

Front Page News Story Archive

April 2023



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News Stories Posted Monday April 3, 2023



Students use technology to delve into the secret lives of snakes

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Monday April 3, 2023

Humans think a snake's life is simple. They slink. They slither. They bask. They bite.

But a [Georgia College & State University](#) vertebrate biologist says we don't really know much at all about what snakes do and why. Using the latest, state-of-the-art technology, Dr. Dominic DeSantis and his students are keeping an eye on these coiling creatures—where they go, what they eat and how they interact—hoping to learn their serpentine secrets.

“

Snakes act as an important linchpin pretty much everywhere in North America, but we don't understand that role very well. We know it's important. We know they're there. We know they're really prominent in all these systems, sometimes in high numbers. So, clearly, they've got this crazy-important role to play. We just don't know exactly what that role is yet.

- Dr. Dominic DeSantis

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“The role of snakes, especially the large-bodied rattlesnakes and pit vipers that we study, act as apex predators in the ecosystems they exist within. They're big, and they can eat a huge diversity of prey,” DeSantis said. “Rattlesnakes play a critical role, maintaining interactions between species. If we begin to lose them, I don't think anybody knows what those ecosystems devolve into.”

“Snakes act as an important linchpin pretty much everywhere in North America, but we don't understand that role very well,” he said. “We know it's important. We know they're there. We know they're really prominent in all these systems, sometimes in high numbers. So, clearly, they've got this crazy-important role to play. We just don't know exactly what that role is yet.”

As an undergraduate at Texas State University, DeSantis researched salamander behavior. During his doctorate studies at the University of Texas at El Paso, he pioneered a technique to track snakes and monitor their behavior using accelerometers, a device that measures vibrations or changing motion.

DeSantis was hired in 2020 to teach courses like vertebrate zoology and herpetology. He launched a series of case studies here, using the same technology, putting Georgia College students at the frontier of new discoveries in snake behavior.



Alternate Text

Students with research include:

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Rattlesnakes play a critical role, maintaining interactions between species. If we begin to lose them, I don't think anybody knows what those ecosystems devolve into.

- DeSantis

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- Recent graduate student **Anna Tipton** of Hartwell, Georgia. Tipton researched how snakes interact with roadways. Her thesis revealed a completely-new finding: Snakes sometimes move up and down one side of a road for weeks, flicking their tongues to assess the new sensory pathway—perhaps in confusion—before deciding to cross or turn back.
- Graduate student, **Morgan Thompson** of Tucson, Arizona. Thompson is wrapping up her thesis validating the use of accelerometers to record predatory strikes and swallowing of prey by rattlesnakes in nature. This represents the first and only available method for monitoring these aspects of snake behavior.
- Senior [biology](#) major **Jack Powers** of Roswell, Georgia. Powers will begin his master's in biology at Georgia College in the fall and continue studying over-winter

behavior in timber rattlesnakes—what DeSantis calls “a really important aspect of their ecology that’s almost completely overlooked in literature.”

- Junior biology major **Danielle Bartlett** of Marietta, Georgia. Bartlett is testing rattlesnakes and pit vipers for a fungal disease that caused significant declines in snake populations in the Northeast and Midwest. Pinpointing factors associated with severe disease could help predict declines in local populations.

Eight Georgia College students—three graduate students and five undergraduates—work with DeSantis.

Half their research is driven by hypotheses centered on behavioral ecology of snakes. The other half—what DeSantis calls “next generation natural history”—is driven by “cool emerging technologies,” like accelerometers.



Dr. DeSantis instructing students in the field.

Since the 1980s, radio telemetry was the only means of tracking snakes. That entry-level tech—basically a handheld antenna—allowed biologists to see where snakes went, point A to point B.

When accelerometers came on the scene 15 years ago, they were so big they could only be used on large marine mammals, like dolphins. Now, radio telemetry is used to locate a snake every few days. Transmitters track how far each snake has moved. But accelerometers collect other movement data like the number of times a snake eats, reproduces, constricts or strikes in self-defense.

Finally, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used to classify different behavioral states. What would take several graduate students two years to evaluate—AI can do in a matter of hours.

“

There's a growing trend in field biology to leverage a lot of really cool, automated classification techniques to improve the way we collect data on organisms in nature, especially small and secretive things that are hard to observe.

Snakes obviously fall into that category. Their whole life is centered around being really stealthy and secretive. Most of them are nocturnal, and they're oftentimes really cryptic, well camouflaged. By the time you've seen it, it's not going to be exhibiting any of the behaviors you want to observe. So, we have to use technology to collect data on the species across time.

- Dr. Dominic DeSantis

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Twice a week, DeSantis' group goes to Cedar Creek Wildlife Management Area, nearly 40,000 acres of forest in Eatonton. The university has permits from the U.S. Forest Service and Georgia Department of Natural Resources to track and study snakes at this site—which includes adjacent national forest and nearby private land owned by people who call DeSantis to relocate snakes from their yards.

Students hike 10 to 15 miles each visit, working in pairs. They track 22 snakes—19 rattlesnakes and three rat snakes—each implanted with small transmitters.

Using radio telemetry kits, handheld antennas and receivers—students adjust the tuning for each snake, which transmits its own frequency. They find and relocate snakes. They also record observations, like whether a snake is resting or in retreat. They note habitat, body temperature and wind speed.



Alternate Text

Typically, each snake moves between 2 and 300 meters a night. At the end of the monitoring period, about a year, snakes are brought back to the lab at Georgia College.

Transmitters are surgically removed and snakes returned to the wild. Then, data logging begins.

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As we further develop, advance and validate these technologies we're using, I think they'll prove pretty transformative for the discipline.

- DeSantis

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“Because of methodological limitations,” DeSantis said, “it was always really challenging to study the behavior of rattlesnakes in the field, and it still remains challenging. As we further develop, advance and validate these technologies we're using, I think they'll prove pretty transformative for the discipline.”

