

# Front Page News Story Archive

December 2022



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# News Stories Posted Friday December 2, 2022



## GCSU first in state to offer new election administration certificate

[Government & Sociology, Department of](#): Friday December 2, 2022

The United States is in dire need of professional election administrators who understand today's legal challenges, changing policies, vote-collection methods and latest technology.

In response, Georgia College & State University has created a new [Election Administration Certificate](#)—the first academic certificate on elections in the state of Georgia and one of only a few nationwide.

“Certificates in election administration go a long way in educating students about the election process, which builds public confidence in the election system,” said Claire Sanders, senior instructor of [political science](#) at Georgia College.

“Since few universities offer such certificates,” she said, “our students will have a unique educational advantage should they ever pursue a career in election administration or if they want to serve their community as a poll worker.”

More than 8,000 election officials and 100,000 poll workers administer elections in the U.S.



Senior Lecturer of political science Claire Sanders.

Georgia College’s Election Administration Certificate started this fall as a way to prepare students for a career in public service—and to graduate students who are knowledgeable about election laws and procedures, election bureaucracy, voting rights and political parties.

The program takes students beyond campaigns slogans, party rivalry and polarization—all too common in today’s political environment—to focus on what’s truly important: elections as the foundation of representative government.

The certificate is available to students at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

They must complete four courses in political science and public administration—examining the constitutional, legal, political and administrative environment of American elections. Both graduate and undergraduate certificates require immersive experiences that include volunteering with a local elections office, conducting opinion polls or other related work.

Final projects in Sanders’ class recently focused on topics like voter confidence and how state election laws affect voting outcomes.

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**This certificate brings awareness that my generation needs to step up, take a role and serve in a public capacity. The most rewarding part of working in the election process is the feeling I contributed to our democracy and increased my knowledge and trust in the election process.**

**- Colin Hall**

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Junior political science major Colin Hall of Jones County thinks the certificate couldn't come at a better time. He wants to be an elected official but is dismayed by recent partisan fighting and lack of trust in election results.



Colin Hall

To help fulfill internship hours, Hall was a Jones County poll worker in the recent mid-term elections.

The job gave him newfound respect for poll workers and election administrators. By taking election certificate courses and working the mid-terms—Hall said he is fully confident in the integrity of U.S. elections, especially in Georgia.

“I was interested in getting the Election Administration Certification, because America thrives on democracy, our election process and the right to vote,” Hall said. “Election administrators are so vital to our democracy. They have such pressured, stressful jobs but still preform at a professional level.”



Nicholas Wimbish and Emily Wyche at a local precinct during the recent midterm elections.

Junior Jack Howle of Thomson, Georgia, is double majoring in political science and economics. He worked the polls in McDuffie County during the mid-term election. His most common question for voters was: “May I see your Georgia ID, please?”

After verifying identification, Howle and Hall both asked voters to make sure addresses were correct and to include their

middle names on voting records. They verified advanced, in-person absentee ballots as well.

Both students are personable and friendly and had no trouble talking to strangers.

“It was incredibly rewarding,” Howle said. “I gained an in-depth understanding of

how elections are run in the state of Georgia and how tightly regulated everything is.”

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**Poll working experience is fundamental to the new certificate program—only so much can be learned from a textbook or lecture. Practical experience is a must for the certificate to be effective and more than just a piece of paper.**

**- Gibson Howle**

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“Poll working experience is fundamental to the new certificate program—only so much can be learned from a textbook or lecture,” he said. “Practical experience is a must for the certificate to be effective and more than just a piece of paper.”

In the future, Georgia College will establish more partnerships with local governing bodies, so students can work all aspects of elections.

Hall believes this hands-on experience is vital, as he prepares for a political career.

Some elected leaders are “out of touch” and lack understanding of the election process itself, he said. As a public servant, Hall wants to ensure better resources are allocated for election administration and more respect given to poll workers.

“My goal in the future is to serve in a political office and hopefully work my way up to make a positive difference in a world that so desperately needs it,” he said. “I believe the Election Administration Certificate will help me better serve people but also better serve our election administrators.”

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**“Most importantly, this certificate will help me as a candidate to trust, respect and not doubt our election process, regardless of the outcome of an election.”**

**- Colin Hall**

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# News Stories Posted Monday December 5, 2022



## **Class of 2022: Criminal justice major aims for the U.S. Foreign Service**

**Government & Sociology, Department of**: Monday December 5, 2022

Criminal justice major Cameron Alee of Augusta, Georgia, knew she wanted to work in law enforcement for the federal government. Ultimately, Alee plans to mix her minor in international studies with criminal justice for a career with the U.S. Foreign Service.

“I always loved learning about criminal history,” she said. “I want to add the element of working for the criminal justice system along with American international affairs.

