

Front Page News Story Archive

November 2022



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
News Stories Posted Monday November 7, 2022	3
Pre-med mentoring program has 100% application success rate to medical school	3
News Stories Posted Tuesday November 8, 2022	13
Building and fire safety director got his edge from transformative experiences at GCSU	13
News Stories Posted Wednesday November 9, 2022	18
Rear Admiral's visit highlights university's long relationship with Navy	18
News Stories Posted Friday November 11, 2022	21
Exceptional steward of the environment inspires scholarship	21
News Stories Posted Monday November 21, 2022	27
Thunder's creator leaves cherished icon for GCSU and the community	27
News Stories Posted Tuesday November 22, 2022	34
Class of 2022: Student sees herself growing in the computer industry	34
News Stories Posted Wednesday November 23, 2022	37
Everyone Wins: Visiting scholar programs strengthen university	37
News Stories Posted Wednesday November 30, 2022	42
Class of 2022: Biology major is all a student can be	42

News Stories Posted Monday November 7, 2022



Pre-med mentoring program has 100% application success rate to medical school

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Monday November 7, 2022

They say going to college is like drinking from a water fountain—in medical school, a fire hose.

At Georgia College & State University, a group of pre-med students already know what it's like to drink from a hose and withstand the deluge.

They have a mentor by their side.

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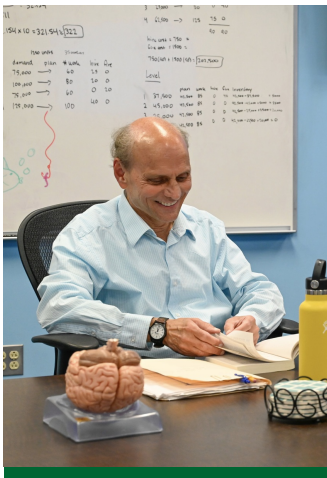
Private tutoring sessions for the MCAT exam would cost thousands of dollars. But, here, we have Dr. Hegde.

- Sarah Fix

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When senior Sarah Fix of Fayetteville, Georgia, switched her [biology](#) major concentration from nursing to pre-med, she checked resources at other schools.

“There’s nothing comparable to this,” Fix said. “Private tutoring sessions for the MCAT exam would cost thousands of dollars. But, here, we have Dr. Hegde.”



Dr. Ashok Hegde

Dr. Ashok Hegde is the William Harvey Endowed Professor of Biomedical Science at Georgia College. In 2016, he took over the university’s [pre-med mentorship program](#) from Dr. Kenneth Saladin, distinguished professor emeritus of biology, who wanted to better equip tomorrow’s medical students.

The results of Saladin’s vision have been nothing short of astounding.

Since the program started in 2009, every student who applied to medical school has been accepted.

Every single one.

In 14 years, only a handful of students decided not to pursue medicine. Some opted for health-related jobs with fewer working hours. The rest—about 140—got into medical school.

That's unusual.

But so is the mentorship itself.

Most universities have larger pre-med numbers—but only an academic advisor to help students along. Advising generally means one meeting and a brochure.

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There's not a program like this in Georgia or anywhere in the country. I talk to people at national conferences. I dug online. As far as I can tell, there is not a comparable program anywhere. There are varying degrees of pre-med advising but not pre-med mentoring. There's a huge difference. It's not about giving them a little bit of information. It's about actually preparing them with all the skills that they require. I don't leave anything to chance.

- Dr. Ashok Hegde

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To underscore how unusual the 100% application rate is—one only has to look at admission rates for medical school.

Prior to coming to Georgia College, Hegde taught first- and second-year students at Wake Forest Medical School in North Carolina. Part of that job was interviewing prospective students. During that time, Wake Forest received about 8,000 med-school applications. Only 500 were chosen for interviews and roughly 200 accepted. The average class size was about 120.

That's about a 2.5% chance of success.

Even more troubling: According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AMMC), as many as 18.4% of medical students drop out during four years of medical school.

That's why Hegde accepted the position at Georgia College.

Med students at Wake Forest often told him they wished they'd been better prepared and knew what they were getting into.

Some—like two former undergraduates—come specifically to Georgia College because of its pre-med seminar. They'd gotten into the University of Georgia's medical school but heard of Georgia College's mentoring program and transferred.



Senior Sarah Fix and Junior Carter Coursey in the medical culture seminar.

Junior biology major and pre-med student Carter Coursey of Loganville, Georgia, also came for the mentorship. When he heard about the 100% application success during an admissions tour, he turned to his father and said, “Whoa. This is what separates this school from all the others. This is the right place for me.”

Coursey wanted to be a doctor since high school. He loves science and enjoys helping people. The chance to impact lives on a daily basis appealed to him. He hopes to become a dermatologist or orthopedic surgeon.

Like so many other pre-med students before him, however, Coursey wasn't sure he was good enough. What if he messed up the school's 100% application rate by failing to get into medical school?

“

...when you have someone like Dr. Hegde in your corner, you say, 'I've got this.' He's definitely lowered my anxiety because I feel like I'm more prepared. This seminar makes me feel like I can succeed in med school.

- Carter Coursey

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But there's something special about having a mentor on your side.

Someone who believes in you and helps you believe in yourself.

It creates confidence. Now, Coursey knows he'll make it.

"There's been many times in a class, when I've been struggling with a topic, I think, 'This is hard,'" he said. "There are other majors I could do that are easier than this, and I think, 'Do I want to do this? Can I do this?'"

"But when you have someone like Dr. Hegde in your corner, you say, 'I've got this,'" Coursey said. "He's definitely lowered my anxiety because I feel like I'm more prepared. This seminar makes me feel like I can succeed in med school."

"My day brightens every time I see Dr. Hegde," he added.

To create this kind of self-assuredness, Hegde covers all bases. Seminars are not about note-taking or quizzes. There are no lectures. There are no grades, only satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

It's all active learning.

The medical culture seminar is part of the university's newly-named Biomedical Science concentration and meets two hours a week. Students are in seminar for at least two semesters and up to four. All aspects of what it takes to become a medical student are covered: How long it takes to study for the national medical exam, MCAT; how to write riveting personal essays for applications; and what to say at medical school interviews.