Students research various topics. They've delved into foraging behaviors to see what snakes are eating. They ponder how much time snakes spend underground versus basking in the sun. With video cameras, they've caught social interactions between predator and prey—as well as squirrels and bobcats harassing snakes.

Now, they're determining if snakes make decisions—like deliberately hibernating alone instead of groups when sick.

Graduate biology student, William Tillett of Atlanta loves this interactive learning.

He started as a chemistry major wanting to be a radiologist. That changed when he took ecology and caught the “research bug.” He stayed on for a master's degree, and was the first to use accelerometers on rat snakes. Tillett discovered they eat more often than rattlers but use less space when foraging. He wondered how two large-bodied snakes exist in one place in high numbers.

Technology showed a surprising result.

Rat snakes move vertically, spending half their time in trees.

“Rattlesnakes are sit-and-wait foragers. They sit in one spot, sometimes for multiple days at a time, waiting for something to walk by, and then they strike,” Tillett said. “Rat snakes eat more, so they’re probably going to require a lot more energy to move throughout the environment, right? But it’s just peculiar. My results show the exact opposite.”



Graduate biology student William Tillett in Herty Hall's herpetology lab.

Now, Tillett's working with other research students training AI to characterize this behavior and determine if rat snakes are eating or resting in trees. Then, he hopes to get a Ph.D. and work in the U.S. Forest Service or Department of Natural Resources.

Coming to Georgia College helped him find his path.

“

Being at such a great university with small class sizes allowed me to forge that relationship with professors,” he said. “I don't think I'd be where I am today, if I didn't have that.

- William Tillett

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News Stories Posted Tuesday April 4, 2023



GCSU well represented among Fulbright semi-finalists

[National Scholarships Office at Georgia College](#) : Tuesday April 4, 2023

Georgia College & State University students and alumni continue experiencing success applying for one of the United States' premiere cultural exchange programs.

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs named four Georgia College students and recent alumni as semi-finalists for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program.

"I am so proud of all of our Fulbright semi-finalists, and I'm especially excited to have several alumni represented," said Anna Whiteside, assistant director of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College and national scholarships coordinator.

Operating in over 160 countries worldwide, the Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Recent graduate, and Fulbright semi-finalist, Julian Lopez, '20, applied for the scholarship program because of its focus on ambassadorship and intercultural connection. Lopez is a strategist with the global consulting firm BCG BrightHouse. He believes the Fulbright program—with its meaningful engagement with people from other cultures—will help him develop a skillset for working with people around the world.

"Intercultural understanding and collaboration are paramount in the business consulting profession, especially when working with global clients," he said.

Another benefit of the Fulbright experience, Lopez added, is the opportunity for America's brightest scholars to represent our nation's positive virtues abroad.

"There are so many stereotypes and misconceptions about Americans in Europe—I experienced it while over there in 2019," he said. "I want to bring clarity to what is accurate and what isn't."



Julian Lopez

Georgia College graduate creative writing student Kelsie Doran is a world-traveling poet who enjoys teaching the gift of language. Helping Norwegian students in her potential host country learn English, she said, is something that would benefit them beyond her Fulbright experience.



Kelsie Doran

In the spirit of cultural exchange that is at the core of the Fulbright program, Doran hopes to bring back tools and concepts from the Norwegian education system to use upon her return.

"I hope to learn from the students, and that we can grow from one another," she said. "I hope to gain insight, to embrace Norway fully and to explore what it means to teach."

Doran and Lopez applied for the Fulbright to advance their personal and professional trajectories beyond their classroom experiences at Georgia College. Both said Whiteside assisted them with their applications in a way that made the process efficient and an

opportunity for growth.

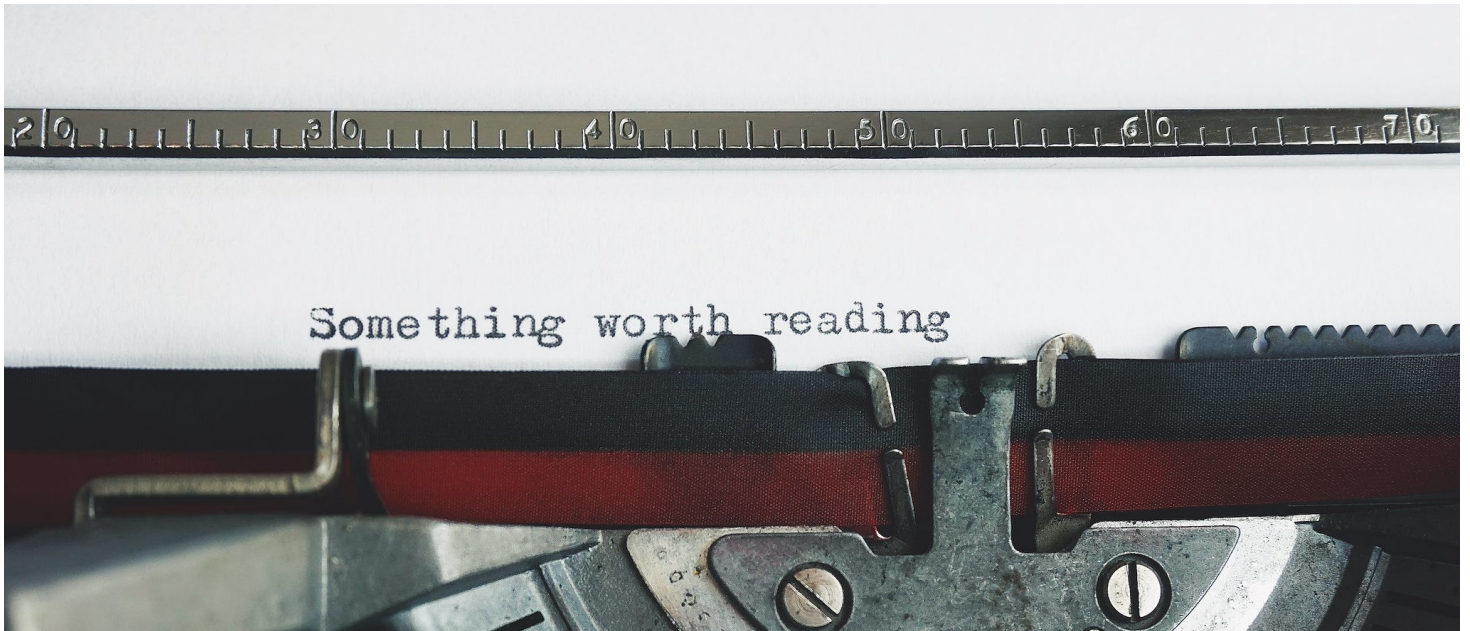
"Just do it; there's really nothing to lose," Lopez said. "If you get the scholarship, you're looking at the opportunity of a lifetime. If you don't, the application

