

Front Page News Story Archive

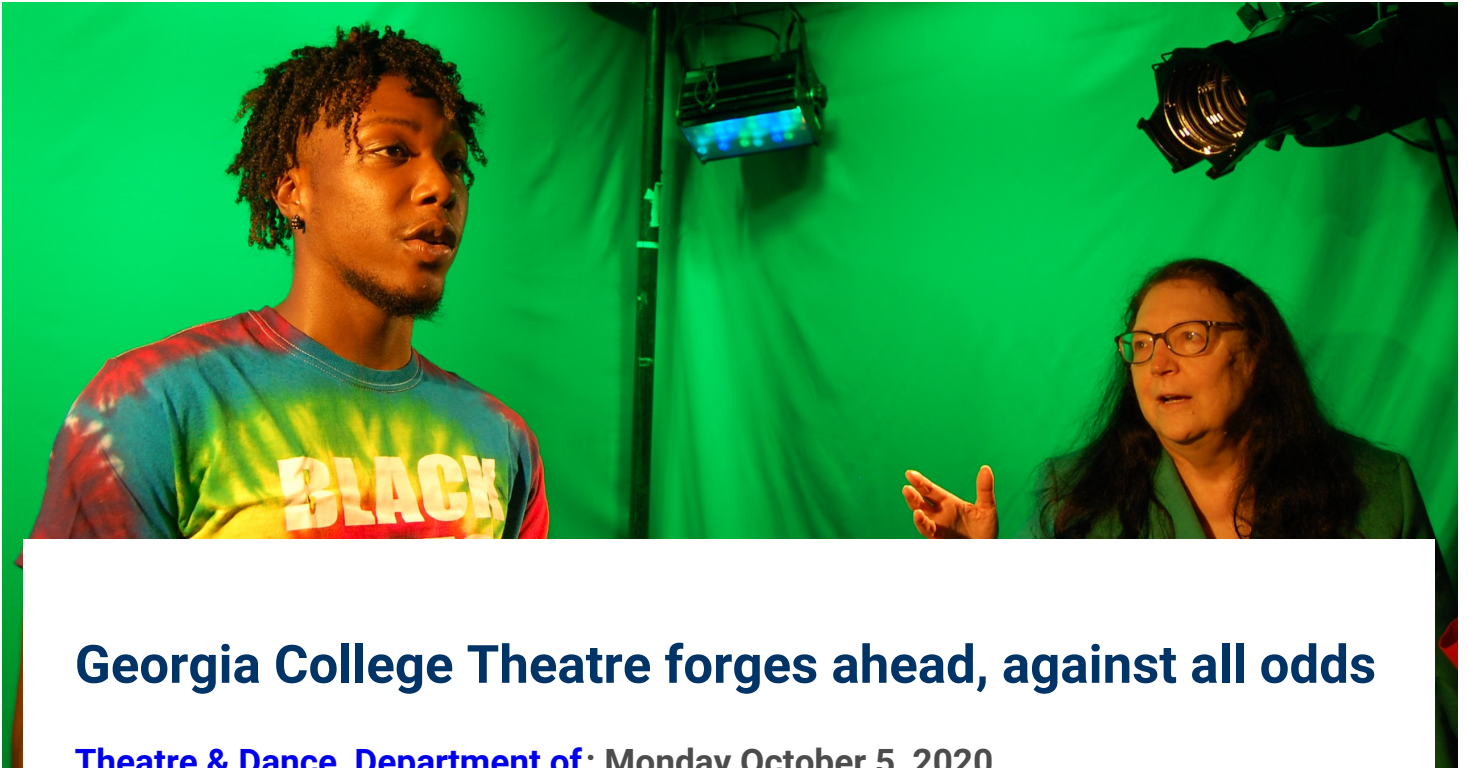
October 2020



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News Stories Posted Monday October 5, 2020



Georgia College Theatre forges ahead, against all odds

[Theatre & Dance, Department of](#): Monday October 5, 2020

In many places, the performing arts have shut down—snuffed out, it seems, by a virus.

Even Broadway is closed. Stages are dark. Actors can't rehearse safely together. They can't perform in front of live audiences. Big-name plays can't be performed, because royalties exclude permission for virtual acting. Tickets can't be sold for locally-scripted productions that are largely experimental. Going online is costly, too, requiring specialized video equipment and training.

These challenges seem insurmountable.

“

It's mind blowing, and it's been a lot of work, but I think it's going to be very rewarding.

- Dr. Karen Berman

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Dr. Karen Berman, like many theatre chairs this summer, faced these same obstacles. But—with typical gutsy grit—she forged ahead.

"I wasn't going to let COVID deter us," Berman said. "We decided we would go for a virtual season, which basically means we're either livestreaming a performance or pre-taping and creating film for the very first time in our shows."

"It's mind blowing, and it's been a lot of work," she said, "but I think it's going to be very rewarding."

At first, Berman feared student reaction. Her faculty was "devastated," when award-winning hits like "Little Shop of Horrors" got canceled. They had researched and planned since late winter, putting their own personal concepts into shows. It all went into the trash.

And, in two weeks, a bold new season emerged.

It's filled with original scripts and music by faculty, students and community members—a variety of 'what can we try' moments. The president, provost and dean provided Theatre and Music with \$20,000 each to buy new video cameras, lighting and sound equipment that enhance Zoom productions. Software programs were purchased, as were kits for students to use from home. Keith Bergeron, assistant director of Production Services, agreed to train students on equipment in personal tutoring sessions.



Theatre major
Stephanie Telon-
Perez rehearsing.



Alumnus Sam Wilson uses a ringlight during rehearsals with theatre and music double major Sophia Clark. (Her mask was briefly removed for photo only.)

Every action and line in a play is filmed individually. Actors perform alone, usually in makeshift studios on campus or at home. Each clip is painstakingly pieced together by two recent graduates with certificates from the Georgia Film Academy, Harlee Pope and Jeremy Colwell, as well as other film studies graduates.

But new problems lay ahead.

“

This is scary for me. I’m way out of my comfort zone here. But it’s also exciting. We’re discovering the problems as we go. We’re brand new to this. We’re hitting all the bumps in the road, and we’re facing them one at a time. We’re trailblazing.

- Dr. Berman

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Theatre’s first production— “Zoom [OUT]: An Experiment in Production” by former professor and Blackbird owner Iona Sun Holder—had to be re-filmed halfway through because of sound issues. Then, computers didn’t have enough gigabytes. It took hours to download one minute of film. There was no money for costumes or

to hire drama coaches and compensate guest artists. Theatre lost \$40,000 last spring when campus closed and shows were canceled. They lost another \$40,000 in revenue from community dance classes. Since all productions this season are free, Berman said, “donations will be more important than ever.”

“This is scary for me. I’m way out of my comfort zone here. But it’s also exciting,” she said. “We’re discovering the problems as we go. We’re brand new to this. We’re hitting all the bumps in the road, and we’re facing them one at a time. We’re trailblazing.”

“Zoom [OUT]” portrays student pandemic experiences and how people connect during isolation. The film premiered outdoors this month on a 40-foot screen at Central State Hospital. Faculty and students watched, social distancing from their cars. The film is now available for public viewing on YouTube at www.GCGivingVoice.com.

“

This truly inspires me to continue in theatre, no matter what obstacles I face.

- Claire Hemenway

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Senior theatre major Claire Hemenway of Peachtree City acted in the play. At the beginning of the academic year, she wrote a letter expressing what Berman said “encapsulates the feelings of this new world.” She acknowledged being upset at first, hearing of plans for online theatre. Despite the season not being what she originally expected, however, Hemenway said she’s “having an amazing experience.” She expressed pride that Georgia College didn’t simply quit but continued to see possibilities and “make art.”

“I’m not going to lie. I was devastated and confused at first. I’m sure other faculty and students were, as well,” Hemenway wrote. “But ... I am genuinely honored to be part of a program that is actively deciding to be a part of history. We are a part of redefining performing arts in a pandemic. Not many people get to say that!”

“This truly inspires me to continue in theatre, no matter what obstacles I face,” she added.

Fall programming is a daring blend of virtual acting on film and livestream. FaceTime is being used as a platform, as well. The only onstage performance is an upcoming children’s play, “Lions in Illyria,” based on Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” that utilizes animal masks. It will be livestreamed online to audiences.



Sophia Clark during rehearsals for "Giving Voice," which premieres mid-November.