Dr. Carrie Cook, professor of criminal justice and coordinator of the masters of criminal justice program, motivated Alee to be the best she can be—a lesson that will carry over in her profession.

“Dr. Cook is always present,” Alee said. “She constantly has a positive attitude and



has never canceled class. This taught me to be respectful of others.”

Cook also taught Alee how to develop the skill of adaptability.

“Learning to adapt to different situations is very common in criminal justice fields,” Alee said. “Day-by-day, I’ll need to change what I’m doing or what I plan to do that day. If something randomly happens, I’ll have to know how to shift direction quickly.”

Alee studied abroad in South Korea at the University of Seoul—a Georgia College & State University partner school—as a junior, teaching students English. After graduating from Georgia College, she plans to gain even more international skills by teaching English to kindergartners in a private academy in Seoul, something that will be a new experience for her.

“This is my stepping stone into my future career,” Alee said. “I plan to develop fundamental teaching skills, work with different people around the world and improve my Korean language skills.”

Initially, she chose to study in South Korea after becoming friends with a South Korean exchange student through the International Club.

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**Throughout my experience at Georgia College, I've learned to think differently, especially within my major. When working with people, we definitely need to think about different perspectives. That opened my horizons to focus on others' perspectives, instead of just mine—something that'll help me in my profession.**



Cameron Alee at the Changdeokgung Palace in Seoul, South Korea, during her study abroad her junior year.

- Cameron Alee

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“I've always known about South Korea, but she taught me a lot more about it,” Alee said. “Then, I used websites and textbooks to continue learning more about the language and culture. So, when I studied abroad, I put my knowledge to work.”

Some of her favorite things to do in South Korea include traveling by train, bus and airplane and checking out different cafes.

“I had to adapt to the language and the culture,” she said. “That was a bit difficult, but it was a huge learning experience.”



Cameron Alee at GCSU's pergola.

When Alee studied abroad in Seoul, she joined her university's dance club and performed in the school's festival. Alee continues to teach herself dance routines to Korean pop (K-pop) music, which she's demonstrated three times at GCSU's International Dinner and International Fest.

“I just watch them perform a routine through YouTube,” she said. “Then I learn the dance. I really enjoy doing it.”

Serving as president of the International Club provided Alee with a unique

opportunity to grow as a leader.

“I learned how to lead a group of diverse people to collaborate,” she said. “Our team worked really well together—that was the best part. But, the hardest was learning everyone's schedules and respecting their time.”

Alee's criminal justice classes also taught her to embrace others' differences.

“Throughout my experience at Georgia College, I've learned to think differently, especially within my major,” Alee said. “When working with people, we definitely need to think about different perspectives. That opened my horizons to focus on others' perspectives, instead of just mine—something that'll help me in my profession.”



## Class of 2022: Environmental Science major learned importance of making connections

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Monday December 5, 2022

*Story and photos developed by University Communications.*

As an environmental science major and geology minor, senior Isabella Banich of Alpharetta made the most of her time at Georgia College & State University--from participating in sustainability research to her work in multiple clubs and organizations

But the biggest lesson she learned was the critical importance of making connections.

"Knowing professors and professionals here and across academia has opened so many doors for me," Banich said. "Most of the activities I've been a part of were introduced to me through friends, coworkers or mentors. Most people want you to succeed, and they'll pass your name along."



Senior Isabella Banich

When touring colleges, Banich “fell in love” with Georgia College’s beautiful campus—but, also, its reputation for involving undergraduates in research.

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**I wanted to see if we could find compostable dishware to use instead.**

**- Isabella Banich**

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She worked three semesters with Dr. Allison VandeVoort on sustainability. Their research focused on implementing compostable dishware into the current composting system on campus. Currently, the Office of Sustainability diverts consumer waste from the Maxwell Student Union dining facility to the university’s compost area at West Campus.

“I noticed we used a lot of single-use plastic on campus, especially during the pandemic,” Banich said. “Because we already had a composting system in place, I wanted to see if we could find compostable dishware to use instead.”

Compostable dishware should fully decompose within Georgia College’s unique composting system while keeping pH, nitrate concentration and temperature at correct levels. To do this, Banich worked with other lab students to compile baseline data. They chose dishware and tested compost weekly. Banich presented their findings at the Georgia Undergraduate Research Conference and should have final results in mid-December.

She has now been to five conferences and presented at two.



Banich collects soil at the compost station on W. Campus.

Banich favorite class was Dr. Bruce Snyder's "Ecosystems of Georgia" travel course last May. It ended up being her favorite class. The group hiked, camped and explored five ecosystems in areas like Jekyll Island, Moody Forest, Cedar Creek Wildlife Management Area, Vogel State Park and Blood Mountain. They identified different species of animals, plants and insects that are native to Georgia.