experience will only make you into a stronger, more experienced, more articulate applicant for opportunities down the line.”

The scholarships office is available to work with students—undergraduate, graduate and alumni—to develop their Fulbright application, Whiteside said. Visit [the National Scholarships Office website](#) to learn more about the Fulbright, and other national scholarships.

“Many people don't know this, but you can apply for Fulbright Scholarships as an alum,” Whiteside said. “And, as a Georgia College alum, you are welcome to come and work with me on your application.”

News Stories Posted Wednesday April 5, 2023



Creative writing students pass their knowledge of the craft to seventh graders

[English, Department of](#) : Wednesday April 5, 2023

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

She was trying to teach a group of seventh graders about haikus. Although she was excited about her lesson plan—they were not.

“Adaptability is one of the biggest things I’ve learned from this class,” said Aner Gendellman, a junior creative writing major from Alpharetta.

Gendellman is one of a dozen graduate and undergraduate students taking the creative writing course, “Teaching Writing in the Schools.” Throughout the academic year, they learned what it takes to be an educator by teaching 65 seventh graders from Georgia College & State University’s Early College program how to write.

That day, Gendellman knew in a heart-stopping instant her plan wasn’t working.

Thinking fast, she grabbed a rugby ball she’d brought along and moved the



Aner Gendellman stands in support as one of her seventh grade students reads.

adolescents into a circle. When students caught the ball, they had to define literary devices like personification, similes and metaphors.

It was literally a game-changer—and the class was a success.

“I had to totally scrap my lesson plan that day and do something by the seat-of-my-pants,” Gendellman said. “This class

really helped me be more comfortable with the idea that I don’t need to have everything perfectly laid out. Being a teacher can be kind of chaotic. You need to be able to adapt.”

These are the crucial moments Dr. Kerry Neville hopes her students experience and embrace.

As coordinator of the university’s Masters of Fine Arts (MFA) program and associate professor of English, Neville sees the “Teaching Writing in Schools” course as a chance to prepare young teachers, even as they mold young writers.

“My hope for our student teachers is they learn that teaching is an imperfect art,” Neville said. “There are going to be days when things feel amazing, and you’re on top of your game. And there are going to be days when the universe throws a curveball, and you have to adapt.”



Dr. Kerry Neville

Students mostly take the course to ‘try on’ teaching. If they already know they want to teach, the class helps improve their skills. Graduates take it as an elective, while English majors can use the class as their senior capstone project.

A record number of students signed up for the course this year. To accommodate the increase, students co-taught seventh graders in small groups. They took turns being lead teacher and developed lessons plans for about eight writing classes in the fall and six more in the spring.

Prior to class with seventh graders—students met with professors to review what they’d teach that day. They presented various aspects of writing like building voice

in poems or prose; creating rhyme in poetry; developing plot in short stories; using imagery, metaphors and similes; or making revisions.

It's all about strategy and what it means to imagine and create. The class augmented what seventh graders learn in school—giving them an hour each week “devoted purely to imaginative writing,” Neville said.

Afterwards, student teachers came back together and rehashed what went right and wrong. They wrote about their teaching experience in journals.

“

We get our teachers prepared, in terms of learning how to develop lesson plans, learning how to develop strategies for teaching creative writing, for thinking about what it means to be a teacher and what kind of teacher they imagine themselves in the classroom—because there's a lot of nerves for most student teachers. It's the first time most of them have walked into a classroom and been in charge of content.

- Neville

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Getting hands-on practice with real learners is invaluable, said Michaela Reed, a MFA graduate student from Albany. A recurring challenge, for her, had been the noise level of classes—until she realized, despite the noise, her students were still learning and improving each week.

“The unpredictability of the classroom is something very normal to me now,” Reed said. “I’ve learned over time I just had to embrace my classroom chaos.”



Michaela Reed (left) and Nayoung Seo (right) collaborate.

“I completely encourage people to be involved with this course,” she said, “because it gives you a whole different perspective. I think we go through a lot of our lives being on one side of the conversation, as students. Becoming a teacher opens your mind.”

International student Nayoung Seo from South Korea incorporated her culture into

lessons. She employed things like Korean pop music and was thrilled when students responded enthusiastically.

The experience taught Seo patience. One boy liked science but not writing. Under her tutorage, he's now eager to write down his thoughts and experiences.

"It definitely pays back, when time passes by, and they learn more skills," Seo said.



A seventh grader presented his favorite piece of writing recently.

At the end of the academic year, student teachers beam with pride as their young pupils read a favorite poem or mini-essay on stage for family and friends. Their selection is then published in a small journal, called "The Peacock's Feather."

It's a moment of accomplishment for both writers and teachers.

As seventh graders develop confidence in their writing—so do student educators in their ability to teach.

"I love watching our teachers," Neville said, "and the way they love watching their seventh graders blossom over the year. Our student teachers move from feeling anxiety and insecurity to being confident and self-assured. Their dedication to teaching creative writing is just a wonderful thing to see."