The big musical this fall is locally scripted with gospel music and Hip Hop. "Giving Voice" is about the Black Lives Matter movement and premieres original songs by two Georgia College students and Raymond Jackson, a musician for Beulahland Bible Church in Macon. Everyone on the 19-member cast and crew wrote their own scripts, based on personal experience. The play includes praise dancing, slam poetry, rap and monologues.

Rehearsals were on Zoom—no easy feat, Berman said, because of time lapses. Each voice was recorded individually in a studio setting. All singing parts will be edited together for cohesion.

"We have to capture them visually, too, singing in sync from individual boxes on Zoom. It's madness," Berman said.

Despite the challenges, Theatre is showcasing a complete season. "The



Izzy Lee rehearsing for "Giving Voice."

Nutcracker” will be modified and filmed in pieces, several dancers at a time. Student capstones will be made, including one about immigrants. Ten-minute original plays by two alumni are also being created and shown on YouTube.

“

We're doing something important here. Everyone's feeling it.

- Dr. Berman

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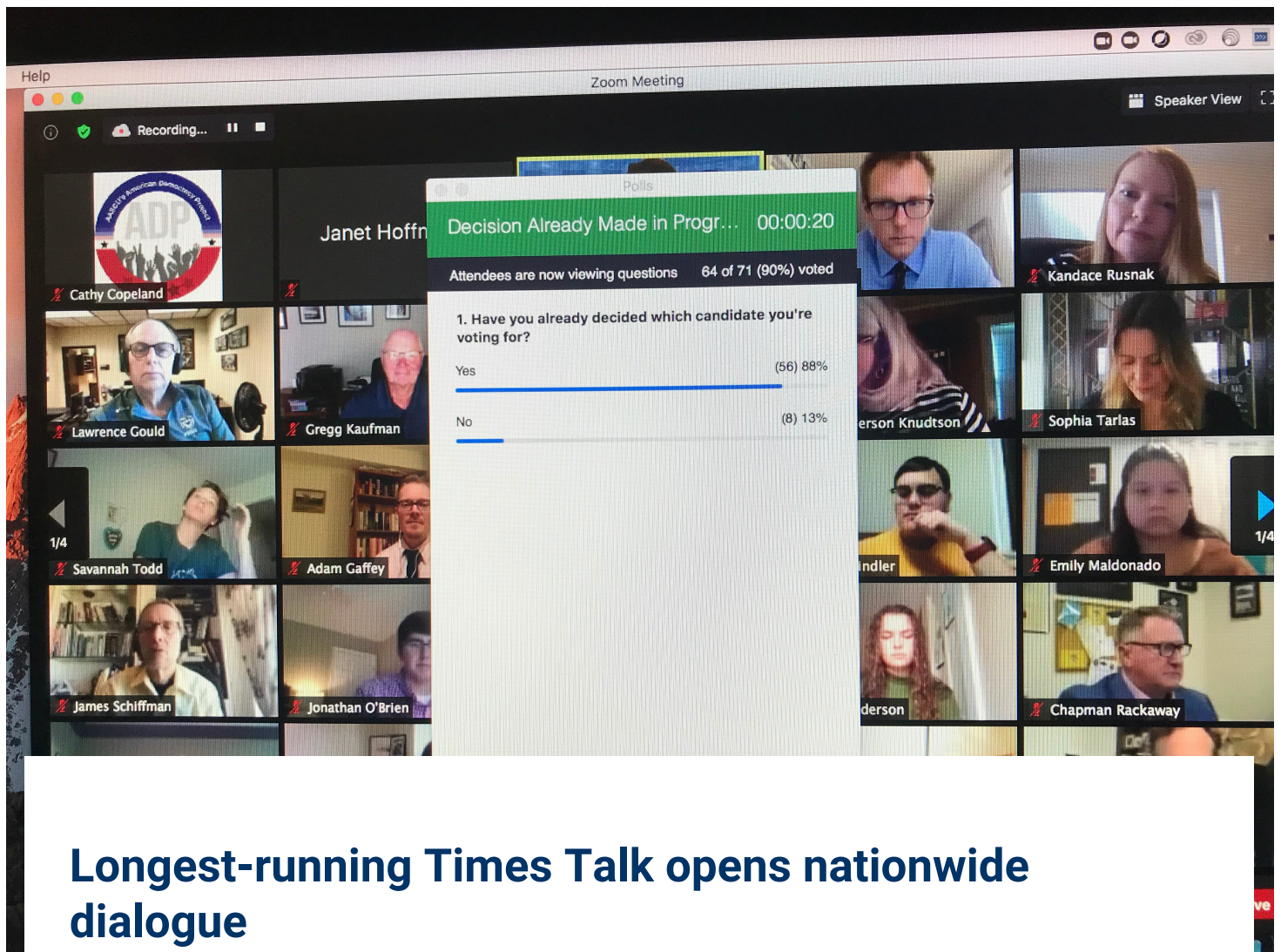
Through it all, students are learning more than ever before—like senior theatre major Fran Smith of Stone Mountain, who studied how to add special effects and backstage scenes by computer. She’s developing 3D designs to incorporate into film.

“We’re giving our students new skills,” Berman said. “I wrote the students in the summer and said, ‘We’re going to make you all film stars. We’re going to teach you how to produce films, which is just going to increase your toolkit as you go out into the real world.’”

"We're doing something important here," she added. "Everyone's feeling it."

(At top: masks were briefly removed for photography purposes only. Normal Theatre protocols are strict regarding mask wearing, social distancing and cleaning of equipment.)

News Stories Posted Friday October 9, 2020



The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting window. At the top, the title bar reads "Zoom Meeting". Below it, a status bar indicates "Recording..." and "Speaker View". The main area is divided into a grid of video feeds and a central poll window. The poll window is titled "Polls" and displays the question: "1. Have you already decided which candidate you're voting for?". The results show "Yes" with 56 votes (88%) and "No" with 8 votes (13%). The poll is titled "Decision Already Made in Progr..." and has a timer of 00:00:20. The grid of participants includes: Cathy Copeland (with an ADP logo), Janet Hoffmann, Lawrence Gould, Gregg Kaufman, Savannah Todd, Adam Gaffey, James Schiffman, Jonathan O'Brien, Candace Rusnak, Sophia Tarlas, Emily Maldonado, and Chapman Rackaway. The ADP logo is a circular emblem with the text "American Democracy Project" and "ADP" in the center.

Longest-running Times Talk opens nationwide dialogue

Student Organizations & Clubs: Friday October 9, 2020

Recently, Georgia College had two opportunities to demonstrate Times Talk—the longest running program like it in the U.S.—for national audiences.

Individuals from 50 U.S. colleges and universities participated in the two, first-ever national conversations titled, "So, what did you think of the debate?" The discussions were held the day after the U.S. Presidential and Vice-Presidential Debates. From Alaska to Delaware, 237 students, faculty, staff and community members chimed in to provide a pulse on how Americans reacted to the debates.

Dr. Jan Hoffmann, professor of rhetoric and campus coordinator of the American Democracy Project (ADP) at Georgia College, is the driving force behind Times Talk. The weekly discussion is an analysis of current events and issues, using New York Times articles to start the conversation. In line with Georgia College's liberal

arts mission, this dialogue is held in pursuit of knowledge and truth for the public good and illustrates the value of engaged citizenship.



Dr. Jan Hoffmann facilitates an in-person Times Talk, held before the pandemic.

“Active traditions of campus and community-wide civic, civil discourse such as ours, are hard to come by, and they matter now more than ever,” said Hoffmann. “We aren’t just located in a community, we are creating community through knowledge, and growing knowledge in and through community.”

Since 2005, community members and Georgia College students, faculty and staff have been voicing their opinion about current events and issues through Times Talk. The group shares pizza while engaging in lively dialogue. Times talk occurs Wednesdays at noon in the Pat Peterson Museum Education room in Russell Library. However, that changed with the COVID-19 pandemic. Now the discussions are held in a virtual setting.

When scheduling allows, on Tuesdays at 8 p.m., WRGC—Milledgeville’s public radio station—hosts interviews with facilitators prior to the Times Talk. Then, Russell Library compiles a LibGuide including radio podcasts, background articles facilitators used in Times Talk and resources. Individuals can check out these items from the library, if they want to learn more about the topics covered in each session.

Times Talk is topic driven, so Hoffmann is continually searching for facilitators who are familiar with the focus of each week's discussion—whether it's alumni, emeritus professors, students, faculty, staff or community members.

