be a leader,” Erin said. “It’s expected that you’ll be one when you graduate. That was ingrained in us. Although, I never thought of myself being a leader in this area. When I envisioned leadership, I thought of maybe being a charge nurse. This was totally on another playing field.”

David also never thought he and Erin would be placed in a position to fight for legislation to become a law. But, even though he didn’t realize it as a student,

David's professors helped prepare him for the fight for Gracie's Law.

"We're not legislators," he said. "We didn't come from families or backgrounds that are cultivated in this culture. And, so really, the only exposure we had of this was in our classes at Georgia College."

"

I had professors who provided a bit of leadership exposure in class to show us that this was not out of reach for us," said David. "We learned if something needs to be changed, it's possible to change it."

Although David never saw himself as a leader, he managed to earn a 2010 leadership award at work.

"I just see myself as taking authority over a situation, as it arises, as in Gracie's Law," he said. "You don't always see the purpose of what you're being taught until it manifests later."



(Left to right) State Representatives Mack Johnson (D-Sandersville) and Rick Williams (R-Milledgeville) savor the victory of HB 842, or Gracie's Law, getting passed as a House Bill.

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**"I had professors who provided a bit of leadership exposure in class to show us that this was not out of reach for us. We learned if something needs to be changed, it's possible to change it."**

**- David Nobles**

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On Jan. 29, the Nobles and university doctoral nursing students Angie Childre and Kimberly Griffin attended the Georgia Council for Developmental Disabilities' Advocacy Day at the capitol in Atlanta to advocate for Gracie's Law. The couple told their story to a crowd of about 100 people. Childre and Griffin also helped educate state legislators about the need for the law.

"That was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," said Erin. "We got to meet so many amazing people, who were ordinary citizens like us. And, to be able to see our representatives announce Gracie's Law with such enthusiasm was just phenomenal."

The couple has documented their journey on their Facebook Page, titled "Gracie's Law." They understand how their story might impact others. Their daughter wasn't supposed to live but is alive and well today, because of the great care she received.

The Nobles want to pay it forward and help others with disabilities.

“I just never saw us in a role like this, but the fact that we’re here, I couldn’t be more grateful that this House Bill is getting the attention that it deserves,” said David. “This law could potentially save lives.

On Feb. 3, Erin gave an inspiring talk on campus to Georgia College nursing students.

“My hope for this day is that these young, impressionable college students will have a seed of hope planted into them,” Erin said. “because one thing David and I learned is—you can go from hearing someone else’s story to living your own story in a matter of a blink.”

“David and I have heard other people’s stories, and you always say, ‘Glad it’s them and not me,’” she said. “But in a nanosecond, it can be you.”

Currently, HB 842 is moving through various committees with legislative testimonies from the House and Senate. The couple hopes Gracie’s Law continues to move smoothly through this process and that it will be on Gov. Kemp's desk for him to sign soon.

When the couple looks back on the experience, they’re just thrilled with how healthy Gracie has become and what her law represents.

“She’s taught us so much,” David said. “We’ve seen miracle after miracle. And now, to go through all of that we’re standing in the House Chamber of the Capitol and being recognized with the whole house with our daughter who was not supposed to live—it’s just been a whirlwind of emotion. It’s been an incredible journey.”

# News Stories Posted Friday February 7, 2020



## The many talents of James Schiffman: Getting today's journalism students ready for tomorrow's newsroom

[Communication, Department of](#) : Friday February 7, 2020

Dr. James Schiffman's life is a fascinating tale of traveling and taking chances—a journey that ultimately took him to Asia and remote U.S. regions, then to jobs at the Wall Street Journal and CNN.

With Georgia College's multi-media, digital-first, collaborative newsroom set to open this year in renovated Terrell Hall—the associate professor of communication now steers a new generation of young journalists into a brave if uncertain future.

“The change just continues, good and bad,” Schiffman said. “Journalism is in a lot of turmoil. We're in the middle of a revolution with the collapse of newspapers and the collapse of classified advertising. Newspapers, as we know them, are failing all over the place.”

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**I remain optimistic that journalism will reinvent itself. I'm really excited to get back into Terrell. We have an opportunity to transform student media here into something that it hasn't been before.**

**- Dr. James Schiffman**

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“I remain optimistic that journalism will reinvent itself,” he said. “I’m really excited to get back into Terrell. We have an opportunity to transform student media here into something that it hasn’t been before.”

Schiffman went to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, majoring first in engineering, then getting a degree in economics. He started a master’s program in economics at the University of Colorado, but dropped out. He was drifting; looking for an interest. Then U.S. President Richard Nixon went to China—sparking a passion in Schiffman for news, history and Asian affairs.

“I remember picking up the newspaper and reading the newspaper and thinking I can at least do this. I want to be the first American correspondent in China,” he said. “Imagine telling people that in 1973? They thought I was crazy. Kind of a lunatic.”