News Stories Posted Thursday April 6, 2023



Entrepreneurial students earn money in first VC-Squared competition

[College of Business & Technology](#): Thursday April 6, 2023

Three students earned prize money to fund their original business ideas in The Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship's first VC-Squared competition.

A part of Research Day, the "Shark Tank-esque" contest challenged students to present their ideas for products or businesses to four expert judges—each deciding whose idea was worth funding.

"Our inaugural VC2 was most definitely a success. The students really carried the event with their innovative and inspiring business ideas," said Dr. Nicolas Creel, assistant professor of business law and director of the center. "There is a ton of latent entrepreneurial talent in this student body, and I aim to tap into it with this and other events going forward."

“

There is a ton of latent entrepreneurial talent in the student body, and I aim to tap into it with this and other events going forward.

- Dr. Nicolas Creel

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Gavin Inrocci took the first-place prize of \$400 with his idea for an apparel app, Trey McCallum walked away with \$200 and second place for his new TV hardware design, and Joel Saucedo—first-year physics student—won most innovative award and \$100 for his idea to redesign medical equipment.

The event was designed to encourage students to develop new, creative ideas and promote thoughtful solutions to self-identified problems, Creel said.

The competition was open to all majors and gave 12 enterprising students opportunity to realize their ideas with the potential to save lives, make a difference, create an impact, engage the community and more. While 10 presentations were made to the judges this year, Creel says their outreach will only expand with time.

VC-Squared was the culmination of Creel’s advising to the participating students, who could have also developed skills in the center’s Bobcat Business Builder Bootcamp—or B-Quad—a business education workshop open to anyone willing to learn what it takes to launch and grow a business.

Students were evaluated by the “shark” judges on their persuasiveness, quality of product or service, pricing, marketing plan, oral communication skills, professionalism, innovation and their ability to answer detailed questions.

They could earn additional points if the judges were willing to invest their own money.

In the end, the event gave students a way to see the potential of their ideas to succeed. Not without criticism though, as the judges’ thoughtful questions and advice pushed each presenter to think critically about all aspects of their plan.

If they didn’t win money, they still left with a better understanding of business and



Gavin Inrocci won first place in GCSU's first VC-Squared.

more ideas to motivate them.

News Stories Posted Friday April 7, 2023



Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award inspires young writers

[English, Department of](#) : Friday April 7, 2023

Five inspiring writers achieved finalist status for their poetry and/or short story earning the Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award from Georgia College & State University. Their creative works were selected out of 70 submissions. The 14th Annual Awards ceremony took place March 30.

Winning first place two years in a row in the First Year and Sophomore Category is Charlotte Aexel of Wind Lake, Wisconsin. Her poem, "Miss Flannery," took first place while her short story, "Indiana's Ghost," landed second place. The sophomore is an English and French double major. She is also the author of "The Suitcase" poetry collection and serves as the editor-in-chief of the GCSU Student Literary Journal "The Peacock's Feet."

Olivia Ver Steegh placed third in this division for her short story "The Silent Song of Mushrooms." Ver Steegh of Milton, a first-year student, is majoring in English with a creative writing concentration. She enjoys writing fiction and is a nature enthusiast, focusing most of her work on the natural world.



Charlotte Aexel

Winning first place in the Junior and Senior Category is Aner Gendellman of Alpharetta for her poem, "A God's Ice-Cold Diet Coke." She is a junior creative writing major and has been published in "The Peacock's Feet." Gendellman also won third place in the 2022 Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award.

Other Junior and Senior Division finalists include Kayla Goode and Hannah Mitchell.

Goode is an English major from McDonough, who placed second with their poem "Portrait of my Mother Mowing the Lawn." Goode's poem, "Old Man Hunche," won the Intro Journals Project competition at the college level, and they compete nationally.

Hannah Mitchell, an English major from Plains, placed third for her poem "Fruit of

Your Soul.” Her love of poetry stems from a great appreciation of the Romantic Era and a desire to use words to create beauty out of themes and ideas that are oftentimes unappealing.

During the ceremony, finalists read excerpts of their works and were awarded certificates and cash prizes. First-place winners received \$1,000.

Aexel’s inspiration for her winning poem originated from a project she completed on Flannery O’Connor, ’45, for her high school’s AP Literature Class. It also occurred during a difficult time in her life.

“It’s cool that I was able to turn that concept into art, mix it with some things I’m passionate about and see how writing helped me process something. Plus, I get to share that poem with people.”

Her second-place short story, “Indiana’s Ghost,” was inspired by the 14-hour trip she takes to and from Wisconsin multiple times per year.

“I was inspired by the interstate, billboards and people I saw,” Aexel said.

She enjoys transforming small details into something big, like a short story or poem.

“That’s my favorite thing about writing,” Aexel said. “It helps me look at my life from a new lens, and it makes me a lot happier.”

Although she thinks effective writing is important in any profession, she also thinks it’s good for the soul.



Aner Gendellman

“

It’s really inspired my confidence as a writer. It’s hard to bridge that gap

between, 'I like to write,' and 'I am a writer.' This award does that.

- Charlotte Aexel

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“You can take anything that happens to you and turn it into something beautiful or that can help someone else,” Aexel said. “I think people would enjoy doing that, even if writing isn't their passion.”

Winning the Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award two years in a row validated her self-confidence as a writer.

“It's really inspired my confidence as a writer,” Aexel said. “It's hard to bridge that gap between, 'I like to write,' and 'I am a writer.' This award does that.”

Gendellman chose to submit two of her works. She pushed herself to try something new, outside her comfort zone. Her inspiration for her winning piece came from sitting in a Waffle House with friends, observing others.

“There was a weird aura in the place,” Gendellman said. “I saw this woman. I was really intrigued by her. So, I decided to give her a little backstory and write a poem about her.”