"Times Talk is a beautifully packaged, collaborative effort," said Hoffmann. "We just involve so many parts of the campus in generating knowledge. There's a wealth of expertise at Georgia College, and Times Talk provides an opportunity to showcase this each week."



Kendyl Lewis

Georgia College senior Kendyl Lewis facilitated a Times Talk in the spring of 2020 on food insecurity titled "Is food the key to breaking the poverty cycle?"

"Many people don't know what food insecurity is or what programs exist to help individuals who struggle with this issue," she said. "I wanted to use the Times Talk as an opportunity to educate how everyone can play a role in ending food insecurity."

Participants asked questions about the root causes of food insecurity and suggested potential solutions to help solve the problem.

"I always learn so much when I facilitate a Times Talk because the participants ask such thought-provoking questions, and they make me think about how I can continue to educate myself on the topic," Lewis said. "Hearing other people's perspectives helps me become a better advocate for ending food insecurity, and it reignites my deep passion for helping others."

Georgia College junior Jonathan O'Brien has always enjoyed politics. He loves to hear what other people think of world news, so much so, he was a facilitator for the Times Talks analyzing both debates.

“

"Overall, I thought the national discussion was very engaging," O'Brien said. "This serves as a reminder that civil discussions about current issues and events can still happen."

- Jonathan O'Brien

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“Folks in my sessions were not interested in surface-level questions,” O’Brien said. “They wanted to get right into the nitty-gritty of what happened at the Presidential Debate.”

In the first breakout room, O’Brien and participants discussed historical presidential debate moments. They focused on how debates in the past have changed the trajectory of the race and the public’s perception of a particular candidate.

“In the second room, we got into the issues: ‘Should Joe Biden commit one way or the other on the question of adding justices to the Supreme Court if elected?’ This question prompted many responses and got an excellent discussion going,” O’Brien said. “Participants also wanted to talk about the issues most important to them—COVID, healthcare and the lack of foreign policy questions brought before the candidates.”



Jonathan O'Brien

The participants in O’Brien’s breakout rooms came from varying backgrounds, so they provided unique perspectives.

“Overall, I thought the national discussion was very engaging. This serves as a reminder that civil discussions about current issues and events can still happen.”

The two national Times Talks Hoffmann conducted recently were requested by the executive director of the ADP, a lead initiative of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the director of education at the New York Times, who hope to use these events to encourage more individuals to start Times Talks on their campuses.

“I’ve even written a ‘how-to’ guide for starting a Times Talk program, and I’m eager to share our experience and insights with others,” said Hoffmann. “It would be wonderful to have Times Talk on every campus in the U.S.”



Students show their Bobcat spirit in video contest to keep campus safe, together

[University Communications](#) : Friday October 9, 2020

On Sept. 18, Georgia College's Office of University Communications launched a video competition challenging students to show ways they can support each other by following GC's collective values of Reason, Respect and Responsibility. The competition had over 25 student submissions that showcased the energy, creativity and positivity of the Bobcat community. The contest also came with grand cash prizes of \$500 for first place, \$300 for second and \$200 for third.

"I am so proud of our three winners and of all the outstanding Bobcats who submitted videos showing their continued efforts to keep campus safe and together," said Georgia College President Steve Dorman. "They have shown us the true spirit of togetherness and perseverance that Georgia College is known for and what makes our university truly special."

"It is really wonderful to see such creative content being developed by our students and for such a critical public health message," remarked Associate Vice President for Strategic Communications Omar Odeh. "We all need to be reminded of the importance to stay safe and remain vigilant against COVID-19. The creativity we have seen makes that message even more compelling."

[youtube embedcode="xl8u1JSaQpo" style="left"]Rachel Jeneff's video won first place.[/youtube]

The first-place video was submitted by senior exercise science major Rachel Jeneff with help from senior sociology major Abby Leedy, who filmed the video,

and senior criminal justice major Joe Betz, who appeared in the video and contributed vocals. The video depicts Jeneff and Betz, donned in masks, in an ultimate face-off on the tennis court with a rendition of 'Eye of the Tiger' as the vocal track in the back. The three roommates came up with the idea as something to do together and it took off from there.

"One night we were all sitting in our living room, and we were talking about how we should enter the contest," said Jeneff. "Joe mentioned how he wanted tennis, since we have been actively playing tennis intramurals, and 'Eye of the Tiger' in the video. I replied with 'It's the eye of the bobcat' and we decided that we should make a parody."

“

I've still managed to have the college experience by doing small things that bring me joy. - Jenna Puszewski, first-year mass communication major

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First-year psychology major Anna Grace Douberly took second place with her retro-inspired video that took her from the library to the fountain to doing cartwheels on Front Campus.

[youtube embedcode="qiZJwqBa9_o" style="right"]Second place was awarded to Anna Grace Douberly.[/youtube]

"I've always loved making videos, and I attended Savannah Arts Academy for high school where I majored in film studies, so making short video projects is something that I'm experienced in," Douberly said. "I found out about the contest the day before the deadline and put everything down to work on it so I could come up with something unique and fun. I wanted to come up with something that was a little goofy, and I immediately thought of old school PSAs where the 'cool kid' does the right thing. I went with an 80s theme because 'Jump' by Van Halen was the first thing that came to my mind in terms of what music I wanted to use."

The Savannah, Georgia, native was excited to come to campus after being quarantined at home for five months. She wanted to do her part to keep Georgia College together and safe.

"The message is important to me because when our numbers were going up really fast at the start of the year, it was pretty scary and really disappointing seeing students not wearing their masks around campus or going to parties all weekend," she said. "I didn't want my freshman year of college to be cancelled like the end of

my senior year was.”

Third place went to first-year mass communication major Jenna Puszewski, who produced a concise how-to video on ways to beat COVID-19 like wearing a mask, maintaining a 6-foot distance and washing your hands. The video was shot vlog style, where she talked one-on-one with viewers.

[youtube embedcode="jammAyDAFZw" style="left"]Jenna Puszewski received third place honors.[/youtube]

“My idea was to take a more vlog-style approach to the video because I thought it would help the viewers feel like we were having more of a genuine, one-on-one conversation,” she said. “Connection is what is most important to me when creating content.

A theme running throughout all the submissions is an eagerness to stay on campus and finding ways to stay safe and be together, yet apart.

“I’ve still managed to have the college experience by doing small things that bring me joy. I have taken many socially-distanced walks around campus, my suitemates and I have had picnics on front campus (at least six feet away from others) and I have joined some clubs,” Puszewski said. “While doing these simple activities, I have naturally made friends, furthering my college experience during an uncertain, new time.”



Virtual forum enlightens others to be innovative and vigilant to stay safe during COVID-19

Alumni : Friday October 9, 2020

Fifteen individuals participated in a virtual seminar titled “Medical Professionals and Life During COVID-19” in September. The event, hosted by the Georgia College Nursing Alumni Council, was conducted by a panel of health care leaders, who shared their thoughts on staying protected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sarah Parker Tarr, '05, is a full-time lecturer of nursing, including lab and clinical, at Belmont University and secretary of the Georgia College Nursing Alumni Council. She chose to participate in this forum, because COVID-19 has greatly impacted the health care environment.

“As health care professionals, we are all in this together,” she said. “It’s important we have opportunities to share our experiences, learn from one another and reflect on the challenges and successes we’ve encountered during this time.”

The discussion is vital for health care workers as they experience COVID-19 in direct and unique ways.

“As those on the front lines of care, we have a responsibility to remain educated about COVID-19 to provide the best possible care for our patients,” said Tarr. “Health care professionals are overwhelmed, overworked and exhausted from this experience, and it’s far from over.”