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**I was terrified of public speaking before I arrived here. But presenting in front of Georgia College students, at other colleges and in front of conference attendees curbed that fear quite quickly.**

**- Banich**

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Classes like this expanded Banich's education outside the classroom—much like her extracurricular involvement on campus.

She planned and executed Excel Bootcamps for the Learning Center, then presented this work at the Georgia Tutoring Association Conference. She's a member of the university's Honors College, Botany Club and Eta Sigma Alpha, the national honors club.

While working for University Housing, Banich served as the National Communications Coordinator for the Resident Student Association.

Each one of these activities helped Banich become more confident.

“I was terrified of public speaking before I arrived here,” she said. “But presenting in front of Georgia College students, at other colleges and in front of conference attendees curbed that fear quite quickly. I also made new connections and friends through all of these programs.”

Banich studied abroad last summer as part of intercultural leadership based in Strasbourg, France. Her travel was connected with the Georgia College Leadership Program and Customized Education Programs Abroad (CEPA). She visited the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and the European Parliament.

The trip was the last requirement she needed to earn the Georgia College Leadership Certificate.

“I was able to grow my leadership abilities and recognize ways I can change my own community, as well as communities abroad,” Banich said. “With these visits, I gained a higher appreciation and understanding of the political spheres of Europe and local community of Strasbourg, while also enjoying some local activities like Bastille Day, Illuminations de la Cathédrale and the Marché de l'Esplanade.”

Banich feels she's changed a lot in four years of college. She's more outgoing and open to new experiences. She knows how to present a professional image to the world and engage with others.

This will help as Banich looks for an internship in the national or state park service. After that, she hopes to go to law school and study environmental policy.

Her advice to incoming students is to say “yes” to opportunity.

“They should follow their passion whether in academics, extra curriculums or anything beyond,” Banich said. “It really makes all the difference for your college experience.”

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**Georgia College taught me the basics of my field and has given me the opportunity to develop into a leader and young professional who's competitive in the job market. I've also made some of my best friends and memories on campus. I'm going to miss Georgia College.**

**- Isabella Banich**





# News Stories Posted Wednesday December 7, 2022



## Class of 2022: Supportive environment helps composer express human emotion through music

[Music, Department of](#) : Wednesday December 7, 2022

Rafal remembers the feeling.

In early 2020, Rafal, who goes by just his surname, was in the audience at an honors conference hearing his composition for saxophone quartet played by an ensemble of professional musicians. It was a turning point.

“It felt like that was one of the first times that one of my pieces was actually performed,” he said. “I felt like a real composer—I felt like I had just done something in real life rather than just pretending.”

But it might not have played out that way.



Rafal

The Athens native didn't declare music as his major when he arrived at Georgia College & State University. Deep down, Rafal knew that's what he wanted to study, but it seemed out of reach, like it wasn't a practical enough pursuit for his college career. But throughout his first semester, Rafal stayed open to the possibility. And eventually, he made up his mind to follow his heart.

Rafal's instrument is the trumpet, but he considers musical composition his true form of expression.

"Music is made to express emotions that can't always be expressed with words," he said. "I want to be able to express the full range of human emotion."

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**"If you find something you like doing, it can be the reward in and of itself."**

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Rafal's time at Georgia College freed him to experience life and offered a community to support his creative exploration. Through dedicated practice and collaboration with other musicians in the music department's performance groups, Rafal honed his ability to translate life into song.

"I feel like if I understand it, I can accurately portray it," Rafal said. "And having lots of different experiences is beneficial to me because now I can write about it."

As he reflects on his years at Georgia College, Rafal challenges everyone to keep an open mind so you do not miss out on the experiences that could be key to your happiness.

"If you find something you like doing," he said, "it can be the reward in and of itself."

# News Stories Posted Thursday December 8, 2022



## Class of 2022: Graduate living her music therapy dream

[Music, Department of](#) : Thursday December 8, 2022

*Story developed by University Communications. Photo Credit: Nicole Young.*

Caroline Miller from Suwanee, Georgia is completing her Master of Music Therapy this December. The double Bobcat worked in the Georgia College & State University (GCSU) Music Therapy Clinic as a graduate assistant since graduating with her Bachelor's of Music Therapy in December 2020.

While there, she's served about 80 children a week in eight special education classrooms, as well as individual clients.

"I've watched so many of my kids make immense progress over the years that I

have been treating them, and it is so incredibly rewarding,” Miller said. “To watch a student who is typically non-verbal sing along to our goodbye song, or light up when they play the guitar, is truly one of the greatest joys. I feel so grateful to go to work every day and get to make music with my clients.”