Nixon’s China trip spurred Schiffman back to the University of Colorado for a master’s in Chinese history. While there, he wrote for the school newspaper and spent time in Taiwan, learning the language and writing for the Hong Kong Standard. He arrived home in the mid-1970s, during a deep recession. News jobs were scarce.

“It was right after Watergate,” Schiffman said. “Everyone in the world wanted to be a journalist. I was competing with all these journalism school graduates, and I’d never taken a journalism course in my life.”



**Dr. James Schiffman**

He found a job in the advertising department of a small newspaper in Centralia, Washington. Then, Schiffman landed a position at another small daily in Sterling, Colorado. In the mornings, he’d shoot and develop pictures and, in the afternoons, report the news.

That job quickly led to a staff reporting position with United

Press International (UPI) in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Most bureaus reprinted news from daily newspapers, but Schiffman's did original reporting. He covered the entire state, plus capitol legislation and court news. He even covered U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's first run for the House in 1978.

But Schiffman's heart yearned for Asia. He accepted a journalism fellowship with Gannett Foundation at the University of Hawaii, then went back to UPI as a reporter in their Hong Kong bureau, covering commodities and shipping. From there, Schiffman worked for the Asian Wall Street Journal as a reporter and bureau chief, spending four years in South Korea.

All this experience finally put Schiffman right where he originally wanted to be: in China.

For two years, he worked as a correspondent in Beijing, but it proved to be "a really tough place to work" in the late 1980s. Journalists lived in guarded, diplomatic compounds under surveillance. Schiffman returned to the United States a year before the massacre at Tiananmen Square.

He worked for the Wall Street Journal in Atlanta, then went to CNN in 1990 as a writer during the Gulf War. Schiffman moved quickly from writer/editor and copy editor to editor. When Ted Turner expanded CNN's International Network, Schiffman worked there as a copy editor, senior copy editor and chief copy editor. He was with CNN 21 years.

Not wanting to "be the old guy in the newsroom," Schiffman decided to go back to school. He earned a Ph.D. in communication at Georgia State University and came to Georgia College in 2012.

Schiffman now tells stories of travel and reporting to a new wave of journalists. He teaches a newscast class every semester, along with shooting for news, international media systems, history of broadcasting and interviewing/listening.

When he arrived, the university already had a student television station, called GCTV. Schiffman changed the format to live news. Students renamed the program GC360.

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**We do everything live and that's tricky. There's no fixing anything. Once you start, you're live until you're not live and, if something goes wrong, you just have to handle it. You have to think fast on your feet.**

**- Dr. James Schiffman**



Dr. Schiffman in the student media control room.

It's not easy preparing workers for a changing industry. The Internet is causing many newspapers to fold and others to rethink how news is packaged. Attention spans are shortening, and popular apps like Tic Tok sport ever-shorter videos.

Despite these challenges, Schiffman sees an uptick in the numbers of students pursuing journalism. A writer is a writer, he said. They'll always adjust to the medium. Students have the advantage of youth. The young go out and do whatever it takes to realize their dreams, regardless of obstacles.

Basic principles of journalism don't change, he said, and students must continue to work hard. But, now, they must also adapt and be multi-skilled entrepreneurs.

Terrell Hall's state-of-the-art newsroom includes a production studio and radio station, where students have the tools to practice modern, digital-first journalism. Student media organizations will be able to collaborate and publish news first to online platforms. They'll also be able to produce a newspaper, television and radio newscasts and experiment with innovative news delivery.

Schiffman hopes the Terrell newsroom will make Georgia College 'the' place to go

for journalism in Georgia. He believes the collaborative learning environment will give journalists a leg-up in today's unpredictable landscape.

"I tell my students I'm a living example of the idea that you may be doing a job you never conceived of when you started out," Schiffman said. "Nobody could conceive of CNN when I started journalism. Nobody."



Dr. Schiffman overseeing student work.

# News Stories Posted Wednesday February 12, 2020



## "Keepers of the Promise" Award winners played crucial role in diversifying Georgia College

[Alumni](#) : Wednesday February 12, 2020

In celebration of Black History Month, Georgia College reflects on the determination of five individuals, who were of paramount importance in helping to move the university toward embracing ethnic diversity.

These pioneers were recognized during Alumni Weekend 2019 with the Georgia College African-American Alumni Council's (AAAC) "Keepers of the Promise" Award: Professor Emeritus Dr. Lucretia Coleman, '69, '71, Cellestine Hill Hunt, '68, Joyce Hill Vasser, Dr. Thelmon Larkin, '70, and Jacquelynn Waller Nelson, '71, '76. The award signifies the determination and example these individuals had set in integrating Georgia College.



(Left to right)  
Jacquelynn Waller  
Nelson, Dr. Thelmon  
Larkin and Joyce Hill  
Vasser

The education they received and their connections to

Georgia College helped make them leaders in their field.