Sarah Tarr

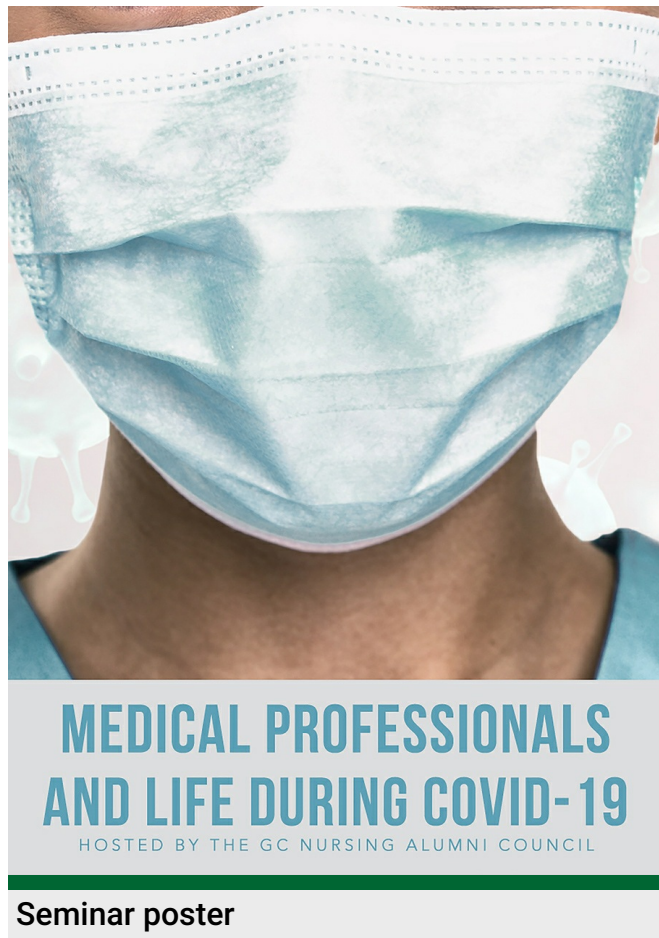
Besides caring for patients and families, health care professionals have a responsibility to care for themselves.

“Allowing ourselves opportunities to reflect, to express our feelings and our experiences is essential to our ability to care for ourselves and to identify positive things that have come from this difficult time,” she said.

“

“Teamwork is the most important thing. You cannot operate in a silo and survive. Each person is gifted with talents and skills, and when you put those talents and skills together as one team, you will be successful.”

- Sondi Traylor Fiegel



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Seminar participants addressed measures that have been implemented to support nurses who’ve been directly impacted by COVID-19 deaths of patients or family/friends. These include offering support through chaplaincy programs, counseling services and other means to address their spiritual and emotional needs.

The forum also proved helpful for non-health care workers. Participants learned the benefits of using task forces to navigate COVID-19 issues; the use of creativity to maintain engagement of employees/students; the effectiveness of infection control measures such as masks, distancing and screenings; the value of teamwork, transparency and the care of oneself and others; as well as the significance of continuing to maintain policies and protocols. One example presented was Georgia College’s use of social media, videos and personal phone calls from faculty and staff to engage students and maintain student enrollment and engagement during the pandemic.

Tarr is pleased with the creativity used by others during this time.

“As we move through this pandemic, it’s important we allow ourselves space and opportunities to share not only our experiences,” she said, “but, also the creative strategies we’ve employed to maintain our safety and the safety of others, while continuing to provide the highest-quality nursing care.”

Sondi Traylor Fiegel, '01, director of Patient Care for the Methodist Medical Group and vice president of the Georgia College Nursing Alumni Council, feels it’s important to share what’s happening on the COVID-19 frontlines and the effects the pandemic has on nursing and health care.

“This is an unprecedented time we’re living in,” she said. “Perhaps those in attendance learned something that will help them down the road when faced with something similar.”

Fiegel feels that working as a team is the key to successfully getting through a crisis.



Sondi Traylor Fiegel

“Teamwork is the most important thing,” she said. “You cannot operate in a silo and survive. Each person is gifted with talents and skills, and when you put those talents and skills together as one team, you will be successful.”

During the COVID crisis, Fiegel collaborated with nurse educators, the registration team, staff nurses, facility workers and others to open a testing site to serve the community surrounding one of the hospitals.

“We were able to conduct 200 tests in a four-hour period,” she said. “This team met weekly to discuss what was and wasn’t working well, make adjustments and provide a successful and much needed service to the community during the four months that the testing site was open.”

Dr. Sheri Noviello, dean of the College of Health Sciences, feels it’s a good idea to make new connections with other nurses and maintain existing relationships through forums such as this one.

“Participating in events like this is probably even more important today, since we’ve been social distancing,” she said. “Nurses need support from other nurses and to know that they are not in this pandemic alone. Many individuals feel isolated during this time and talking about the challenges and the triumphs is therapeutic.”

Noviello deems the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the toughest professional

challenges for everyone. She knows that being flexible and creative are key to surviving this pandemic.

“Not knowing what may happen from one moment to the next iterates the need to try to be a little more patient with others and understand we are all doing our best in these uncertain times,” Noviello said. “Kindness goes a long way.”



Music: the subtle persuader—Trax blazes new trail during 2020 presidential election

[Music, Department of](#) : Friday October 9, 2020



Trax logo.

Picking the right presidential candidate can be tricky in the best of times. Just in time for early voting this month, however, comes something everyone can get behind: music.

Georgia College's updated and improved [Trax on the Trail](#) website is a serious study of the science of music and political strategy. Songs on the campaign trail often evoke nostalgia, even lightheartedness. They boost a candidate or poke fun, halt indecisiveness and influence voters.

Music can also bring people together during a divisive period in history.

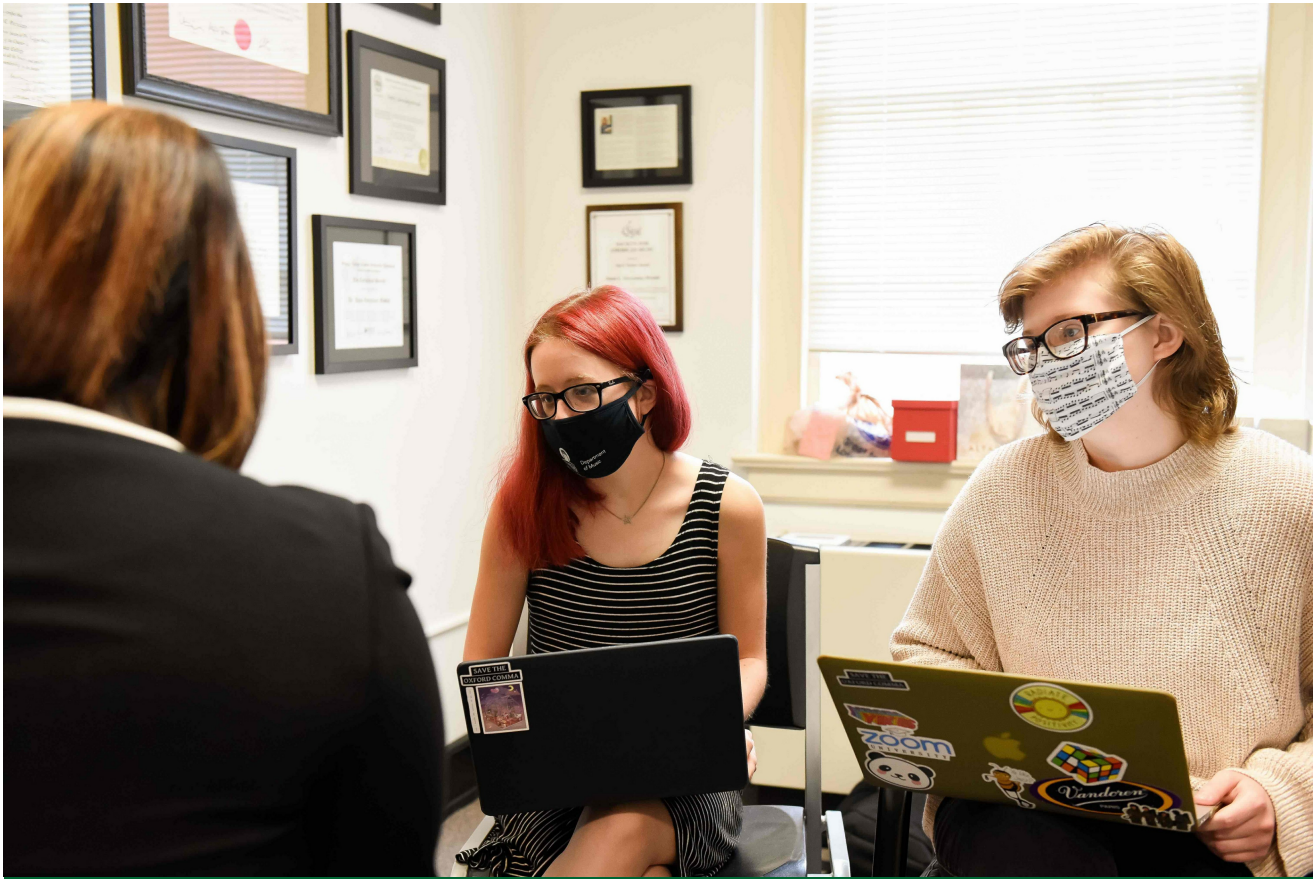
"The work we do at Trax is really important in the sense it combines something that people are often hesitant to talk about, like politics, with something everyone has an opinion about, which is music," said Haley Strassburger, a senior [music](#) education major from Atlanta and research assistant at Trax.