Seminars also cover what it's like to be a doctor. Hegde tells his students—it's not like Grey's Anatomy on TV.

Students read and discuss books written by doctors. They watch Ted Talks; interact with visiting physicians and former pre-med students; and do real case studies, normally reserved for medical school.

Students love this part of the seminar. Every time Hegde announces a new case study, they cheer.

They get to play doctor, going step-by-step through the process of correctly diagnosing an illness. As a patient's symptoms and history unfold, Hegde asks, "What are you thinking? What's your hypothesis?" The goal is to understand the disease but also the treatment.

“

I’m looking for potential. It’s not about being bright and hardworking. Not everyone is cut out for medicine. It requires a certain kind of person. That’s what I’m looking for—whether this student is suited for a medical career.

- Dr. Hegde

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Students determine what to look for in a physical exam, which lab tests to order and whether X-rays or MRIs are needed.

Like any good mystery, there are twists and turns along the way.

Eventually, a diagnosis is made. Any terms or diseases students don’t understand become learning opportunities. They each research an issue, then present findings to the class like a doctor presenting a case.

The first time Hegde did a case study with undergraduates, he wasn’t sure what to expect.

“I did one out of curiosity to see how they’d do, and they did quite well,” he said. “I was pleasantly surprised. They were comparable to first-year medical students.”

It’s gotten to the point, where Hegde said he’s “almost cocky” knowing his students will do well in interviews and med school.

“

A person’s heart has to be in it. This is not a profession you go halfheartedly into, because lives are at stake. It’s not just about you. An office job is not going to hurt anybody. But here, there’s a real danger of hurting someone.

- D. Hegde

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When selecting students for seminar, he looks for individuals who can articulate why they want to become doctors—students with people skills and compassion. They must also have a grade point average (GPA) of at least 3.7—the same requirement for med school.

“I’m looking for potential,” Hegde said. “It’s not about being bright and hardworking. Not everyone is cut out for medicine. It requires a certain kind of person. That’s what I’m looking for—whether this student is suited for a medical

career.”

“A person’s heart has to be in it,” he said. “This is not a profession you go half-heartedly into, because lives are at stake. It’s not just about you. An office job is not going to hurt anybody. But here, there’s a real danger of hurting someone.”

Students are usually surprised by the invitation to join. Most admit to hesitating before accepting, because they don’t want to be the first to break the group’s 100% acceptance streak.

Once inside the program, their confidence blossoms.

Senior biology major Jinha Kim of Milledgeville has a premed concentration with a minor in Spanish. She loves science and is passionate about medicine, but she said it’s her nature to be nervous and shy.

Biology Professor Ellen France encouraged Kim to apply for the pre-med mentorship, but Kim wasn’t sure she was good enough. Hegde calls that “imposter syndrome”—when someone underestimates their potential.



Senior Jinha Kim

Her first mock interview in front of seminar peers was scary, and Kim felt she messed up. But Hegde was reassuring. That’s why they have practice sessions, he said, to ready students for the real thing.

“I am a very anxious person, and I like to plan things out and be aware of what I’m getting myself into,” Kim said. “The mentorship is showing me what to expect in medical school. Being in this program has definitely shown me my strengths and some of my weaknesses too. I feel a lot more confident in my abilities because of this program.”

“

I have been able to get an inside scoop on what medical school is like. With each new component, I am more and more excited to make that dream become

my reality.

- Jinha Kim

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Kim’s confidence also grew during volunteer hours at Children’s Hospital of Georgia in Augusta and HOPE For Kids in Macon. She helped nurses and families with anything they needed, whether it meant bringing a toy to an ill child or fetching lab results.

She hopes to one day be a pediatric oncologist.

“I have been able to get an inside scoop on what medical school is like,” Kim said. “With each new component, I am more and more excited to make that dream become my reality.”

“

I don’t coddle my students. Right from the get-go, I plunge them into this thing, so they’re not nervous when it’s time to apply. We build a good foundation.

- Dr. Hegde

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Every semester, Hegde meets each student one-on-one at the Max for a meal and discussion. He uses a scale he calls the “Saladin Score”—based on the Apgar score that quickly evaluates the health of newborn babies. It’s a self-assessment that helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses in academics, MCAT preparation, interview skills and volunteer hours.

“Getting into medical school is getting a little more challenging,” Hegde said. “You can think about it all you want, but unless you actually practice these things, you’re not going to get good at it.”

“I don’t coddle my students,” he said. “Right from the get-go, I plunge them into this thing, so they’re not nervous when it’s time to apply. We build a good foundation.”

Every semester, there’s also fun and relaxation. Hegde invites students to his house for a potluck dinner. They sit around laughing and talking about everything but medicine. They listen to Hegde read excerpts from his favorite hobby: writing fiction.

He affectionately calls them his people— “peops” (pronounced peeps) for short.

That, perhaps, sums up the secret to the seminar’s success.

A tight knit family-style group is a bedrock of stability.

It gave Fix the chance she needed to venture forth and test the waters without fear.

Hegde's encouragement, the knowledge she gained from seminars, plus her shadowing of doctors in Northeast Georgia through the Foothills Pathway to Med School program and the hours she volunteered at Fayette Care Clinic in her hometown—all helped solidify Fix's decision to pursue medicine.

Her goal is to become a pediatrician and work with underserved communities in rural areas.

"The journey to medical school is very daunting and intimidating," Fix said. "The culture surrounding pre-medical studies, globally, is competitive and can feel threatening or make you feel inadequate."

"Being in the mentorship has allowed me to change my mindset and become more insulated to the scare tactics of med-school admissions," she said. "I have developed peace and certainty."

Students know they can rely on Hegde's support well after graduation too—sometimes into their practice as doctors.

It makes leaving the nest a little less frightening.

“

It's so great to be around these bright young people. I'm very proud of them. I tell them their success is my success.

- Dr. Hegde

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Sarah Fix

News Stories Posted Tuesday November 8, 2022



Building and fire safety director got his edge from transformative experiences at GCSU

[History & Geography, Department of](#): Tuesday November 8, 2022

Daniel Brown '11, has come a long way since earning his GED.

A first-generation, nontraditional college student, he earned his bachelor's degree in history from Georgia College & State University (GCSU).