**Q: What motivated you to complete your graduate degree?**

A: I'm motivated to complete my graduate degree because I have loved expanding my knowledge of music therapy and how to become the best clinician I can be during my program. I have been very fortunate to have an incredible, supportive and encouraging group of professors who push me and inspire me to work hard. I eventually want to pursue a PhD and become a music therapy professor, because of how fantastic my teachers have been. I want to be able to take what they've taught me, and the passion for music therapy and their students, and pass that on to students in the future.

**Q: Tell me about some of your favorite experiences from the Music Therapy Clinic.**

A: Through the Music Therapy Clinic, my biggest contract was the Baldwin County Schools Program for Exceptional Children. I see them each week, and then at the end of the semester we put on a big performance for the students' families and administration to come and watch them. My kids love to perform and are so proud of themselves. It is my favorite day of each semester to perform with my kids and watch how proud of themselves they are, and give them an opportunity to truly shine.

**Q: What got you started on this journey through music therapy?**

A: When I was younger, I went to a music camp every summer. When I was 10, a GCSU-educated, sign language teacher and music therapist told me about her profession at campus. I had always loved music and wanted to work with special needs kids, so I felt like music therapy was the perfect combination of my two passions!

I went home from camp that summer and told my mom I wanted to be a music therapist—now, almost 15 years later, that's what I'm doing!

**Q: Who has informed your dream to be a professor?**



Caroline Miller

A: Katie Whipple, Dr. Laurie Peebles, and Susan Craig have definitely informed my wanting to be a professor in the future. They have impacted me, and who I am as a music therapist, so strongly, and I am so grateful for them. They care so much about their students and always go way above and beyond for every music therapy student—helping them succeed and encouraging them. I want to, one day, be for music therapy students what they have been for me. I have loved getting to work closely with music therapy students, and I think I would really enjoy working with students in the capacity of being a professor.

# News Stories Posted Friday December 9, 2022



## Class of 2022: Grad proves it's never too late for education

[Government & Sociology, Department of](#): Friday December 9, 2022

This December, Omega Hedgepeth became a two-time graduate of Georgia College & State University. She's worked as a university accountant for the past 11 years, most recently in Accounting Services. Interestingly enough, that's not what she's getting a master's in.

"I started my Master of Public Administration some time ago—and I took two breaks—so I'm excited to be at the end of that journey," Hedgepeth said. "I fell into the public administration program and it's been very different from what I do."

**Q:** You didn't intend to complete this program at first, so what did you like about it?

**A:** Dr. Roger Coate's national security policy class was a very interesting class. Probably for me, the experience was different than most people because I lived through a lot of what we discussed, and it was interesting to go back and look at it

from a historical perspective. The class also familiarized me with threats like cybersecurity, which many of us deal with daily.

**Q: What made you decide to pursue graduate school at this point in life?**

A: I always had it in the back of my mind, as soon as I finished my bachelor's degree. I took a master's class a long time ago, but life went in different directions. But really, I like the thought of being a lifelong learner. I hope this will be my last degree, but I also hope to continue being a lifelong learner. Over the years, I've taken different classes and opportunities to learn other things.

**Q: Why do you find it important to continue learning?**

A: The world changes constantly. You have to realize, when I was first a student here, there were very few computers. They all fit in the bottom of Beeson Hall. When Atkinson opened, we had a computer lab with desktops, which was a world of change. During my lifetime of constantly learning things and constant change or changing regulations, it's just something I think everybody has to do to keep up with what's going on in the world.



Omega Hedgepeth with Cathy Cox at December Commencement.

**Q: What motivated you to complete your graduate degree?**

A: I was watching graduation and I thought, 'I'm so close, I just need a few more classes.' So, I thought 'I'm going to do this.' At that point I started again and that motivated me to finish. In the meantime, my daughter got her master's at Georgia College—she beat me across the stage.

**Q: How does it feel to be graduating?**

A: I'm very elated. My husband is even more elated, and my kids are happy for me to finally be at this point. I'm just glad I did it. Even with my grandmother, she thought it was important to get a master's way back when I was getting my bachelor's. This is kind of an homage to her, and she also got her master's as an older adult. Her kids were grown. I'm glad that I've done it, and, I hope, for anybody that can do it, I wish that for them too.





# News Stories Posted Tuesday December 13, 2022



## Doctor finds master of science program aligned well with her career goals

[Nursing, School of](#) : Tuesday December 13, 2022

Dr. Kristin Corbin Oja, '11, '14, '15, founder of STAT Wellness in the greater Atlanta area, focuses on functional medicine with her patients, so they can live the best, healthy version of themselves every day.

Learn how her education, especially her [Master of Science in Nursing](#) at Georgia College & State University, aligned well with her career goal of helping others to be intentional in their health.