“

By focusing on music candidates use and how it impacts the political soundscape, we're able to simplify the complexity of politics and make it more approachable.

- Strassburger

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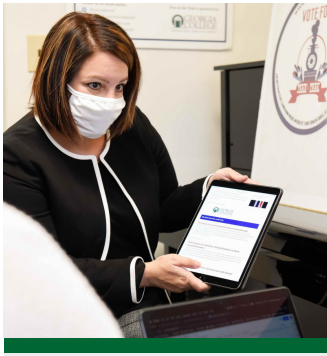


Senior music education majors Haley Strassburger and Sarah Griffin talk with Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak. Strassburger and Griffin are research assistants at Trax.

Since its inception in 2015, Trax on the Trail has been used by journalists nationwide and become an educational tool in classrooms. During the 2016 presidential election, the website got more than 5,000 unique visits per month.

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, people are curious about ways music is used for political gain. So much happens between a candidate's campaign launch and election day. Trax is a "central hub" where scholars and the public can discuss evolving soundscapes and ways songs are employed, said Trax founder and assistant professor of music, Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak.

The Trax database catalogues more than 8,000 songs from the 2016 and 2020



Dr. Gorzelany-Mostak.

campaign trails. There are podcast interviews with music and political experts, as well. The bipartisan team of musicologists, political scientists, educators and Georgia College students are constantly updating information.

Trax's new design features mapping and timeline functions that provide faster, more-fluid engagement with data. The site delivers up-to-the-minute coverage and essays on relevant topics. [One](#) by E. Douglas Bomberger delves into "unsettled times" much like

our own. Events preceding the 1920 election "parallel closely" to 2020 with "a global pandemic, an increase in racial and ethnic injustice" and a president who contracted the Spanish flu virus.

Like then, songs still pique the interest of marginalized voters and reveal strategic shifts in campaigns. Melodies have been known to soothe tension. Slow tempos produce a calming effect. Patriotic songs prompt optimism. Lively beats encourage action.



Image of sheet music. (Courtesy of the Smithsonian)

Since the early days of campaigns, toe-tapping tunes have been associated with presidential candidates. Examples include "[Tippecanoe and Tyler Too](#)," "[Lincoln and Liberty](#)," "[Get on the Raft with Taft](#)," "[Keep Cool and Keep Coolidge](#)" "[Row, Row, Row With Roosevelt](#)" and "[I like Ike](#)." Modern candidates like Lyndon B. [Johnson](#), John F. [Kennedy](#), Richard [Nixon](#) and Jimmy [Carter](#) sustained the trend.

President Donald Trump continues his use of country songs that helped propel him to victory in 2016. Like Ronald [Reagan](#) in the early 1980s—Trump uses Lee Greenwood's "[God Bless the U.S.A.](#)" Former Vice President Joe Biden leans heavily on music President Barack Obama used—rhythm and blues from the

1960s and '70s. During the recent Democratic National Convention, Biden repeatedly used "[My City in Ruins](#)" from Bruce Springsteen's "Rise Up" album.

There are humorous parodies like "[I Think My Dog's a Democrat](#)" and "[Big Bad Don](#)" to keep politics from getting too serious.

“

People come to our site because they find themselves entertained, annoyed or

intrigued by music they hear on the trail. But we hope, as they read our essays and listen to our podcasts, the takeaway will be something more.

- Gorzelany-Mostak

”

“Musical sounds communicate ideas and values, even in the absence of lyrics,” Gorzelany-Mostak said. “We feel it is of vital importance for the public to develop a critical ear and become attuned to the ways political candidates can harness sound as a tool of persuasion.”

COVID has complicated the situation. Songs are still broadcast in commercials, on Twitter and YouTube. But live music performances and fundraising concerts are missing. Presidential candidates are holding fewer campaign rallies, if any at all. This has forced candidates to adopt different musical tactics, Gorzelany-Mostak said.

Senior music education major Sarah Griffin of Warthen, Georgia, documents these cultural shifts. Griffin said she’s “surprised by the sheer quantities of data we’re finding.” Since last fall, Internet traffic on the presidential election has doubled. About 150 different songs and music clips were used at the Democrat convention alone.



Image from Trax website.

“On a societal level,” Griffin said, “the work we do at Trax is important because there are very few, if any, online research projects that explore the dynamic relationship between music and politics.”

Griffin and Strassburger helped design the new website. As research assistants, they maintain the Trax database and log music used by political candidates. This involves spreadsheets that detail the performer, song, event and context. Students conduct interviews with composers, musicians and writers about the current political climate. They post on social media, organize workshops for educators and create promotional materials.

“

It’s incredibly important for us, as consumers to recognize the relationship

between music videos, news, social media and socially-charged events like elections and politics.

- Strassburger

”

Trax has moved them beyond playing instruments in their major to understanding why certain songs are chosen and what music reveals about campaigns. Their work reinforces the importance of being open-minded and critically analyzing what they read and observe.

The students say they’ve become more inquisitive, politically-aware and engaged through Trax.

“It’s incredibly important for us, as consumers,” Strassburger said, “to recognize the relationship between music videos, news, social media and socially-charged events like elections and politics.”

News Stories Posted Thursday October 15, 2020



Recent studies show Georgia College students highly engaged

[GC Journeys](#) : Thursday October 15, 2020

Providing students with a well-rounded, highly-engaged learning experience is a pillar of the Georgia College education.

At Georgia's designated public liberal arts institution, we intentionally work to give our students opportunities to step outside of their usual surroundings, gain authentic experiences, solve problems, become a leader, participate in real-world settings and put ideas into action.

A recent study proves our students receive those opportunities and more.

"The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is a national survey which is administered by almost every college and university in the United States," said Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate provost for transformative experiences. "It's designed to collect data from first-year and senior students to report the quality of the undergraduate experience to faculty, administrators, researchers and others."

The survey compares students from across the country based on several pillars. Georgia College first-year students showed no significant difference when

compared to other universities. However, Georgia College seniors exceeded national peers in a variety of categories including “Collaborative Learning,” “Student-Faculty Interaction,” “Supportive Environment,” “Reflective & Integrated Learning” and “Discussions with Diverse Others.”



Alternate Text

“This means while GC first-year students enter on par with our peer groups, they leave as seniors exceeding their peer groups in several different areas,” said Cofer. “This is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the engagement and experiences that students receive during their time at GC.”

“The survey highlights GC student’s high participation rates in high-impact practices, which make up part of the GC Journeys Initiative,” said Cofer.

The GC Journeys Program encourages students to take advantage of five inside-and outside-the-classroom transformative experiences during their time at Georgia College. The program includes the first-year experience, career planning milestones and the senior capstone course, which are all required. Each student can then personalize their experience by choosing to take part in at least two other options: study abroad, community-based engaged learning, undergraduate research, an internship or leadership programs.



Kendyl Lewis

Senior Kendyl Lewis knows firsthand the advantages of these high-impact practices. The double major in psychology and economics has taken part in several during her time at GC and uses those experience to supplement her education.

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Participating in leadership programs, an internship and undergraduate research has really allowed me to apply what I've been learning in the classroom into real-world settings—so really taking that liberal arts mission to heartt

- Kendyl Lewis

“Participating in leadership programs, an internship and undergraduate research has really allowed me to apply what I've been learning in the classroom into real-world settings—so really taking that liberal arts mission to heart,” said Lewis. “They allow me to not just think about the classes I’m taking in my majors, but also how can I think about those in a way that might prepare me for a career or to be a better leader in my community one day.”

Among her many accolades, Lewis founded the student organization Swipe Out Hunger during her first-year at Georgia College. She credits that experience as laying the foundation for her continued engagement and desire to broaden her knowledge.

“I didn't come into college thinking that I'd be able to start my own student organization, but with the help of leadership programs, and some of my mentors here, I found out that I had this ability to lead others and to really focus on a mission,” said Lewis. “That's something that I really got out of leadership programs.”