Coleman was not only a student at GC, she also taught at GC. In fact, she taught in higher education for more than 30 years, with the last 23 as a professor at GC's School of Business.

She recalls out of the 10 African-American students enrolled at GC in 1965, only three returned to GC at the end of the first year. As a student, there were times Coleman recalls feeling hurt, belittled and angry.

"I worked very hard to treat each student with dignity and respect," Coleman said of her work as a teacher. "I knew from first-hand experience that not doing so could break the spirit."

Dr. Joseph Specht encouraged her to participate in and support professional associations that reached beyond Milledgeville and Georgia.

"Dr. Specht was a very supportive teacher, dean and later, colleague," she said. "He judged me based on what I could do rather than on the color of my skin."

Hunt was the first African-American student to graduate from Georgia College in 1968. Her summers at the university were spent registering voters in Milledgeville.

After graduating, Hunt became a Ford Foundation Fellow, where she advocated to increase racial and ethnic diversity of university and collegiate faculties. In addition, she assisted students of color and those with disabilities.

Later, she became one of the first African-American women to climb the corporate ladder at Bank of America.

Larkin was the first African-American male to graduate from Georgia College.



Dr. Lucretia Coleman, GC professor emeritus

“My time at Georgia College was towards the end of the decade of the '60s,” he said, “which signaled a great deal of change.”

Although Georgia College prepared Larkin well for his professional career, he was never satisfied with just completing his undergraduate degree.

“I wanted to do more and always believed I could,” he said. “Georgia College gave me what I needed to believe I could do anything I wanted to.”

Larkin went on to earn his doctoral degree. Then, his career path of 33 years included education, teaching students from junior high school to the college/university level and social work, advocating for abused and neglected children and counseling/supervising juvenile and adult offenders, including the criminally insane.

“It was always my desire to be of help to others,” Larkin said. “I know that influenced the life work I pursued.”

Faculty who played a positive role in Larkin’s life include: Dr. Floride Gardner, Dr. Dorothy Pitman, Moon Chat Sue, Lawrence Roberts, Jr. and Dean Robert Brewer.

“They all were unafraid to show that being kind and helpful even to a black kid from Milledgeville, Georgia, was okay,” he said. “These are the people I modeled my professional career after, and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to have met each of them. I know I am a better person because of it.”

According to Nelson, there were less than 10 African-American students enrolled at Georgia College in 1967 when she majored in institutional management in home economics with a concentration in food and nutrition. After Georgia College, she earned her master’s degree in home economics.

“The career path to become a registered dietitian is very competitive,” Nelson said. “I found the education I received at Georgia College enabled me to compete with any other student from any other educational institution no matter the size or region.”

Vasser is a retired federal civil servant of 39 years. She held a successful career in human resources and labor management relations.

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**“The instructor was fair and engaging in what must’ve been a most unsettling time. I remember her as being hospitable, yet not condescending; as recognizing my, as well as her, self-worth and as having a common southern**

**work ethic. This reflected the attitude, 'We have a job to do; let's get it done together.' At the time, what more could have been asked of either of us?"**

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“The GC experience taught me that what some view as a generational curse, can, with the help of God, be transformed into a blessing for future generations,” Vasser said. “It’s up to people to whom are given the ability to identify and use talents and skills of others to inspire organizational excellence and success for the benefit of the public good.”

She was the first African-American student to enroll at Georgia College. Vasser took one class at Georgia College for the sole purpose of creating opportunities to desegregate the university.

“The instructor was fair and engaging in what must’ve been a most unsettling time,” she said. “I remember her as being hospitable, yet not condescending; as recognizing my, as well as her, self-worth and as having a common southern work ethic. This reflected the attitude, ‘We have a job to do; let’s get it done together.’ At the time, what more could have been asked of either of us?”

The efforts of these individuals have become an important tenet of the history of diversity at Georgia College.

“For posterity sake, Georgia College can forever tout its role in positively effecting students who were willing to take the lead and forge ahead, even under sometimes difficult circumstances,” Larkin said. “What a testament to being a part of preparing young people to meet challenges.”



Cellestine Hill Hunt



# News Stories Posted Friday February 21, 2020



## Two state-of-the-art facilities: Georgia College breaks ground on new science building and re-opens historic Terrell Hall

[Facilities Planning](#) : Friday February 21, 2020

Georgia College commemorated two campus buildings in February with a groundbreaking ceremony for its Integrated Science Complex and ribbon cutting for newly-renovated Terrell Hall. The two facilities mark a combined construction upgrade for the campus worth \$35.4 million.

University President Dr. Steve Dorman was one of a dozen officials who dug ceremonial shovels of dirt—officially commencing construction of Georgia College’s first new academic structure to be built since the Arts and Sciences building in 1995. The Integrated Science Complex will be located at the corner of Montgomery and Wilkinson Streets across from Herty Hall.