He's always been fascinated by buildings and architecture, owing to his studies and work in construction and plant operations at GCSU.

Daniel's the chief building official of building and fire safety for Macon-Bibb County through his company, SAFEbuilt. At Safebuilt—a 30-year-old company—he leads his interdisciplinary team of four inspectors to provide inspections, review

construction plans, enforce building patents, provide guidance and permitting services.

“Any set of building plans is required to come through this office for review,” Daniel said. “It’s a simple process for the most part, but at times, there are technicalities. That’s when we reference the books. There’s one for every trade. The building code book alone is three-and-a-half inches thick.”

Daniel is a certified building official by the International Code Council, Soil Conservation Commission for Georgia and Main Street 101. However, he’s always looking for new opportunities to grow in his field.

“I want to not only be able to speak to my clients, but at least understand what’s being spoken to me,” Daniel said.

With I-16 and I-75 strategically located in the center of town, Macon, Georgia, is a treasure of historic buildings and new developments. Those include a new amphitheater and renovations at the Macon City Auditorium, which Brown reviewed and permitted.

His team’s goal is to protect safety and equity of buildings in the area.

“We have so many residential, industrial and/or commercial jobs happening at one time,” he said. “But there are always problems when it comes to construction and development. I’m constantly trying to come up with a way to make the project move forward, yet still meet the intent of what we’re trying to accomplish.”

If someone has an issue with a building, Daniel is called.

“I like to meet with clients to see what they’re trying. Then, we’ll find a solution,” he said. “I like the challenge.”



Daniel Brown in his office.

As a commercial plans' examiner, Brown worked with 20 to 25 Amazon executives, design professionals and their attorneys on site at the 1,016,000 square-foot Amazon Distribution Center in Macon.

"That was an incredible experience," he said. "There were special building provisions that had to be addressed. So, I apprised the group regarding safety issues, such as storing combustible items like perfume, located in the warehouse."

"I told them, 'This goes well beyond just simple conversations. You have to get me the performance-based design, meaning it's been tested enough to meet the intent,'" Daniel said.



Daniel Brown inspecting a carnival ride for proper setup, missing and damaged components and current licenses as part of the public safety program.

After a few months of going back-and-forth and reviewing the thick manual page-by-page, Amazon came up with a performance-based system design for a hazardous material storage area that met building codes.

When addressing safety issues, Daniel has to be assertive. He learned those skills from his advisor, Dr. Bob Wilson, professor emeritus of history and university historian at Georgia College, where his public speaking classes required him to speak in front of his peers.

“

Honestly, if I didn't have the Georgia College degree, I never would've gotten the interview. They thought I was teachable and trainable. So, they gave me the job.

- Daniel Brown

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"In the beginning, I thought, 'I can't speak in front of these people,'" he said. "I

finally just told myself, 'You have no choice but to do it.' It turned out not to be so bad. I did it a few more times. Then, these speaking experiences included presenting to groups outside of Georgia College. Today, I have no problem speaking to people at all. That skill has grown stronger and stronger."

These transformative speaking skills turned him into the confident and competent speaker Daniel is today.

"It prepared me to work big pre-construction meetings with 20 to 30 people including architects and company presidents," he said.



Daniel's graduation day. Pictured from left to right are: Maddie Belle, Kari, Clarissa, Daniel and Seth.

Daniel took a historical architecture class from Jim Turner, professor of public history. That class helped Daniel land his job.

He left Georgia College with more confidence than when he started.

“The instruction I received prepared me for my job and the knowledge has actually been learned, not just memorized,” he said. “Sometimes I think about just how fortunate I am to have had that learning opportunity.”

“My public history coursework was perfect,” Daniel said. “I’ve been in building design and construction my whole life. Then here, I’ve found the skills and knowledge from the preservation side, so I’ve got the actual technical knowledge I can combine and incorporate those concepts at work.”

He gives a “shout out” to his three office workers—one, a permit manager and two permit technicians, as well as his wife, Kari McCage Brown, ’07, ’20, coordinator of Business Outreach at Georgia College.

“Kari saw me through all my education,” Daniel said. “Then, she found the posting for the building inspector job with Macon-Bibb County. When she asked me about it, I thought, ‘I just don’t think I qualify for it.’ She thought otherwise and applied for that position for me. Then, I got a call to interview with the building inspector.”

He feels his knowledge of construction, public history and historic preservation gave him the edge he needed to get the job.

“Honestly, if I didn’t have the Georgia College degree, I never would’ve gotten the interview,” Daniel said. “They thought I was teachable and trainable. So, they gave me the job.”

News Stories Posted Wednesday November 9, 2022



Rear Admiral's visit highlights university's long relationship with Navy

[Leadership Programs](#) : Wednesday November 9, 2022

Story and Photos by University Communications

Part of sustaining military might and operational readiness is maintaining critical relationships at home.

In November, United States Navy Rear Admiral Alvin Holsey embarked upon a tour of inland communities to ensure all Georgians understand the importance of the Navy to American peace and prosperity. As a part of Atlanta Navy Week, Rear Adm. Holsey stopped at Georgia College & State University to renew a relationship that started with Milledgeville's long-time Congressional representative, the late Carl Vinson.

Holsey is the former commander of the Carrier Strike Group One, embarked aboard the USS *Carl Vinson*, a Nimitz-class nuclear supercarrier named after Vinson. In

addition to drumming up support for the Navy, Holsey took time to learn more about the namesake of one of the ships that fell under his command.

Vinson represented Baldwin County for 50 years in the U.S. House of Representatives. His tenure is celebrated for his staunch support of the armed services and his strong advocacy for the development of a two-oceans navy.

“When you learn the history of your ship and the culture surrounding the ship, it forms a natural connection,” Holsey said.

“It’s so powerful to have organizations like [Georgia College] to reach out and sow those seeds. I’ve never been here, but I understand the power of this visit, the power of hearing these stories and the power of connecting with community. So, I would encourage that to continue to happen.”

Georgia College is home to Vinson’s papers in the Ina Dillard Russell Library; custodian of the congressman’s former residence, the Carl Vinson House; and an educational partner, formerly providing satellite classes to sailors serving aboard the USS *Carl Vinson*.