Cameron Watts

Recent alumnus, Cameron Watts, '20, continues to see the benefits of taking part in study abroad and leadership programs—two of the high-impact practices.

“A big part of my experience was doing a study abroad at Oxford and in Heidelberg, Germany. Because I was able to do that and be independent, I became a lot more comfortable pursuing new opportunities and new places,” said Watts, who just recently started a new job.

“I've been a Georgia boy my whole life, but there was this opportunity in Philadelphia, and I wanted to go pursue it,” said Watts. “I had all the tools and the confidence that I needed to pursue my dreams in a way that I don't think I would have if I hadn't been at Georgia College.”

The goal for Cofer is that all students have this sort of life-changing experience, and the NSSE results affirm the efforts are working.

“It shows the kind of the quality of education that they're getting during those four years,” said Cofer.” If they come into Georgia College on par with every other

student, but they leave excelling nationally, it shows we're doing something right.”

These results come on the heels of similar findings in the 2019 Indiana University High-Impact Practices Quality study. Georgia College was selected to participate in that study, which showed the quality of the high-impact practices and student engagement. With 453 students

participating, the study found that Georgia College was performing at or above national levels, especially in the areas of undergraduate research and study abroad



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Ultimately, these results show that the opportunities that students have through GC Journeys and education that students receive at Georgia College is putting them ahead of national peers.

- Dr. Jordan Cofer

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View the full NSSE report [here.](#)

News Stories Posted Friday October 16, 2020



Board of Regents approves naming of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College

[Honors College](#) : Friday October 16, 2020



From left to right: Honors College Dean Brian Newsome, GC President Steve Dorman, Provost Costas Spirou and Professor Emeritus Ken Saladin cut the ribbon in front of the Humber-White House.

The Board of Regents approved the naming of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College at a meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 13. Sallstrom was the founder of the Honors Program at Georgia College and a staunch supporter of giving high-caliber students unique learning opportunities.

“The namesake of our Honors College is Dr. John Sallstrom, whom I’ve had a long-lasting professional relationship,” said Dr. Ken Saladin, who recently gifted \$1 million to embark the

Honors Program off on its new mission as a designated college within the university. “He began here seven years before me and came to Georgia College as chair of the religion and philosophy department.”

Sallstrom heavily encouraged students to explore leadership and innovation throughout their studies at Georgia College. In 1973, he helped students initiate the Honors Student Association, later renamed Eta Sigma Alpha. In 1996, he

established the Honors and Scholars Endowment Fund to provide additional long-term financial support for the program.

“I think Dr. Sallstrom’s biggest contribution to Honors at Georgia college was being a visionary,” said Saladin. “He conceived of the idea that we should have an Honors Program even when we were a small, local college. He wanted to do something special for high-caliber students and give them special learning opportunities.”

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The Honors Program and now, the Honors College, is the crown jewel of Georgia College- Dr. Ken Saladin, professor emeritus

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Throughout Honors history, the program has had three directors: Dr. John Sallstrom, Dr. Doris Moody and Dr. Steven Elliot-Gower. Dr. Brian Newsome was selected as the Honors College inaugural dean this year and he will spearhead its future as the fifth official college at the university.

“It’s about raising the profile of honors at Georgia College,” Newsome said. “An honors college means having the resources for transformative experiences. When I interviewed here, I found a deep appreciation for that type of honors community, and that appealed to me.”

As part of the overhaul of Honors at the university, the Humber-White House has been renovated into “a vibrant hub” for honors activities. Space includes a kitchen for food receptions, lounge and study areas and the Doris C. Moody Seminar Room for “dynamic conversations.”

“The Honors Program and now, the Honors College, is the crown jewel of Georgia College,” Saladin said. “It epitomizes what it means to teach students how to think –not what to think but how to think analytically, collaboratively and across disciplines.”

To commemorate 50 years of Honors at Georgia College, and to mark the opening of the new John E. Sallstrom Honors College, join in a Zoom-based celebration during Alumni Week, on Nov. 5 at 6:30 p.m. The celebration will feature a short film of the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Humber-White House, comments by President Steven Dorman and Provost Costas Spirou, a history of the Honors Program and reflections on the path that lies before the new Honors College. It will also have a directors’ panel featuring each of the previous Honors directors: Dr. John Sallstrom, Dr. Doris Moody and Dr. Steve Elliott-Gower. The evening

concludes with a 360-degree video tour of the Humber-White House.

To join the virtual 50th-anniversary celebration of Honors at Georgia College, please register [here](#).

News Stories Posted Monday October 19, 2020



Georgia College's Hillel opens house for Jewish students

[Student Organizations & Clubs](#) : Monday October 19, 2020

Georgia College's Hillel was established 12 years ago—but it never had an actual house. Until now.

Thanks to recent assistance from the GC Foundation, 200 Jewish students have a place to call their own.

"It's mind blowing. This all coincided at the same time. The stars aligned," said Dr. Karen Berman, artistic director and chair of theatre and dance and advisor of Hillel at Georgia College.

"To find a house within walking distance to campus is remarkable on its own," she said, "and we've found a beautiful house. It's like the heavens opened up and rained down gifts on us."



Dr. Karen Berman

Hillel International—The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life is an organization named after Hillel the Elder, a Jewish sage in the first century known for developing the “Golden Rule.” Many universities and colleges have houses for their Hillel groups—which offer Jewish students a safe meeting space.

About a year ago, GC Foundation purchased a brick house on N.

Clarke Street as an investment property. The foundation’s Real Property Committee, led by Max Crook, had the house renovated, and many potential uses were considered. Berman and local donors hoped to lease the house, but they didn’t have the money for long-term payments.

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This shows the dedication of both Georgia College and Hillels of Georgia. This tells parents of prospective students there’s a supportive environment here for their children. That makes a big difference.

- Dr. Karen Berman

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In stepped Elliot Karp, CEO of Hillels of Georgia. He was impressed by what Berman calls “a small and mighty Hillel” and the group’s ability to achieve what larger schools accomplish without funding or resources, like hosting Holocaust survivor talks and art exhibits. Karp agreed to set up a sponsorship campaign to collect donations for the lease and additional programming.

The news was published in the [Atlanta Jewish Times](#), and Georgia College President Dr. Steve Dorman provided the first donation.

“This shows the dedication of both Georgia College and Hillels of Georgia,” Berman said. “This tells parents of prospective students there’s a supportive environment here for their children. That makes a big difference.”

“Now, we’ll have the house and a sign out front,” she said. “It’s going to be real.”

Senior communications major Abbie Frankel of Marietta is president of Hillel. When applying to the university, Frankel was discouraged to learn there was no house for Hillel. But she was happy to find a Hillel group, because she said it’s important to

associate with other Jewish students while away from home.



Hillel President Abbie Frankel (left) and Rachel Jeneff (right) hand out bagels for the Yom Kippur holiday.

Although a rabbi visits campus regularly, the nearest synagogue is 45 minutes away in Macon. This makes the campus Hillel a vital link, connecting Jewish students with their culture and religion. Having a house gives them a place to make meals that accommodate a kosher lifestyle. Recently, the group held a “Break-Fast” meal at sunset with bagels on their front lawn for the Yom Kippur holiday. They also held a grab-and-go boxed Shabbat dinner and a Rosh Hashanah event with traditional apples, honey and challah.

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It’s truly difficult for me to put into words what this means to me as a student.

- Abbie Frankel

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“It’s truly difficult for me to put into words what this means to me as a student,” Frankel said. “This home opens so many doors for our current and future students.”

“Getting this space makes me feel it’s official in a way. That may sound silly,” she said. “But, previously, we were an organization that couldn’t hold events if we couldn’t find a place to host them.”

Hillel Houses also act as an important recruiting tool for prospective students. Berman fields hundreds of calls from parents, inquiring if the university has a Hillel House. It’s not always enough to have a group. Without an actual house, she said, many parents simply hang up and look elsewhere.

Hillels of Georgia provides capital for multiple Hillel Houses throughout the state. So, Berman believes funding will continue for many years to come.

The new house has plenty of room for meetings, study areas and a lounge for relaxation and movie nights. The group will hold game activities and multi-cultural events there, as well. The kitchen, bathroom, wood floors, screened-in porch and roof have been renovated. The front sidewalk was also repaired and landscaping done.



Hillel members in front of their new house.