Dorman also presided over a ribbon cutting at Terrell Hall on Front Campus.

Originally built in 1908, Terrell is one of the university's oldest structures. Years ago, it was a dormitory. More recently, Terrell housed various department offices. Its new use will be for communication technology and studies.

"I am delighted to break ground on our new Integrated Science Complex," Dorman said. "This will greatly expand upon our existing strengths in our science programs at Georgia College and provide our students and faculty members with state-of-the-art facilities focused on science, technology and research."

"In addition," he said, "I am delighted to re-open historic Terrell Hall. The improvements we made to the historical character of the building are breathtaking. This facility brings together all the relevant areas of mass communications and media studies, and it greatly expands opportunities for our students."



New Integrated Science Complex to be completed in late spring 2021.

The \$22.1 million Integrated Science Complex will be three full floors with advanced equipment and spaces for students to gather, collaborate and use for study. Completion for the 43,000 sq. ft. building is slated for late spring 2021. New space will allow the university to offer a concentration in the growing field of forensic chemistry and more science education courses for students who want to teach science.

Planning the building was challenging, due to “the weirdest juxtaposition of dissimilar architecture anywhere on campus,” said University Architect Michael Rickenbaker. Next door is Kilpatrick, which is mid-century modern. Across the street is also modernist—the oldest section of Herty Hall, built in the 1950s. Diagonally across the street is neo-classical Parks Memorial.



Lobby of the new science building.

“It’s a conflicted site. But we looked back to the entire campus with the porch element,” Rickenbaker said. “Brick windows with details around them give depth reminiscent of our older buildings. We even referenced back to the industrial age to look almost like factories that used to be in this end of town.”

“At the end of the day,” he said, “we feel confident we have something that really looks like it belongs here.”

At the groundbreaking, Dr. Jim James, vice chancellor for real estate and facilities at the University System of Georgia (USG), said Georgia College’s campus is a favorite of his. The Integrated Science Complex “was a really tough project,” blending old and new, that met its design goals.

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**You have this iconic—arguably, one of the most or the most beautiful campus in our system—with buildings over a 100 years old that you can’t replicate today. So, how do you build a new science building with technology that didn’t exist 100 years ago and architecturally tie it back to the campus? ... I would like to say this was one of the most successful design projects that’s I’ve experienced in my years at the university system.”**

**- USG Vice Chancellor for Real Estate and Facilities Dr. Jim Jones**

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The architectural design is striking for its wide expanses of glass windows, making it a beacon of light at night, Rickenbaker said. Inside, all teaching and research laboratories have walls of windows—allowing visitors to walk the perimeter of each floor and see science-on-display.



New lab with glass walls for viewing.

New labs with glass walls for viewing. Labs will open into an interior passageway, called the linear equipment room, that'll be shared by all science faculty and students. This shared equipment space is unique to universities our size, Rickenbaker said. There will be a refrigerated room, equipment to identify the structure of organic molecules, imaging and microscopy suites,

incubators and spinning centrifuges. On a third-floor balcony, there will also be flats set up for botanic research.

"The efficiency will be unmatched," said Dr. Indiren Pillay, chair of biological and environmental sciences. "The building epitomizes a sea-change in the way we think as scientists at Georgia College. This building is a monument to that."

Planning for the new building began almost as soon as Herty's new wing was added in 2012. New physics and environmental science programs were part of the reason, said Dr. Chavonda Mills, chair of chemistry, physics and astronomy. The new majors brought in additional faculty and students. Herty also services core courses for pre-nursing, exercise science and health sciences.

As undergraduate research grew—becoming a transformative experience at Georgia College—space was needed even more.

"It's always been there, in our DNA so-to-speak," Pillay said. "It's natural for us as scientists to provide research for our students. But now it's become more of an emphasis for the mission of the university and, much like our colleagues in theatre and other experiential programs, we've seen an uptick in what we want to do with our students."

Dorman suggested a new building across the street, and planning began. Classrooms will remain at Herty, along with the observatory, planetarium and Museum of Natural History. Teaching and research labs will be at the Integrated Science Complex.

The new building will allow sciences to move beyond traditional lab work and into problem-based research, Pillay said. This requires more time in labs for students. Immediate access to instruments in the linear equipment room will also be immensely beneficial for students and faculty, Mills said. All disciplines will share space and equipment. She's excited about the potential for collaboration and hopes it'll lead to more innovative research.

“There’s a lot of functionality there,” Mills said. “There aren’t any spaces that won’t be utilized.”