Holsey said those kinds of connections help build a support network for the men and women serving in the Navy. The history permeates the culture, and sailors are better able to connect their duties back to the people and communities they’re protecting through military service.

“To my mind, leadership is about empathy, development, compassion and promise—the promise to see not just who a person is today, but who they can be tomorrow, who, as leaders, we can help them to become,” Holsey said. “If you have that as the underlying tone, it sets the stage so that as we face down bad actors around the world, we face them as a team.”

“

...leadership is about empathy, development, compassion and promise—the promise to see not just who a person is today, but who they can be tomorrow...



USN Rear Admiral Alvin Holsey with a model of the USS Carl Vinson, which is named after Congressman Carl Vinson, pictured.

And as Holsey’s tour took place in the weeks before Veterans Day, he made sure to emphasize that includes the men and women who wear the uniform today and all those who’ve returned to their civilian lives. During a reception hosted by GCSU Leadership Programs, Holsey made time to meet with the university’s veteran community and reaffirm the U.S. Armed Forces’ commitment to all who have served.

“For veterans: we see you, we hear you, we know who you are, we know that you have served and you continue to serve,” he said. “So, for those young folks and older folks who have served—our veterans—know that we understand the sacrifice, day-in and day-out, we make sure to be attentive to that, and we thank you for your service.”

During his visit, Georgia College President Cathy Cox presented Holsey with a commendation from Governor Brian Kemp, celebrating Atlanta Navy week and recognizing the university’s relationship with the USS *Carl Vinson*. Holsey, in turn, presented Cox with a medallion featuring the emblem of the United States Navy, a tangible reminder of the connection between these two institutions that was renewed by Holsey’s presence on campus.



USN Rear Admiral Alvin Holsey, on right, presents a medallion featuring the emblem of the U.S. Navy to GCSU President Cathy Cox.

Georgia College will recognize the service and sacrifice of all members of the United States military during its annual Veterans Day ceremony at 1 p.m., Monday, Nov. 14 in the Magnolia Ballroom.

News Stories Posted Friday November 11, 2022



Exceptional steward of the environment inspires scholarship

[Chemistry, Physics, & Astronomy, Department of](#): Friday November 11, 2022

Dr. Susan Daneman Richardson, '84, and Andy Richardson, '83, are each on a mission. Susan's striving to make drinking water safe, and Andy's offering scholarships to Georgia College & State University (GCSU) chemistry students.



Dr. Susan and Andy Richardson at the Integrated Science Complex

Susan's been the recipient of several national awards and international recognition. She developed an interest for chemistry in high school, which grew from there and matured at Georgia College.

Dr. John Hargaden helped inform that growth. He taught physical chemistry—known by seniors as the most difficult class in chemistry. He taught her how to get answers to challenging chemistry problems using a few basic equations.

“That was mind blowing for me,” Susan said. “Dr. Hargaden opened up that whole world, which was life-changing—to realize I could memorize very few equations to figure out the rest.”

She's grateful to Margaret Uhler, professor emeritus of English, too. She taught creative writing and encouraged the use of strong verbs.

“She taught me how to be a better writer,” Susan said. “That impacts science, because I have to write journal articles and grant proposals all the time. I've got to be a good writer to win grants and make nice publications that people will notice.”

To Andy, the whole Georgia College experience made him more well-rounded. From interdisciplinary classes and working on campus to being in a fraternity and playing intramurals—he took advantage of the whole Georgia College experience.

“It's very interesting how the four years I was here really impacted my life,” Andy said. “I learned so many intangible things. Not only did I learn from challenging classes, but I gained other skills by working in the financial aid office.”

“Just seeing how things function when you're at that stage of life, was one of the most amazing things,” Andy said. “We just embraced everything at Georgia College. It was like home for us.”



Dr. Susan Richardson observes a rotary evaporator in a chemistry lab, while (left to right) Dr. John Trombley, senior lecturer of chemistry, Dr. Sayo Fakayode, professor and chair of the Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy Department and Andy Richardson look on.

After Susan got her Ph.D. from Emory University, she worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Exposure Research Lab in Athens, Georgia. She researched health issues surrounding drinking water and identifying unknown chemicals. These invisible chemicals are often byproducts formed during drinking water treatment. These byproducts come from natural organic matter reacting with chloramine and other disinfectants used to treat drinking water.

Her interest in safe drinking water began when two scientists visited Susan's lab. They needed help in identifying unknown chemicals in drinking water. She collaborated with them and, over time, discovered about 700 of these chemicals lurking in drinking water.

“

You can come from Georgia College and do anything. It provides a great education and great professors—the whole college experience—all that plays a role in student success.

- Andy Richardson

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“Those scientists showed me the importance of disinfection byproducts in drinking water and how there were so many unknowns,” Susan said. “There were important health effects seen in human studies. So, I thought, ‘Aha, I could really make a difference in human health.’ That was the turning point for me. So, that became my whole career.”