“

This experience is a great step in [the right] direction. I hope to get my MFA in creative writing and teach. I just want to share my love for creative writing with other people.

- Aner Gendellman

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Writing is a good outlet for Gendellman. In addition to her classes, she's involved in several campus activities, and she works.

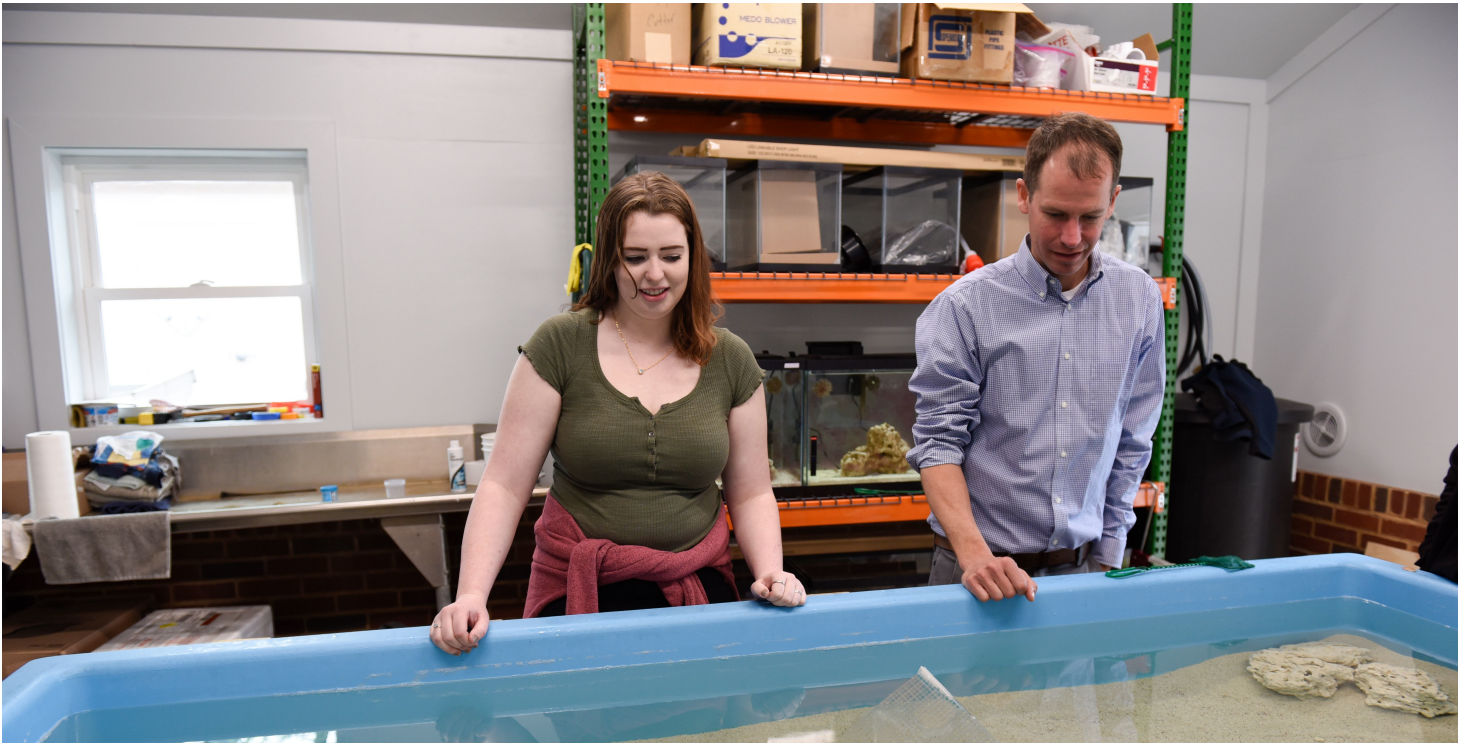
“Many times, I get stressed out,” Gendellman said. “But at the end of the day, I give myself at least 20 minutes to write my thoughts on a page. It really helps me stay calm and keep myself on track.”

She didn't start writing until she took Intro to Creative Writing over a year ago. Gendellman said she's grown so much as a writer since then. More than anything, she wants to be a writer surrounded by other writers.

“This experience is a great step in that direction,” Gendellman said. “I hope to get

my MFA in creative writing and teach. I just want to share my love for creative writing with other people.”

News Stories Posted Wednesday April 12, 2023



Newly-caught sea creatures at home in GCSU's Aquatic Sciences Center

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Wednesday April 12, 2023



Photo Credit: David Weese.

It looks like the water tables toddlers play at—only this 300-gallon aquarium is home to newly-caught translucent blue crabs, hermit crabs, mantis shrimp and miniature starfish that like to bury themselves in the sand.

Georgia College & State University Associate Professor of Biology Dr. David Weese took his Intro to Marine Biology class on a recent research trip to

experience the thrill of the open sea and salty breezes.

They used trawling nets to capture multiple ocean dwellers and brought an ample supply back to put in Georgia College's new marine lab behind the old greenhouse at Herty Hall.

The critters now live in the vast tank—already fighting territorial disputes—just feet away from other smaller tanks that hold sea urchins for research.

"The students got to see how marine research is done," Weese said. "They got to deploy so much instrumentation and measure things like conductivity and temperature. Usually, we read the book, and I show them pictures. But to actually take them out—so they can see how scientists work—is invaluable."



Junior biology major Amelia Pound with Dr. David Weese at the 300-gallon aquarium in the new marine lab behind Herty Hall.

The daylong trip aboard the research vessel, Savannah, was part of a program through the University of Georgia's Skidaway Institute of Oceanography. About 10 students went on the educational trip, funded through the University System of Georgia.

“

Even if your institution is on the coast, this size tank is very unique. It's not something that many schools have.

- Dr. David Weese

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Few universities have large holding tanks to keep saltwater organisms alive, Weese said. This project “opens the door to all kinds of student research,” like water quality analysis, pH or temperature changes in water and pollution studies.