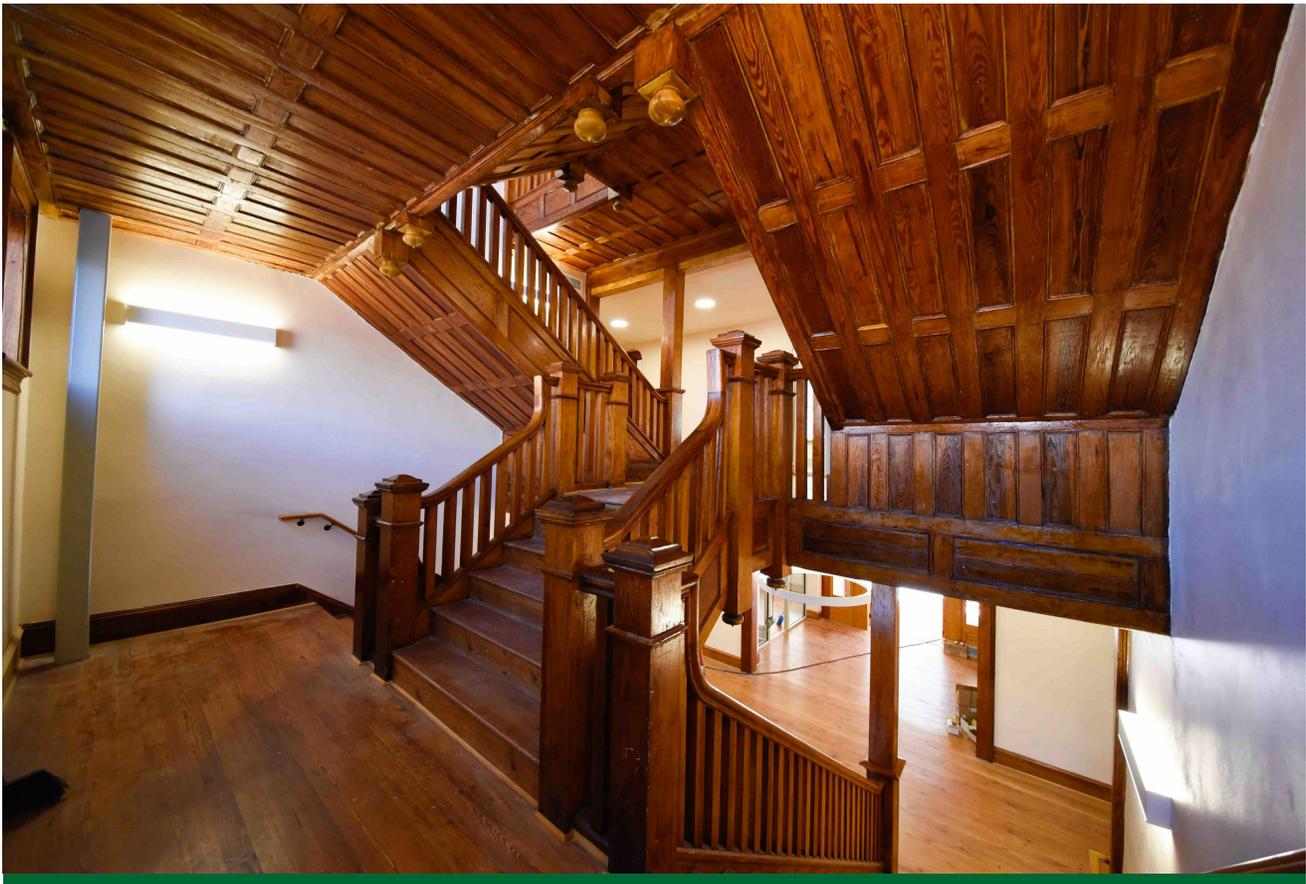
“It’s an open concept,” Pillay agreed. “We’re moving away from the concept of territories in departments. There will be a lot of interconnectedness.”

The community will be welcomed into this new space with beautiful landscaping that also acts as a science lab. There’ll be a pollinator garden for butterflies and bees; an ecosystem of shrubs and trees used in experimentation; a cement bio-swale that retains water and becomes a manmade pond in the rain. Water will drain into other areas of the topography.

Outside, traditional Georgia College rocking chairs will beckon. Inside, hallway walls will display research posters and traveling exhibits of art. The first display will be African-American art, in honor of Milledgeville’s Slatter family, who owned a house on the property years ago. The site will be marked with a memorial plaque.

Mark Bowen, project manager for Facilities Planning, is overseeing construction. Architectural work was done by Cooper Carry of Atlanta, and Sheridan Construction in Macon will do the building. Once the Integrated Science Complex is completed, plans will begin to renovate Herty Hall.

“The project team has worked well with our faculty and staff throughout the design phases,” Bowen said. “It truly has been a collaborative effort that will culminate in a facility that’ll meet the programmatic needs of the university for many years.”



Stunning woodwork was uncovered at Terrell.

Terrell's \$13.3 million renovations took two years to complete. Rick Ruark, associate director for Facilities Planning, was project manager with Lord Aeck Sargent in Atlanta doing the architecture drawings. More than 180,000 hours of labor were put into Terrell's renovations, said Sean Moxley, president of Garbutt Construction Company in Dublin, which did the work.