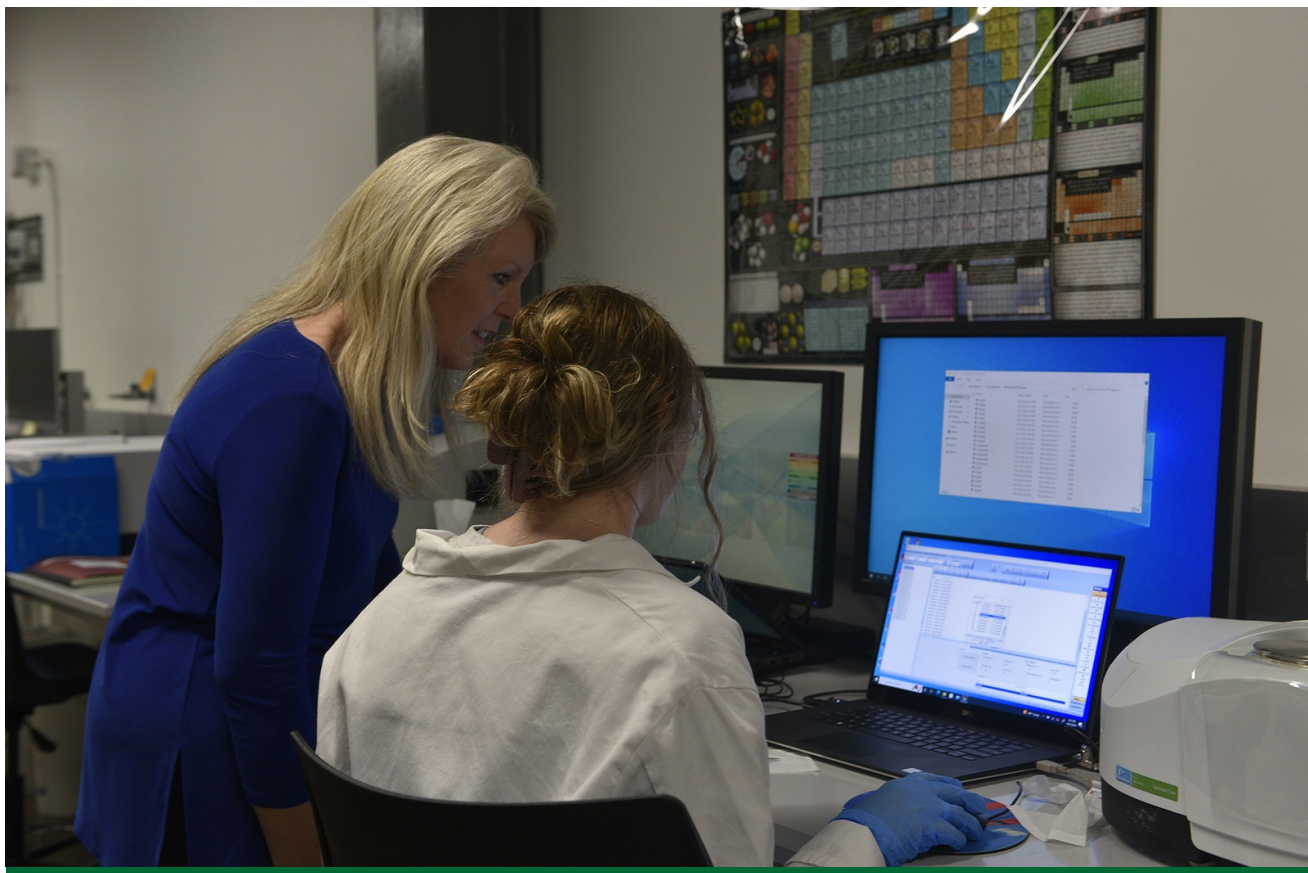
She has published over 190 journal articles and book chapters on the subject of water analysis.

Susan expanded her research and water analysis at the University of South Carolina, where she’s the Arthur Sease Williams Professor of Chemistry in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. Her students help measure chlorinated, brominated and iodinated disinfection byproducts in drinking water.

Susan still has strong ties with EPA’s Office of Water, which helps ensure drinking water is safe. She works with engineers, toxicologists and epidemiologists and recently recommended two important groups of disinfection byproducts for EPA to consider in their upcoming regulations.

Her research has been used to inform ways to make drinking water safer. Her work’s been used in testing and treatment technologies in drinking water utilities across the U.S.

Susan’s recent career shift to the university has been a big change for her. But working with students has been rewarding.



Dr. Susan Richardson looks at a student's work on a FTIR spectrometer.

“At some point, the students become part of your family,” Susan said. “It’s just so rewarding to mentor them and see them grow into independent scientists. You train them. They’re so uncertain when they start, and they’re in-and-out of your office often for the first two years. Then, all of a sudden, they graduate.”

Watching this transformation in her students and seeing some obtain their Ph.D.’s is the ultimate reward.

“I’ve seen them grow into independent scientists,” she said. “Now, they can make decisions and know how to address certain issues with research, troubleshoot instruments and understand how to ask the right questions, write papers and journal articles that get published and give talks at conferences.”

Often called “the lab dad,” by Susan’s students, Andy recognizes that often times students just need hope.

“

At some point, the students become part of your family. It’s just so rewarding to mentor them and see them grow into independent scientists. You train them. They’re so uncertain when they start, and they’re in-and-out of your office often for the first two years. Then, all of a sudden, they graduate.

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“When Susan won the American Chemical Society’s Herty Medal, I thought Georgia College chemistry students could do the same,” Andy said. “These students who pursue their dream can accomplish anything and also make an impact.”

“They’re just kids who need somebody to believe in them and say, ‘Hey, good job,’” he said.

Andy recalled how a \$1,000 scholarship really helps in college. It got him thinking. To show his appreciation for students’ efforts, Andy surprised Susan with a birthday present of a scholarship, bearing her name, for Georgia College students.

“That was the best birthday present I’ve ever given her,” said Andy.

The Susan D. Richardson Environmental Chemistry Scholarship is for rising juniors who have a minimum GPA of 3.5, are pursuing a bachelor’s degree in chemistry at Georgia College and who demonstrate a passion for protecting the environment.

“We want this scholarship to last after we’re gone,” Andy said, “and to put it in my wife’s name along with all of her accomplishments. And to think that it all started at Georgia College.”

“GCSU means a lot to our family,” Susan added. “It’s also where Andy and I met.”

The Richardson’s children—Kelsey Richardson Podo, ’15, and Andrew Richardson, ’17—are third-generation Georgia College students. Susan’s mother, Dr. Rebecca Daneman Groves, ’53, was also a chemistry major at Georgia College.

“You can come from Georgia College and do anything,” Andy said. “It provides a great education and great professors—the whole college experience—all that plays a role in student success.”

News Stories Posted Monday November 21, 2022



Thunder's creator leaves cherished icon for GCSU and the community

[College of Business & Technology](#): Monday November 21, 2022

Jason Hendrix, '09, knew something important was missing when he attended the Georgia College & State University (GCSU) basketball games as a junior. The other teams had mascots, but GCSU didn't.

That's when Hendrix led the charge of the Thundercats—a rowdy, GCSU fan base comprised of Hendrix's friends, which, in turn, lead to the creation of the university's mascot "Thunder."

When he wasn't running cross-country or working at The Colonnade, Hendrix was a sport photographer, traveling across the country capturing images at sporting events.