“Even if your institution is on the coast, this size tank is very unique. It's not something that many schools have,” he said.

Dr. Kristine White, assistant professor of biology, teaches oceanography in the new Marine Sciences concentration at Georgia College. Faculty would like to further develop a reef system in the big tank, she said, and use it for experiments and teaching.

These plans excite junior biology major Amelia Pound of Savannah. The sea trip opened her eyes to possible careers she might choose. Her brother is a microbiologist and her mother a nurse, so Pound grew up curious and asking questions. She feels destined to do experiments and research.



Amelia Pound describes the recent research trip.

“Coming to Georgia College and getting to experience the different labs here, I realized how fun research is and how much I enjoy trying a diversity of things,” she said. “Just learning in general has always been a big passion of mine. Georgia College was the right choice to experience that.”

Being on the open sea brought textbook reading and classroom instruction to life. Holding and interacting with marine organisms—like sea squirts, sand dollars, coral and sponges—helped Pound familiarize herself with their anatomy and personality quirks.

The group even caught a pufferfish and stingray but returned them to the ocean after examination.

“

I’m a big hands-on person—I don't really learn well from just reading a textbook. We dissected starfish not long ago, but it’s nice to actually see them in action. Getting to apply what we learn in the classroom to real life and doing research with the equipment we've learned about is so cool.

- Amelia Pound



Photo Credit: David Weese.

”

Now, Pound helps manage these sea creatures—making sure the water stays filtered for optimal survival. The entire experience made her consider working as a marine biologist at the Georgia Aquarium someday.

“This has definitely opened my eyes to different opportunities,” Pound said. “Ocean research is important in the long run to make sure water quality stays good and ensure we keep our seas clean.”

Photos in gallery taken by David Weese.

News Stories Posted Thursday April 13, 2023



Colin Hall earns Georgia College & State University's first-ever Truman Scholarship

[National Scholarships Office at Georgia College](#) : Thursday April 13, 2023

Colin Hall, a political science major from Jones County, is Georgia College & State University's first-ever Truman Scholar.

Created as a living memorial to United States President Harry S. Truman, [the Truman Scholarship](#) is a highly competitive national award given to exceptional college juniors who demonstrate outstanding leadership potential, a commitment to public service and academic excellence.

"The Truman wants someone who's dedicated to a life in public service," Hall said, "and I can say that one of my big missions in life is to serve people."

Hall joins a class of 62 new Truman Scholars selected from 705 applicants representing 275 colleges and universities nationwide. This year, Hall is the only student in Georgia to earn this prestigious honor recognizing his commitment to public service.

Hall applied for the Truman Scholarship upon the recommendation of National Scholarships Office Coordinator Anna Whiteside, who first learned about Hall through his participation in [GCSU's Election Administration Certificate program](#).

"While we've had several students make it to the finalist level over the past few years, Colin is our first Truman recipient," Whiteside said. "I am thrilled that the rest of the country is going to get an opportunity to learn through Colin how much GCSU students care about improving the world around them."



Colin Hall

Hall credits his parents, Geoffrey and Valerie Hall, and his Christian faith for instilling his strong sense of duty to others.

“

One of the best ways you can serve others is being able to listen and have productive conversations...

- Colin Hall

”

"Something that really motivated me is being able to witness my mother as a teacher," Hall said. "She's been a teacher for 28 years and seeing how much time she invests into students year after year in her classroom has made me gain an appreciation for educators and administrators in education across the state."

Hall has volunteered as a Sunday school teacher since age 12 and regularly seeks opportunities to share his academic experiences with students at Mattie Wells Elementary School, where his mother teaches fourth grade. At Georgia College, Hall assists peers in résumé writing and mock interviewing at the university's Career Center.

Hall aspires to a life of public service as an elected official with the ultimate goal of being elected governor of Georgia. He looks forward to participating in the Truman Foundation's Summer Institute, during which Hall hopes to meet and work with elected officials and career civil servants to better understand constituent services and policymaking at the federal level.

"One of the best ways you can serve others is being able to listen and have productive conversations with people from different lifestyles who have different views on issues," Hall said, "and being able to then take things they say and make

sure we're not forgetting about anybody and that everybody's getting equal representation."

Georgia College administrators joined Hall's professors and Career Center colleagues in surprising him with the Truman Scholarship announcement during a reception.

"We are incredibly proud of Colin and this tremendous achievement," said President Cathy Cox. "He embodies the service-oriented values of the Truman Scholarship and proudly represents the mission of Georgia College & State University to produce graduates who are committed to ethical leadership and public service."

The Truman Scholarship provides funding for graduate studies, leadership training, career counseling and special internship and fellowship opportunities within the federal government.

The experience of applying for the Truman Scholarship has helped Hall prepare for his next steps, which include pursuing a master's degree in public administration and a law degree.

You can learn more about the Truman Scholarship and read Colin Hall's scholar bio on [the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation website](#). Learn more about applying for the Truman Scholarship and other national academic honors on [the GCSU National Scholarships Office website](#).



Colin Hall and President Cathy Cox during a reception informing Hall that he won the Truman Scholarship.

News Stories Posted Tuesday April 18, 2023



Education professor debuts 2nd season of Georgia travel show on GPB

[Professional Learning & Innovation, Department of](#): Tuesday April 18, 2023

Story developed by University Communications.



Dr. Chris Greer

His father gave him his first camera at age 12.

Now Dr. Chris Greer, professor of [Instructional Technology](#) at Georgia College & State University, uses that passion to educate people worldwide about photography and travel.

His first TV outdoor-adventure show, “View Finders,” aired last spring on Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB). It was so popular, he was invited back for a second season.

“I love to educate the general public about history,

ecology and the natural beauty of Georgia,” Greer said. “A TV show like this provides me with incredible reach across the entire state and beyond. It’s very gratifying to have that kind of impact when it comes to topics like conservation and preservation of natural resources.”