Dr. Eric Tenbus, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, said the new Terrell Hall is "gorgeous and puts the communication department into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. When students pursue mass communication, digital media, journalism and rhetoric at Georgia College, he said, they can be assured of having access to the most advanced equipment.

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**Terrell Hall represents another fusion that is important to our atmosphere at a public liberal arts university. And, here, I refer to the fusion of the modern state-of-the-art with the historic in one space.**

**- Dr. Eric Tenbus**

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Much like the new Integrated Complex, bringing together art and science, Tenbus said “Terrell Hall represents another fusion that is important to our atmosphere at a public liberal arts university. And, here, I refer to the fusion of the modern state-of-the-art with the historic in one space.”

Historic elements obscured in the 1970s were salvaged—like higher ceilings, wider hallways, old flooring and windows that were covered up.

Close to 30 coats of paint were stripped off the wood in stairwells and corridors to reveal stunning original woodwork. Arches along main hallways were rediscovered early in the project, Rickenbaker said, and restored. Most of the original materials used to build this turn-of-the-century beauty have been historically and painstakingly preserved.

Terrell now has central air conditioning and full use of its basement. Modern updates include advanced multimedia laboratories and engaged-learning classrooms featuring cutting-edge communications technology. There are small classrooms, sun-filled work spaces for students, a large screening room and debate area.

Georgia College’s collaborative student newsroom will also be in Terrell. Student media will work together in one multipurpose space—the university’s live TV news organization, GC360; student newspaper, the Colonnade; and student radio station, WGUR 95.3. Facilities include a versatile production studio and new radio station. Students will have the tools to practice modern, digital-first journalism and experiment with innovative news delivery, while also producing a traditional newspaper and television/radio newscasts.

Associate Professor of [Communication](#) Dr. James Schiffman hopes the Terrell newsroom will make Georgia College ‘the’ place to go for journalism education in Georgia. He believes the collaborative learning environment will give journalists a leg-up in today’s unpredictable media landscape.

“I’m really excited to get back into Terrell,” Schiffman said. “We have an opportunity to transform student media here into something that it hasn’t been before.”

# News Stories Posted Tuesday February 25, 2020



## Virtual reality 'field trips' for students created by Georgia College team

[College of Education](#) : Tuesday February 25, 2020

Teachers face a host of challenges to engage students in the classroom. With new technology at their fingertips, children crave innovative ways of learning.

Georgia College professor of Instructional Technology Dr. Chris Greer hopes to bring new opportunities for students to learn topics like science and history using virtual reality (VR).

His YouTube channel, [Virtual Reality Georgia](#), brings sites across the state to life—one of the first to highlight locations in Georgia using VR.

“The end game is to have sites from all over Georgia,” said Greer. “From state parks to museums, we hope to make these sites available to K-12 teachers and students as well as the general public.”

Using a 360-degree camera, Greer and his graduate assistant Hannah Jones visit locations like the Ocmulgee Indian Mounds, the Old Governor’s Mansion, Smithgall State Park in Helen and Cumberland Island.

“For the videos, we look for the most engaging spot whether that means next to an animal habitat, a wide angle of a mansion or placed to see as much of the room as possible,” said Jones, a 2018 special education graduate from Georgia College who is now

pursuing her master’s degree in instructional technology. “We try to tell every guide to talk to the camera like a group of students in third grade.”

You can watch the videos without VR goggles, but the experience is much more immersive if you use them. VR isn’t new technology, yet not all students have access to the goggles in the classroom. Greer believes that will change as schools continue to find innovative ways for children to learn.

“I was talking to the head of technology at a public school system in the state recently. He said they’ve got a new grant for technology, and, instead of just Chromebook carts, they want to do a VR headset cart,” said Greer.

“Teachers will roll in a cart, and say ‘let’s go somewhere,’ and everyone will put on the goggles,” he said. “I think once that happens across the state, it will become kind of like a watershed moment for VR where suddenly you’ve got students using these headsets quite frequently in the school. You need content for them, and that’s where our content will fit in.”

Last fall, Greer presented the project at a conference and was approached by Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB) to collaborate.

“The folks at GPB are doing something similar, and they said ‘we needed to get



Greer works with the 360-degree camera

together on this,” said Greer. “They’ve got a whole team dedicated to it. They’ve been out filming similar projects and have even put together lesson plans and other material for virtual field trips for teachers and students to use.”

Now the videos Greer and Jones put together will be featured on [GPB’s virtual field trips website.](#)

“This helps us get our content out to a broader audience quickly,” Greer said about the GPB partnership. “They have a common goal— it’s all about access to benefit education in Georgia.”

For Jones, technology like the 360-degree camera is relatively new, but through opportunities at Georgia College in the classroom and her graduate assistantship, she’s been pushed to learn more.