Due to COVID-19, dedication of the house has been postponed until large crowds can gather. All former Hillel board members will be invited. A rabbi will come to bless the house with doorposts containing the Ten Commandments.

Until then, the group will meet at the house in small numbers—social distancing with masks.

It’s more than they could’ve hoped for.

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This solidifies our place on campus. I’m eternally grateful for the opportunities being presented to us as an organization right now. Our physical property might seem like a small thing, but it’s truly so huge for us

- Senior Abbie Frankel

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News Stories Posted Tuesday October 20, 2020



Georgia College ranks third in state system for four-year graduation rate

[University Communications](#) : Tuesday October 20, 2020

Georgia College is well ahead of the national average for institutions that graduate students in four years. A recent 3 point increase places Georgia College third in the state's university system, as well—a sign of innovative programming and commitment to student success.

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It shows we're providing a life-transforming and highly-engaged experience that helps prepare students for a lifetime of success.

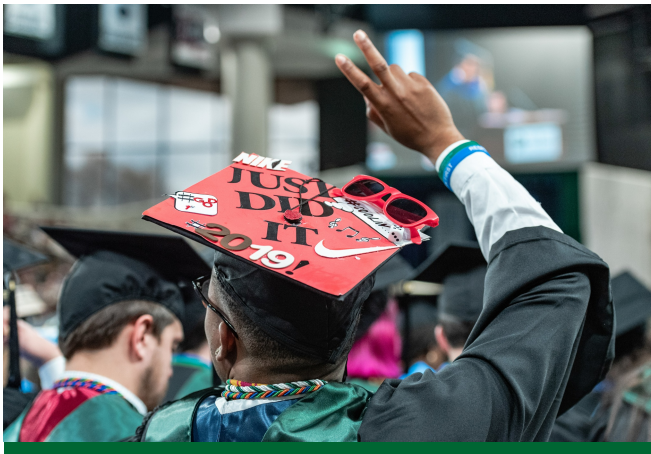
- Dr. Steve Dorman, university president

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“This is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the education, support provided on campus and experiences that students receive during their time at GC,” said Dr. Steve Dorman, university president. “It shows we’re providing a life-transforming and highly-engaged experience that helps prepare students for a lifetime of success.”

Georgia College’s four-year graduation rate rose 3 points over last year—putting it 32 percent higher than the national average for public universities, which is 38.8 percent. The new rate is 17 percent higher than the overall national average, 43.7 percent, that includes private institutions.

This achievement shows the university’s working efficiently to give students what they need—saving the “precious resource of their time” and lowering the financial burden on families, according to Suzanne Pittman, associate vice president of Enrollment Management.



Graduation scene

In fact, Georgia College has an extremely low student loan default rate—just under 3 percent—one of the lowest in the state. Graduating on time puts students into the job market sooner, so they can begin their earning potential.

Getting a bachelor’s degree in four years also makes students more competitive for graduate schools and professions like law or medicine.

“Any time you can show a proven track record of success, it demonstrates you’re focused,” Pittman said. “It shows other schools and potential employers that you’re a serious contender, and you can handle academically-challenging material.”

The university raised its four-year graduation rate by more than 12 points in the past 10 years. At 51.2 percent, however, there’s still room for improvement. Numbers nationwide remain low on average, officials said, because students change majors, decide to include more courses for a minor, take time off from studies for personal reasons or tackle fewer credits to maintain their HOPE scholarships.

“Our priority is to provide students a well-rounded education and for them to graduate in four years,” said Dr. Costas Spirou, provost and vice president of Academic Affairs.

“Much of the credit for the increase in our four-year graduation rate goes to our highly-committed faculty and staff,” he said, “who are dedicated to teaching and work closely with our students both inside and outside the classroom to achieve their goals.”

The university did several things in recent years that impacted the four-year graduation rate, Pittman noted. A professional advising model was established, giving advisors the ability to focus on individual plans for student progress. In freshman seminar, students use a computer program to academically map out their college years. This forces students to think about their future, finish mandated courses early and put forethought into career management.



Graduation scene

Georgia College also invested more funds into the Learning Center, providing tutors and supplemental instruction for those who are struggling. A teaching model, Math Emporium, helps students better understand college algebra.

As part of Georgia College’s unique GC Journeys program, students as early as freshman year interact with counselors at the Career Center. The program ensures every student engages in multiple high-impact, transformational experiences. Practices—like undergraduate research, internships, study abroad and community-based learning—broaden and enrich the college years.

When students participate in these kinds of encounters, they’re more engaged on campus and do better in class. As result, they’re more likely to stay on track and graduate on time.

Georgia College connects its common core curriculum directly to the national LEAP (Liberal Education and America’s Promise) essentials—which include critical thinking and quantitative reasoning. A recent National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) showed Georgia College’s graduating seniors exceeding in areas like reflective, integrated and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction and “discussions with diverse others.”

The University System of Georgia (USG) helped steer this progress with programs like Momentum Year, Complete College Georgia and Gateways to Completion. USG

has “done a tremendous job” framing the route to success—encouraging schools to share ideas and work towards common goals, Pittman said.

“The level of engagement we provide has to be a good thing,” Pittman said. “Fortune 500 companies are looking for graduates with well-rounded educations, who are job ready and able to adjust to new settings, who work well in groups and think critically.”

“These are all things a liberal arts education focuses on,” she said, “so that resonates with parents and prospective students.”



Graduation scene

News Stories Posted Thursday October 22, 2020



Four generations of physics students install solar panel at BCHS

[Chemistry, Physics, & Astronomy, Department of](#): Thursday October 22, 2020



Photos courtesy of Ava Leone.

It takes four pairs of hands to make the light bulb go on. Plus, a little sun and some physics.

A group of Georgia College physics majors recently installed a solar panel at Baldwin County High School (BCHS). They represented all four years of college—from freshman to a senior who graduated last May. It was the university's first off-campus solar project—delayed slightly from the spring, due to COVID-19.

This was the most exciting part for me, seeing the transfer of knowledge from my physics scholar, Bo, on down to Evan, our freshman.

- Dr. Mahabaduge

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“This was the most exciting part for me, seeing the transfer of knowledge from my physics scholar, Bo, on down to Evan, our freshman,” said Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge, assistant professor of physics.

Every year, Mahabaduge gives a seminar on physics to honors students, who have that “little extra something” about them. The seminars are a recruitment tool for Mahabaduge. Inevitably, after each, a student will email him looking to do more. This time, it was a freshman from Acworth, Evan Dunnam.

Dunnam zeroed in on a point Mahabaduge made regarding his solar panel research. He emailed the professor to ask if there were any solar projects coming up. Mahabaduge said, “Yes, there’s one this weekend.”

Last month, Dunnam joined three other students: alumnus Bo Cavender, who works at a textile manufacturing company while applying to graduate schools; junior Catherine Boyd and sophomore Caleb Cardinal. Dunnam never thought he’d be doing research and working with upperclassmen so early in college.

Now, he’s interested in pursuing aerospace engineering.

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It helped me learn about electricity, and it got me curious to get into it a little bit more, because there’s so much I don’t know that I’d like to know.

- Evan Dunnam

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“It’s opened up a couple doors for projects in the future,” Dunnam said. “I came in not knowing the first thing about solar panels. The most interesting part for me was doing hands-on work with a breaker box that was connected to the solar panel and a charge controller, an inverter and stuff I’d never even heard of.”

“It helped me learn about electricity,” he said, “and it got me curious to get into it a little bit more, because there’s so much I don’t know that I’d like to know.”

In 2019, BCHS officials approached Georgia College’s Office of Sustainability for help installing a solar panel they received as a donation. They wanted to bring power to a small shed used for gardening projects at the school.

Sustainability officers got in touch with Mahabaduge, who had his students come up with a list of materials they needed to do the job. Then, Cavender scripted a plan and acted as supervisor, delegating work to the other students.

All plans seem perfect on paper, Mahabaduge said. But, in life, problems arise. The first obstacle was the shed faced the wrong direction. For all-day sunlight, it needed to be moved to a new cement foundation facing south.



Caleb Cardinally (left) with Catherine Boyd (right) and Bo Cavender (bottom right).

Once that was done, the students arrived for installation and soon discovered they had mis-measured the roof's angle. Nail holes, made in wrong places, had to be resealed. Boxes were opened, only for students to find parts missing. A half-day project took all day.

Having to “think on their feet” and solve unexpected problems is part of the learning process, Mahabaduge said. It reflects what students will experience in the real workplace.