A sand dollar floats in the sea against a dramatic sunset. (All landscape photos in this article by Dr. Chris Greer.)

Greer has been at Georgia College 17 years. He teaches a wide range of technology integration courses to undergraduates and graduate education students. Until recently, he hadn’t thought of developing a television show. The idea occurred after the publication of Greer’s image-rich books on Photography: “Georgia Discovered: Exploring the Best of the Peach State” and “Naturally Georgia: From the Mountains to the Coast.”

These books and the GPB show interest people who don’t always have time to travel to faraway places. But they also give people options for nearby attractions—places they may not have thought to visit.

“The appeal of this show is it highlights beautiful locations that anybody in Georgia can visit on any given weekend. We try to showcase the natural beauty that can be

found all over this state,” Greer said.

Last spring’s shows were his first dive into television. The second season of “View Finders” began April 1st. It features 10 episodes —five airing this spring and another five in the fall. Every episode showcases a variety of music from Georgia musicians, as well. The series runs Saturday mornings and Thursday evenings for about 30 minutes.

“View Finders” can also be streamed at gpb.org or via the [GPB](#) app on a smart TV.

Episodes record a variety of places in Georgia and just beyond. Greer’s aim and undimming hope is always to capture gorgeous scenes and silhouettes in his camera’s viewfinder and on video.

Ever seeking, he goes on lengthy hikes and camps deep in the woods to capture pure moments.

This season’s GPB shows are filled with dramatic imagery like a floating sand dollar against a fiery-orange sunset; driftwood piercing through the sand against a pink-clouded sky; a well-strewn path through tree-draped Spanish moss; and a waterfall spilling over rocks and autumn leaves.

“The show offers a little something for everybody,” Greer said. “The audience will appreciate how beautiful the state of Georgia is and hopefully have a vested interest in preserving that beauty for generations to come.”



Photo of driftwood emerging from the sand against a sunset.



Photo of trees draped with Spanish Moss.

News Stories Posted Thursday April 20, 2023



GCSU offers first Healthcare Simulation Certificate in Georgia

[Nursing, School of](#) : Thursday April 20, 2023

Healthcare simulation centers are powerful tools for training healthcare professionals. Now, Georgia College & State University offers a new certificate program designed to make these centers more effective.

The College of Health Sciences has developed a one-year, graduate healthcare simulation certificate program to equip educators with best practices for teaching aspirant healthcare providers. The new Healthcare Simulation Certificate is the first of its kind in Georgia.

"Healthcare simulation educators all share a common end-goal, which is to improve patient outcomes," said Dr. Sterling Roberts, director of the Georgia College Simulation Center and assistant professor of nursing. "With this program, we can prepare educators to conduct simulation training in academia and other settings according to best-practice standards."

In healthcare simulation centers, students practice patient care using tools like

specialized manikins and standardized patients—someone trained to act as a real patient.

Students need guidance from faculty and healthcare practitioners who understand the equipment and its use for training. In this program, graduate students learn best-practice standards, simulation design, policy development and more.

Following instruction, faculty work with each student to create a clinical path that fits students' individual needs.

"Where I work currently, we utilize simulation, but not as effectively as we could be," said Ashley Barnes, a doctorate student of nursing practice. "I have learned so much that will help grow my organization's current program, and it really reignited my love and desire for simulation."

"Once I complete the program," Barnes said, "I want to continue to improve my simulation knowledge and sit for the Certified Healthcare Simulation Educator exam."

In August 2022, the Georgia College Simulation and Translational Research Center received provisional accreditation through the Society for Simulation in Healthcare—one of two University System of Georgia institutions with this distinction.

“

Learning these new skills will better equip me as a nursing instructor to develop and promote critical thinking and knowledge for my own students—so they can be better nurses.

- Tonya Jewell

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"While I had some idea about simulation, I really had no knowledge of how they were structured and run," said Tonya Jewell, a doctorate student in the certificate program. "Learning these new skills will better equip me as a nursing instructor to develop and promote critical thinking and knowledge for my own students—so they can be better nurses."

"I cannot say enough about Dr. Roberts and the simulation team," she said. "They are truly experts in simulations and very willing to share their knowledge so we, too, can become experts."

News Stories Posted Friday April 21, 2023



Psychology students study effect of COVID masks on youngsters' ability to detect emotions

[Psychological Science, Department of](#) : Friday April 21, 2023

They say eyes are windows to the soul.

But can emotions be understood only by looking in someone's eyes? A group of Georgia College & State University [Psychology](#) majors attempted to see if that's true.

This year, students in Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang's Social Emotional Research Lab returned to Baldwin County's Early Learning Center (ELC) to provide emotional coaching for 3- to 5-year-olds. The work is especially important for children who spent much of their early years looking at masked adults during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students compared the children's socio-emotional skills to previous years' data on children who saw entire faces during early development.

"We wanted to make sure kids still understood people's facial expressions," said



Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang

senior psychology major Clara Eysel of Columbus. “We wanted to know if the COVID years—with the masks and distancing and separation—affected their ability to tell when someone's upset, happy or mad.”

“

We wanted to make sure kids still understood people's facial

expressions. We wanted to know if the COVID years—with the masks and distancing and separation—affected their ability to tell when someone's upset, happy or mad.

- Clara Eysel

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Initial results show COVID-19 and mask wearing had a negative impact.

Children who regularly saw only the eyes of adults appeared to have lower emotional knowledge. This means they could be at higher risk for social incompetence problems—like depression, social anxiety, trouble relating mind to body, post-traumatic symptoms and obsession-compulsion disorders or social withdrawal issues.

Teachers of this age group reported seeing more troubles with behavioral regulation, attention spans and language skills. Findings were based on teacher assessments, Chiang stressed, not children actually displaying these problems.