“I started seeing all these mascots from other universities,” Hendrix said. “That’s when my friend Chris McCorkle and I got the grandiose idea to have the students in their section wear costumes [to GCSU Basketball games]. We did some fun, crazy things. One student showed up in a cowboy outfit and another one wore a suit to look like a coach.”

Hendrix once sported a Spider-Man suit and, another time, a 12-inch mohawk.

Then, he became determined to create a Georgia College mascot.



Jason Hendrix



Thunder at an early stage.

Hendrix approached Stan Aldridge, former director of the Athletic Department about how to go about getting a mascot for GCSU. Aldridge told Hendrix the Thundercats should make this endeavor their own.

“Well, we did,” Hendrix said. “I took it as a semi-personal quest. I’ve always been told in my life that you can’t do things. Yet, I’ve always found a way to get them

done.”

“

My end-all, be-all goal is to leave a legacy. I'm so glad to see what they've done with Thunder. The whole thing is super special to me, and I love it.

- Jason Hendrix

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During Homecoming, the Thundercats started collecting donations from alumni, students and local businesses. They weren't raising enough money to purchase a mascot outfit, so Hendrix kept talking with mascots from other schools for advice.

In 2007, he attended the NCAA Final Four in Atlanta. The University of Florida; Georgetown University; University of California, Los Angeles; and The Ohio State University were all there with their mascots. They put Hendrix in touch with their spirit coordinators.

Hendrix asked them: “How did you get your mascot? What was the budget? Who controls the mascot—the university or a student organization?”

Those conversations led him to Tom Sapp of Real Characters, Inc. His mascot design work includes the University of Georgia's Hairy Dawg, the Atlanta Hawks' Harry, Michigan State University's Sparty and the University of Florida's Albert and Alberta Alligators.

Hendrix met with Sapp in April 2007 to discuss his vision for GCSU's mascot.

“I came to the table with a document that included an image of our Bobcat head, GCSU's colors, his size, pants and other things,” he said. “Then, he started building it.”

“We went from having a theoretical idea to how we are going to pay for all this

stuff," he said. "We nicked and dimed everybody to start funding this mascot uniform."

To apply for funds, Hendrix registered the Thundercats as a student organization through the Student Government Association (SGA). Yet, the donations coupled with the funds SGA provided didn't quite give them enough to move forward on the mascot project.

Hendrix then met with former GCSU President Dr. Dorothy Leland.

"I told her, 'I want to do this, because I want to give back to the university somehow in some way,'" Hendrix said. "'If I need to write letters to donors, or go door-to-door, I will. I guarantee you it will have a return on investment in 20, 50 and 70 years from now. You won't regret this decision.'"

After several more meetings, he got a phone call from President Leland, telling him his hard work had paid off. She funded his mascot project with a check for \$25,000.

"I still get chills every time I talk about this," he said. "It really hit me."

With the aid of Thundercats' advisor Alan Weston, Hendrix deposited the check into the Thundercats' student organization account. Then, they bought the mascot's costume and all the accessories. They also bought shirts for students to wear at games.

"It was a wow moment," Hendrix said. "I literally called Tom Sapp as soon as we got that check, and he got his crew immediately on production of the suit, knowing we were trying to launch it in time for basketball season."

The mascot was to be unveiled at the home game after Thanksgiving in 2007. But first came the decision of what to name the mascot. The Thundercats distributed



The first time Thunder appears at a GCSU basketball game.

flyers across campus for ideas. Options were “Kool,” “Paws,” “Prowler,” “Scratch” and “Thunder.”

When put to a vote, Thunder won. It was a proper homage to the Thundercats.

“Georgia College gave me the wheels to drive with the costume,” he said. “I made all the creative and visual appearance decisions of what Thunder would look like when it came to life off the pages of the previously produced artwork by Mr. Sapp. Then, once we finished, I handed it over to the university for approval.”

With oversight from Weston, Hendrix created the rules and regulations of Thunder for GCSU, accompanied by a waiver, code of conduct, type of events the mascot would attend, maintenance, storage and check-out process.

Then, it was time for Thunder’s reveal. Cheerleaders put Thunder’s head in the middle of the court. They circled around it, so no one could see.

In the meantime, Hendrix got into a huge blue duffel bag. Male cheerleader, Corey McTeer, walked it to the middle of the gym floor and sat it down. He unzipped it just enough for Hendrix to get his head out of the bag. They stuck the head on Hendrix. Then, when AC/DC’s “Thunderstruck” played, Thunder popped out.

“This was a really cool experience,” Hendrix said. “The best part about it, was that it had never been done before. There was no pre-conceived notion of what should’ve been done. So, when it happened, it was organic.”

Thunder appeared in public for the first time during the “Hanging of the Greens” on campus that Christmas.

“I showed up as Thunder, wearing a Santa hat,” Hendrix said. “The next day I was



Thunder makes a first, surprise public appearance during the "Hanging of the Greens" in 2007.

on GCSU's website with all these people hanging up the greens."

Hendrix, who currently resides in Tallahassee, Florida, has been back to campus several times since then.

Most recently in 2018, Hendrix returned to campus to receive the "Young Alumni of the Year" award. He took a photo of his wife meeting Thunder for the first time. Eventually, he wants his three-year-old son, Micah, and four-month-old daughter, Addi, to meet the mascot, as well.

He'd also like for his kids to go to Georgia College. Maybe they can follow in their father's footsteps.



Thunder colors with students at a local school.

"I love that other students have done it, since I was last the mascot in 2009," Hendrix said. "Today, if you're the Georgia College mascot, you have the privilege of wearing Thunder's iconic, oversized blue shoes at graduation. I'm so excited GCSU allows this because it's a revered secret of Thunder's identity. And it's really cool."

One day, he'd like to support the many students who've continued his dream by endowing a scholarship for students who play Thunder.

“My end-all, be-all goal is to leave a legacy,” Hendrix said. “I’m so glad to see what they’ve done with Thunder. The whole thing is super special to me, and I love it.”

During Thunder’s 15th birthday Nov. 26, Hendrix plans to tweet during the day about the history of GCSU’s mascot. You can follow his tweets at @JasonMHendrix.