“Technology has not always been my friend, so to begin with, I was a little worried about being surrounded by the amount of technology,” she said. “I have learned an enormous amount over the last two years.”

Greer and Jones taught themselves how to operate the 360-degree camera as well as the editing software. Through the process, they learned other tricks—like the camera does not do well with heat and the importance of crisp audio with no interference.



The team captured footage from a controlled burn.



Graduate student Hannah Jones (right) works with Greer on the Virtual Reality Georgia project.

“I wanted to work with Dr. Greer on Virtual Reality Georgia because I knew this was brand new technology and that it could help educators and students around the state. I also wanted to experience a different side of education,” said Jones

Greer’s hobbies of photography and a love of travel coupled with his focus on technology in education led him to start the VR project.

He's also created a digital textbook with Apple on Georgia State Parks and will soon publish a travel book on Georgia, which he both wrote and did the photography for. But for Greer, the biggest win is for his students and students across the state to have a learning opportunity through technology.

"Dr. Greer has been a great mentor in my life," said Jones. "He has pushed me to explore different opportunities during my degree such as taking a graphic design course and a photography course. Working with him on this project has been an absolutely wonderful experience, and I am beyond grateful that I have had this opportunity."

A new grant will help create a space for Greer and students in the College of Education to use this and other cutting edge technology.

Email [chris.greer@gcsu.edu](mailto:chris.greer@gcsu.edu) for additional information or site suggestions.



## Undergraduate Research: Georgia College a center for new ideas

[University Communications](#) : Tuesday February 25, 2020



Student does lab research

It's always been part of Georgia College's DNA, as one professor said recently. But—with undergraduate research now officially dubbed a “transformative experience” and part of GC Journeys' high-impact practices—investigative opportunities at Georgia College are gathering even more momentum.

After 23 years of its own annual research conference on campus—the university last year started a new state program called, “Posters at the Capitol.” It has published the only national book on student mentorship and, next year, will launch a new national journal of undergraduate research, the first of its kind.



Student presents at a conference

Georgia College was also an early adapter of bringing the arts into research. Add this to the fact that more than 20 percent of Georgia College undergraduates participate in research from all disciplines—and a picture begins to emerge of this small, rural, public liberal arts school.

It is an image of idea-making that's feisty and bold.

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**One of our strengths is the output. A lot of our strengths actually come from the output of ideas and the benefits we've been able to give students. We're giving them tons of opportunities they never had before.**

**- Dr. Doreen Sams, professor of marketing and coordinator for MURACE**

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In 1998, the Boyer Commission Report on Reinventing Undergraduate Education challenged U.S. universities to permeate undergraduate education with “inquiry-driven learning opportunities.” The study found undergraduates lacked basic skills of “critical thinking, clear writing and coherent speaking” and, therefore, challenged research universities to use their expertise to “strengthen the undergraduate

experience.”

Many institutions have implemented programs since then, and Sams is careful not to compare. It isn't fair to equate small campuses to larger research schools. Some universities have more money or more administrative support. But what can be said is this: When the Boyer Commission released its 1998 report, Georgia College had already started its own campus research conference in 1997, mostly displaying undergraduate work.

“The amount of undergraduate research happening at Georgia College is unprecedented,” said Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate provost for transformative learning experiences. “Not a lot of colleges have had 23 years of an undergraduate research conference. We're really ahead of the mark there. We are far above anything I've seen.”

Right now, across campus in multiple disciplines, students as early as freshman year are taking advantage of opportunities to conduct research:

- A math student is researching the pricing of derivative securities used to buy stocks.
- A psychology student is working on the effects of lying on memory and whether liars later come to believe their lies as truth.
- An environmental science student is using regression analysis to estimate the length of ancient sea snakes with vertebrae found in local Kaolin mines.
- A chemistry student is doing a salivary hormonal study to determine the effects of different socio-economic environments and the prevalence of prostate cancer in African-American males.
- A music student is developing a review methodology for beginning band percussion books.
- And a government student is determining whether felon disenfranchisement is used to suppress minorities from voting.

That's just skimming the surface.

Last year, 1,318 Georgia College undergraduates participated in research, Cofer said. The student research club, Undergraduate Research Circle, is creatively contributing, as well. Last fall, they hosted a research 'roundup' that operated like speed dating. Eleven faculty and 35 students showed up for multiple mini-meetings about research opportunities.

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**“It was student driven. It shows an organic demand by students. They want to be a part of these experiences. It's neat to see this kind of energy. For a school our size, we have a pretty big footprint,” he said. “To be this residential college**

**with close ties between faculty and students and support from our president and provost, who've made a priority of undergraduate research—I don't think that just happens. It's pretty impressive."**

**- Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate provost for transformative learning experiences**

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MURACE is now part of the high-impact and engaged-learning experiences of GC Journeys. It started in 2012. A group of faculty members spent a year researching the idea, presented it to the Provost's Office and were granted \$100,000 to support student research and conference travel. That funding has continued. In the past eight years, MURACE has financially supported more than 2,500 students.