Alumnus Bo Cavender installs solar panel at BCHS.

In the end, the panel was mounted with nuts and bolts at the right angle to catch the sun. It connects to two batteries, which will generate up to 300 watts of energy—giving the BCHS shed enough “off-the-grid” electricity to power tools and a light for several hours a day.

This collaborative effort with BCHS “provides a lasting economic impact and will hopefully inspire local students to pursue careers in science,” said Dr. Chavonda Mills, chair of physics, chemistry and astronomy.

Inspiring others is one reason Boyd got involved with the project. The Columbus resident thinks it’s important to be a role model for high school girls—showing them women can be successful in science. Like Dunnam, Boyd started in Mahabaduge’s research lab as a freshman. She’s on track to get a dual degree in mechanical engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and she’d like to work at NASA.

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It was surprising to jump right into research my first year. I didn’t know that was unusual, until I started presenting at conferences, and people would ask if I was a junior. By giving us the opportunity to do research as an undergrad, Dr. Mahabaduge has definitely given us a step-up on other students.

- Catherine Boyd

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News Stories Posted Thursday October 29, 2020



New Andalusia Institute has robust opening

[Andalusia Institute](#) : Thursday October 29, 2020

It was a bizarre time to begin a new job—let alone launch an organization from scratch.

COVID-19 quickly turned Dr. Irene Burgess' new position as inaugural executive director of Georgia College's new Andalusia Institute into a quagmire of possible pitfalls. But the opening was 'virtually' flawless.

"It's gratifying that we've been able to develop the start of an Andalusia Institute culture, despite the challenges of the



Dr. Irene Burgess

time,” Burgess said. “Actually, COVID was one of the better things that happened to us. It gave me time to work on our virtual presence, create a Facebook page and establish ourselves in a way that’s really unique.”

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Actually, COVID was one of the better things that happened to us. It gave me time to work on our virtual presence, create a Facebook page and establish ourselves in a way that’s really unique.

- Dr. Irene Burgess

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Putting events online turned out to be a smart move—amplifying the works of famed author and alumna Flannery O’Connor, while introducing the institute to a wider audience. People worldwide tune in for lively discussions about O’Connor’s novels, short stories and essays.

Before the pandemic, Burgess planned to begin slowly, building up the institute with author visits and readings. COVID changed that direction, and Burgess couldn’t be happier with the results. More than 200 people are registered to participate in virtual events—the most popular given by English Professor Dr. Bruce Gentry.

For years, Gentry led a monthly discussion on O’Connor with residents in Eatonton. Online, his sessions have blossomed into a bimonthly international affair. Viewers from all over the United States—as well as Italy, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Argentina and Turkey—link into his Zoom programs. People who can’t otherwise travel to Andalusia find a sense of community, connection and common interest with likeminded readers via computer.

Andalusia Institute’s online programs also sparked global interest in Milledgeville, Georgia history, Southern studies and mid-20th century literature.

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This little thing in Eatonton once a month is now worldwide because of coronavirus.

- Burgess

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“This little thing in Eatonton once a month is now worldwide because of

coronavirus,” Burgess said. “Only half the audience are scholars. Some are just happy to have someone to talk to because of COVID. Others are fanatic about her books. They love her and they love her books, but they never had anyone to talk to about it. Now they have an outlet.”

Burgess understands the magnetism of O’Connor’s peculiar, charming and sometimes gruesome stories. She grew up in rural Maine and sees many of her townsfolk in the quirky mannerism of O’Connor’s characters. In high school, Burgess read O’Connor and marveled at a world much like her own. Her father was a chicken farmer, before working at a local factory and eventually moving the family to New Hampshire.

She left to get an undergraduate degree in agricultural economics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Burgess worked as a line supervisor at food production plants, before deciding she’d rather read and discuss books for a living. She got her master’s in English at the University of New Hampshire, then a Ph.D. in women writers and English literature of the 16th century at SUNY Binghamton University in New York.

From there, Burgess did a number of things. She taught at Wheeling Jesuit University, where she became chair of the English department. She was associate dean for academic affairs at Wilmington College in Ohio, then provost at Eureka College in Illinois; vice president of academic programming at the Appalachian College Association; and head of a scholastic consortium in Pennsylvania.

But she was looking for something different.



The Flannery O'Connor farmhouse at Georgia College's Andalusia.

Burgess saw an ad for Georgia College, which was starting an institute based on one of her favorite post-modern writers. She jumped at the chance to visit campus and see where O’Connor got her undergraduate degree in sociology. Burgess couldn’t wait to tour the Andalusia farmhouse, where O’Connor spent her remaining years writing and suffering from Lupus—a devastating inflammatory disease when the immune

system attacks its own tissues.

Becoming head of a new institute based on O’Connor was a rare chance to build something from the ground up. Burgess was intrigued and jumped at the

opportunity—bringing along skills uniquely suited to the job like her experience starting organizations and raising funds, as well as her interest in literature and O'Connor.

At her interview, Burgess asked Georgia College administrators the “why” question. Why did they think it was a good idea to start an institution based on the writer? University President Dr. Steve Dorman gave a satisfying answer. He said the famous alumna had to go elsewhere for a masters in Fine Arts. He wanted “future Flannery O’Connors” to get the support they need here.



Flannery O'Connor's bedroom at Andalusia.

This answer so captivated Burgess that she’s planning a future writing residency on 487 acres of land behind the Andalusia property. She hopes to build individual houses and a writing center with advanced accessibility and supports for the disabled. She feels this would best honor O’Connor, who walked with crutches due to her illness. The author developed Lupus in her mid 20s and died at age 39, while living at Andalusia

with her mother. Nearly all of her short stories, novels, essays and letters were written during those years.

Burgess envisions a writing residency for all people, but one especially equipped to assist people with all types of disabilities. There are other writing residencies in the country. Out of 5,000 higher education schools, however, maybe 50 are tied to alumni writers. None are built to uniquely support the disabled.

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There’s this whole group of artists, who have disabilities...We’re building something from scratch. Why not build something that’s highly accessible? Build it so everyone can use it.

- Burgess

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“There’s this whole group of artists, who have disabilities. About one-in-five people in the U.S. has a disability,” Burgess said. “One of the problems with writing residencies—many are in old houses converted to be accessible. We’re building something from scratch. Why not build something that’s highly accessible? Build it

so everyone can use it. Make it easier for all people.”

“It will be a challenge,” she said. “But it could also be very appealing and distinctive.”

Another idea Burgess is working on involves collecting and preserving memories of O'Connor. Burgess is taking Dr. Stephanie Opperman's oral history class to learn more about the art of historical storytelling. The oral history project is being podcasted and kept at Ina Dillard Russell Library. A student from Gentry's Southern literature class is busy transcribing interviews from people who remember O'Connor and members of her family.



The rocking chair front porch at Andalusia, where Georgia College students met the author for literary chats.

While living at Andalusia, O'Connor kept in touch with former professors. College literary groups often visited the farmhouse in the spring, sitting in rocking chairs with O'Connor on the front porch. Every Monday night, O'Connor was part of a reading and discussion group in Milledgeville—called “The Quart Club,” because each member brought a quart of ice cream. People remember their parents talking about the club and how O'Connor read her stories out loud.

Working here, I've become aware of her as an individual. People tell stories about her. I go to the Andalusia museum so often, and I talk to scholars and people who met her. She's become real to me.

- Burgess

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Several university scholars help lead discussions for the institute's monthly virtual events—like Jordon Cofer, associate provost of Transformative Learning Experiences, and Dr. Carolyn Denard, associate vice president and chief diversity officer in the Office of Inclusive Excellence. Various people know O'Connor's work and life history well and have tidbits to offer—like Nancy Davis Bray, associate director of Special Collects at the library; and Monica Miller, head of the Flannery O'Connor Association in Macon and professor at Middle Georgia State University. Monthly events are also being used to highlight emerging new authors, like Yaa Gyasi.

Georgia College was an intellectual hub for O'Connor, and Burgess wants the Andalusia Institute to continue this tradition. Along with the Andalusia museum, the institute will keep the memory of O'Connor and her work alive and vibrant.

“It's kind of a thrill,” Burgess said. “I've taken this deep dive into reading and understanding Flannery.”

“Working here, I've become aware of her as an individual,” she said. “People tell stories about her. I go to the Andalusia museum so often, and I talk to scholars and people who met her. She's become real to me.”