News Stories Posted Tuesday November 22, 2022



Class of 2022: Student sees herself growing in the computer industry

[Information Systems & Computer Science, Department of](#): Tuesday November 22, 2022

Zeenal Prajapati

- Where are you from? Vadodara, Gujarat, India
- Why did you choose to attend Georgia College & State University (GCSU)? One of the reasons I wanted to attend Georgia College is because I really liked the bachelor's Computer Science program at Georgia College. Another reason I would like to share is that the International Education Center at Georgia College offered the International Scholarship, which has been a great help to make college life and education affordable as an international full-time student at Georgia College.
- Why did you choose to major in computer science? We all know that there are

limitless opportunities in the field of technology. Also, I have been enjoying programming since high school. It surprises me, how technology can make a positive difference in the world in terms of creativity and innovation.

- **When did you begin to develop an interest in computer science?** I started developing an interest in computer science since 10th grade, as we used to learn and implement basic programs using different languages. Since then, I decided to major in computer science or information technology.

- **Who's your favorite GCSU professor and why?** Dr. Gita Phelps was my favorite professor. She recently retired this past July. I took several computer science classes with her starting from the introductory level. She has been always helpful to students whenever they are struggling with the content taught in class. Her main goal has always been to encourage students to develop new skills by doing projects and programs on interesting games or topics, and sometimes solving real-world problems using programming.

- **What did you learn from this professor or another professor that you will apply on the job?** I learned a lot from her, but the most important thing I learned is to always keep trying, keep going and never give up. This will eventually lead to success and the accomplishment of my goals.

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I can see myself growing progressively, as well as professionally in this career by keeping myself open, to grab all the possible opportunities and learn new things.

- Zeenal Prajapati



Zeenal Prajapati

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- **What would you like to do after you graduate?** I would like to get an entry-level job in my major field to gain necessary experience. I will also consider getting a master's degree in the near future.
- **Why can you see yourself in this career?** I can see myself growing progressively, as well as professionally in this career by keeping myself open, to grab all the possible opportunities and learn new things.
- **Which campus organizations do you belong to?** I am part of the UPI (Upsilon Pi Epsilon) Honor Society and the International Club at Georgia College.
- **How did belonging to these campus organizations change you as a person?** I developed my public speaking skills, helped people, experienced a sense of responsibilities and fulfilled them. The greatest experience of all is to meet new people and get to know them.
- **What advice would you give to freshmen students coming to Georgia College?** Keep trying new things, keep all your options open and enjoy your college life at GCSU because this time is not coming back.

News Stories Posted Wednesday November 23, 2022



Everyone Wins: Visiting scholar programs strengthen university

[Provost & Academic Affairs, Office of the](#): Wednesday November 23, 2022

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

Few things make an immediate impact as great as the university's visiting scholar programs.

Periodic academic visitors, whether long- or short-term, are a boost for everyone involved. Visiting scholars participate in the productive activities of a new department; expose Georgia College faculty to novel ideas and fresh perspectives; engage students with people who are prominent in their fields; and build heightened recognition for the university.

"The purpose of scholar programs is to provide our students, our faculty, our colleges and departments with opportunities for visitors to interact with and allow them the opportunity to engage in ways that would expand and enrich the student



Dr. Costas Spirou

and faculty experience,” said Dr. Costas Spirou, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs.

“The concept is accepted as being a very important approach to strengthening the academic community,” Spirou said, “bringing in individuals who have different experiences and perspectives. This collaboration with faculty adds a whole new dimension to university life.”

The [provost’s office](#) started a new visiting scholar’s program last year, so departments could inject critical elements and ideas into curriculum through short-term engagements. Lengthier endowed programs were already well-established, running for either a semester or academic year. Most notable are the [Paul D. Coverdell Visiting Scholar](#) and [Martha Daniel Newell Scholar](#) programs.

Shorter visits are easier to accomplish and finance. They’re also more convenient for guests who can’t be away from their families and institutions for long.

“Georgia College is a relatively small institution, and our various programs cannot cover all the specialties contained within the academic disciplines. A visiting scholar can temporarily fill a gap in departmental coverage for at least a semester,” said Dr. Eric Tenbus, dean of [College of Arts & Sciences](#) (COAS).

Last spring, three experts came for week-long visits.



Former Olympian Butch Reynolds visited campus in spring 2022.

Former Olympian **Butch Reynolds** was the first provost scholar. In early February, he worked directly with students and faculty in the [College of Health Sciences](#). He told them about substance abuse and ethics in exercise science, detailing obstacles he overcame to become the fastest runner in the world.

In March, **Dr. Peter Cardon** spent a week with students and faculty in the department of [information systems and computer science](#). A professor of clinical business communication at the University of Southern California, Cardon shared his deep interest in information technology and how artificial intelligence influences communication.

In April, Distinguished Research Award winner **Dr. Douglas Walker** was hosted by the [economics department](#). A former Georgia College faculty member, Walker is an economist at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He talked to students about the socioeconomic impacts of gambling.

This year's line-up of provost scholars is impressive too:

- The [department of professional learning & innovation](#) will host **Dr. Brenda Juarez Harris** of Southern Utah University. Co-author of "White Parents, Black Children: Understanding Adoption and Race," Harris will present research on exemplary black teachers and raising consciousness. She'll also participate in

informal lunches and dinners with the diversity committee and College of Education faculty.

- The [department of communication](#) will host Dr. R. Jarrod Atchison. He is director of the national championship-winning debate team at Wake Forest University in North Carolina. Atchison will deliver a keynote address for his new, co-authored book “We Are Not One People: Secession and Separatism in American Politics Since 1776.” He will also hold a debate workshop and judge a public debate, hosted by Georgia College’s Speech & Debate team on Milledgeville history and public memory of secession, co-sponsored by the department of history and geography.
- The communication department will also host Dr. Jenna Hanchey, assistant professor at Hugh Downs School of Communication at Arizona State University. Hanchey was a Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania. Her research examines aid, development and volunteer work in Africa. Hanchey’s visit will help foster diverse thought, professional practice and global awareness across the communication curriculum.
- The [department of biology](#) will host Dr. Rebecca Bixby, director of the University of New Mexico Water Resources Program. Her research on aquatic ecosystems focuses on the responses and adaptation of aquatic organisms to natural and anthropogenic stressors like fire, drought and flooding. Bixby will work with students in Georgia College’s new Aquatic Science Center, GC Shades of Green, Office of Sustainability, Environmental Sciences Club and Rural Studies Institute.