Last year, Sams visited all first-year GC1Y classes and started the conversation about undergraduate research. Involvement in exploratory study helps build skills in critical thinking, leadership, self-reliance, independence and reading comprehension, she said.

"If you compare where we were to where we are now," Sams said, "then, I think we have a great story to tell. We are doing great things, and we're looking forward to doing even greater things."

Senior Laura Swarner, who's double majoring in theatre and English, was recently named a semi-finalist for the 2020 Fulbright Scholarship. Her dramaturgical research and set design on theatre's fall 2019 production of "Ballet Russes" helped garner her the attention. She also recently took first place at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, a nine-region competition held in South Carolina. She will attend the national competition in Washington D.C. in April.



Laura Swarner

Before entering college, Swarner hadn't thought of undergraduate research as something associated with creativity.

"Doing research for theatre and, honestly, just theatre in general has helped me grow in my understanding of history and culture," Swarner said, "It has also helped me to be able to look at facts or a theme and solve problems or build on an idea

from there.”

“Georgia College prepared me by teaching me what I need to know in order to develop my ideas and present them professionally,” she said. “The theatre professors and staff at Georgia College have worked with me one-on-one to help me achieve my goals in a way that wouldn’t be possible in a larger institution.”

In December, 50 faculty members in nine departments—chemistry, physics and astronomy; communication; government and sociology; music; health and human performance; history and geography; biological and environmental sciences; English and psychology—were awarded 2020 GC Journeys/MURACE Undergraduate Research mini-grants, totaling \$25,000, to promote undergraduate research on campus.

“New faculty are getting on this bandwagon,” Sams said. “It’s almost infectious. So, we’re seeing more students doing better quality work going to impressive conferences. That’s not to say they didn’t before, but the numbers are increasing.”



## Student newspaper continues tradition of investigative reporting

[Student Organizations & Clubs](#): Tuesday February 25, 2020

Imagine a time before social media and modern-day cellphones were available and the only places where you could get the 'news of the day' was the paper or radio. This need to communicate helped inspire Georgia College's student run newspaper, The Colonnade.

The idea for a student newspaper at Georgia State College for Women started in 1923 when the Y.W.C.A published Triangled Thoughts, a bi-monthly newspaper that was given to the students. During the spring of 1925, a formal newspaper was established. Issues would be published twice a month and students were charged a fifty cent subscription fee. Due to the columns and the characteristics of the campus, the newspaper was named, 'The Colonnade.'

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**It was a place for women on campus to get their ideas out, get their voice out. At the time, from what I've seen in the archives, there was a lot of school spirit and since there were so many rules about women leaving campus, it was a way for the women to talk about what was going on.**

The idea stuck and since then, The Colonnade has reported on many events throughout the years. It even has had Flannery O'Connor serve as Editor in Chief. No matter what though, the purpose of the paper has always been to inform students.

"The purpose of The Colonnade, in today's terms, is to bring awareness to our students of what's going on around campus. And also, since it's our job as journalists to seek out the truth in matters, it's our job to tell students what's really going on, to dig into things to look into things, to show them that, you know, life's not always pretty. But the more you know about things, the more you can make a difference in your community."

Currently, The Colonnade has three sections; news, sports, and arts & life which covers a variety of subjects from Homecoming and Deep Roots to health issues to politics. Each issue takes multiple people and hours to put together.

"We have a paid staff and unpaid staff, unfortunately, just because of our budgetary constraints. Our paid staff include, editors and photographers, an ad sales manager and public relations. Under the editor in chief, there is an art director, managing editor, and then three desks for each of the sections each with their own head editor and assistant editor. Typically six to eight people will come up with story ideas and edit 15 articles for an 8 page paper."

One of the things that is a challenge for the staff is staying true to journalistic roots in the rise of fake news and polarizing media.

"One thing that's been really unique about working for The Colonnade the past three years is the rise of fake news and how it is affecting our media. So being young journalists in that environment and looking at our field, either dying in small towns or being under attack at times, can be very daunting."



Amy Lynn McDonald is a recent graduate with a Bachelor in Mass Communication and is the former Editor in Chief of The Colonnade

While journalism may have had a past of being a male-dominated career field, The Colonnade has always been an innovative newspaper, providing an outlet for women to pursue their passion.

"One thing that was really heartening to me is that since it was a women's college, all the editors in chief were women. To know that I'm leading an organization that has such a strong history of women leading, there's so few places where that's true. It's really cool that I can genuinely be myself."

### See more photos from The Colonnade



Sophomore Mass Communication major, Eric Boyd, uses the white board to layout a story for a future issue



Different issues of The Colonnade hang at the editor's desk



Eric Boyd places copies into a newspaper bin outside of the Maxwell Student Union