Whether visiting scholars come for a week or a year—they all greatly supplement life on campus, Spirou said.

The Coverdell position was revised in 2019 to attract policy scholars within humanities and the social sciences. The position used to be called the Paul D. Coverdell Chair in Policy Studies, held 10 years by former professor Dr. Roger Coate. During that time, Coate brought in a number of distinguished speakers from around the world to provide co-curricular programming for students—many were connected to the United Nations.

The Newell Scholar position was created in 2011 for long-term visitors from any academic discipline in the College of Arts and Sciences (COAS). Another endowed position on campus is the Alex Gregory Distinguished Fellow in Leadership program. It brings highly experienced groundbreakers and forerunners for extended stays on campus to share expertise with the next generation of leaders.

Georgia College also sponsors on-going residency programs to expand opportunities on campus. The [music department](#) works with the Kazanetti String Quartet of Atlanta to provide individual and group sectional support for the university’s String Orchestra and related chamber groups. And few years ago, the [English Department](#) established the Darugar Scholar in-residence program to

provide students and faculty opportunities to engage and learn from nationally-recognized writers.

Scholars participate in department activities and broaden perspectives by giving public lectures and presentations, hosting workshops and seminars, teaching classes and holding discussions.

These interactions raise awareness and promote the university.

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This is an important piece to our endeavors and quest for academic excellence. The more we do in this area, the better it is for our university and academic community and, honestly, I think it goes beyond the academic community. These interactions are not just for faculty and students but the community too. It brings vibrancy to the intellectual environment here on campus and in Milledgeville.

- Dr. Costas Spirou

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News Stories Posted Wednesday November 30, 2022



Class of 2022: Biology major is all a student can be

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Wednesday November 30, 2022

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

At Georgia College & State University, senior biology major Wesley DeMontigny of Marietta learned nothing's set in stone, and it's OK to change your mind.

"We should be willing to change our views and apportion belief according to the available evidence," DeMontigny said. "Your views will change throughout college, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. But if you keep an open mind and seek out the truth, you will stumble upon it sooner or later."

When choosing a university, DeMontigny wanted small class sizes and a beautiful campus. When he visited Georgia College, he "was sold."

He had always enjoyed science but wasn't clear which major to pursue at first. DeMontigny tried several subjects, but nothing clicked until he took Principals of

Biology with Dr. Daniel Burt.

He took off after that.

Since then, DeMontigny has participated in several research labs and projects that have or will generate publications. He won the nationally prestigious [Goldwater Scholarship](#) during his undergraduate years and just applied for the [National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#), which grants \$37,000 a year for the first three years towards a Ph.D. The fellowship requires novel scientific research. DeMontigny hopes to study an elusive genus of marine parasites, "Amoebophrya," while pursuing his Ph.D. in cellular and molecular biology at the University of Maryland.



Senior biology major Wesley DeMontigny.

In the future, he'd like to be a professor and conduct research in microbiology.

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We should be willing to change our views and apportion belief according to the available evidence. Your views will change throughout college, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse. But if you keep an open mind and seek out the truth, you will stumble upon it sooner or later.

- DeMontigny

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Making use of diverse opportunities offered at Georgia College helped DeMontigny win the Goldwater Scholarship.

“It’s the most prestigious award an undergraduate researcher in natural sciences, mathematics or engineering can get,” he said. “I believe my heavy involvement in undergraduate research, work at the [Learning Center](#) and passion for microbiology are responsible for winning me this scholarship.”

In Burt's lab, DeMontigny did soil microbiology—studying bacteria from chicken litter—how it survives in soil and its ability to generate crystals of calcium carbonate. He also examined the presence of "Fusarium oxysporum," a harmful plant-infecting fungus found in hemp farms throughout Georgia. Both topics required use of classical microbiology techniques like bacterial and fungal culturing, soil chemistry and molecular techniques like DNA extraction and polymerase chain reactions.

DeMontigny spent a year in Dr. Dave Bachoon's molecular source tracking lab too, analyzing the quality of water from streams around Georgia, Florida and Puerto Rico. This research involved filtering water, extracting DNA from filters and using polymerase chain reactions to detect genes belonging to pathogens and fecal bacteria.

For several months, DeMontigny has also been in Dr. Rich Adam's genomics lab programming simulations that generate genomic data for different evolutionary scenarios. This has helped him gain experience in bioinformatic techniques like genome assembly, transcriptome assembly and machine-learning assisted inference of gene regulatory networks.



DeMontigny gives a class presentation.

Last summer, he also completed a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates (NSF REU) at Central Michigan University.

DeMontigny studied the effects of crude-oil on bacteria that live in coastal island environments in Lake Michigan. The research gave him additional experience in scientific fieldwork, classical microbiology and molecular biology.

“I originally began research, because I was I thought it was a potential career path,” DeMontigny said. “Along the way, I discovered that I loved research and learned way more about biology than I ever could in a class.”

At the Learning Center, he tutored in biology, organic chemistry and other STEM subjects.

“One of the best ways to improve your academics is to surround yourself with people who care about their own academics, DeMontigny said. “The Learning Center not only provided me with an academically-driven community but also allowed me to positively impact the Georgia College community and help make STEM a little less scary.”

Like many students, DeMontigny said he changed a lot in college.

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Through my education at Georgia College, and especially through my scientific training, I've learned to be skeptical and consistent in my thinking. This skill is essential to scientific discovery and every part of life.

- DeMontigny

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The changes are the result of developing his critical thinking skills. It's easy, he said, for young people to be swayed by ideologies and influential people. In high school and early college, it seemed he was adopting a new school of thought every other month—with each new ideology contradicting the previous one.

“Through my education at Georgia College, and especially through my scientific training, I've learned to be skeptical and consistent in my thinking. This skill is essential to scientific discovery and every part of life,” DeMontigny said.

His advice to incoming students: Take advantage of every opportunity.

“What led to my success is I was invested in my classes and genuinely loved the subjects I studied,” he said. “Besides that, succeeding in school is identical to succeeding anywhere else in life—create good habits and surround yourself with people that support you.”