“In comparison, children exhibited more internalizing problems during the past year or so,” Chiang said. “Some children from this age group, who grew up during COVID, could have mild forms of these behaviors. These problems can be related to a lack of social skills in people who poorly handle their emotions.”



Senior Carson Beasley works with children in GCSU's Social Emotional Lab at the Early Learning Center in Baldwin County.

Chiang has tracked emotional data on Baldwin County's children for 23 years. It's important work in an area where a high percentage of kids are raised by low-income, single parents who don't always have time to help their children build emotional skills.

“

You've got to be firm but warm with these children and show them you care.

- Dr. Chiang

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Teachers don't often have the time or resources to support children who exhibit emotional issues either. Chiang obtains grants to buy resources for local teachers and coaches them in strategic classroom management.

“You've got to be firm but warm with these children and show them you care,” Chiang said. “When emotion is so extreme, a person's brain shuts down and isn't processing. You need to find a way to modulate emotions to the point where you can talk with distraught children.”

Dr. Chiang believes it's vital for psychology students to work with children and

families, then apply what they learn to help the local community and carry on as agents-of-change in their careers. She hopes the intervention helps improve emotional knowledge these children lacked during the pandemic.

This semester, nine psychology majors worked twice a week at the ELC. They taught empathy training lessons—using storybooks, video, puppet shows, song, movement and art-n-crafts.

For children, the Georgia College Social Emotional Lab is their “Happy Room.” One little boy loved interacting with college students so much—he cried when it was time to go.

“In the beginning, the kids didn't really know what the Happy Room was yet,” Eysel said. “Now, when we go pick them up from their classrooms, they're so happy and excited.”

Chiang's Social Emotional Lab is great preparation for Eysel, who wants to work in special education. As co-head teacher, Eysel starts labs by showing children large glossy pictures of expressive faces. Students talk to the children about emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, fear, frustration and surprise.

The head teacher reads a story or shows a video about emotion—stopping to ask lots of questions, like “What's this person feeling?” “Why does he look scared?” and “How would this make you feel?”

Students work one-on-one with children, listening and sharing tools for dealing with difficult situations. The lessons are scripted, so the children's classroom teachers can reinforce learning throughout the year.

Eysel has noticed the children's behavior improve.

“Kids are more comfortable talking about their emotions with each other and us,” she said. “In the beginning, they weren't really speaking up very much. But now, when you ask them a question, they all want to answer. They all want to



Seniors Carson Beasley and Clara Eysel.

participate.”

If they feel overwhelmed, experiencing several emotions at once, Eysel tells them, “It’s okay to be upset. It’s okay to be angry. It’s okay to cry but talk to an adult. Let someone know how you’re feeling and someone will help you.”

Senior Carson Beasley of Woodstock, Georgia, is majoring in psychology with a minor in criminal justice. He’s a favorite in the Social Emotional Lab. He plays guitar, and they sing songs like “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and “Going on a Bear Hunt.”

Beasley wants to be a school counselor. Being in Chiang’s lab for two years, he’s learned a lot about young children, assessment testing and data collection.

When they started observing preschoolers this year—Beasley said some could read emotions on masked faces and some could not. Some couldn’t recall a word for the emotion they were seeing. The most challenging element was distinguishing between sadness, fear and anger.



Carson Beasley plays songs about emotion on his guitar.

“

I'm sure, as a kid, that can be frustrating to feel something but not be sure if other people know that's how you're feeling or not be able to say how you're feeling, especially at such a young age when emotions are strong. To help them cope is really the main goal.

- Carson Beasley

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One boy told him he used to hit when he was angry, but now he knows that’s not okay.

Beasley beams when talking about their ability to learn.

“They’re like sponges,” he said. “From the first lesson that we did, there’s been a huge, huge difference.”



Class of 2023: Violinist finds passion for missionary work

Commencement : Friday April 21, 2023

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

Nicholas Koebert

From: Suwanee, Georgia

Major: Music, violin performance

Why Georgia College & State University: I was introduced to GCSU through my high school violin teacher, Julie Rosseter-Sweeney, who also happens to be the violist of Georgia College's quartet in residence, the Kazanetti String Quartet.

Why this major: When deciding what major I should pursue in college, I could not find anything else that I wanted to devote these four years to besides [music](#).

What keeps him going: As a musician, there are special times I experience alone with the Lord—when a spontaneous chorus will arise when playing piano or guitar. These moments make me incredibly grateful to be trained as a musician.

Activities: During my freshman year, I was quickly introduced to a Christian ministry at Georgia College, called House Church. Throughout my entire college career, I found that most of my time outside of classes was spent serving people, leading worship and sometimes even teaching within House Church. I found some lifelong friends at House Church.



Nick Koeber teaching violin to elementary school children in Putnam County.

Community Service: I participated in serving local churches during holidays that commissioned me to participate in holiday orchestras. I also taught violin at Putnam Elementary School in Eatonton. The biggest thing I took from my time teaching there was how the students repeatedly made showing up worth it. My heart for elementary school students grew a lot during my time in Putnam County because of this.

Favorite Professor: My favorite professor at Georgia College is Dr. Bryan Hall. Dr. Hall has championed me as a musician and as a person who will succeed in whatever area I'm growing in. Dr. Hall has been incredibly patient with me during this time. I was able to perform a movement from a Mozart Concerto with the Boise Baroque Orchestra in Idaho this past summer. Without Dr. Hall, I wouldn't have had the opportunity to perform with a professional orchestra.

Biggest lesson learned: The biggest lesson for me was conquering the fear of man. Performing in front of hundreds of pairs of eyes is no simple endeavor. I have performed what seems like more times than I can remember. Here at Georgia College, I learned to conquer fear with faith and courage.

Greatest Challenge: The greatest challenge for me in getting my music degree was envisioning myself continuing violin performance in a classical capacity post-college. Though I've made incredible strides as a musician and person, I have chosen to pursue a career in cross-cultural ministry after I graduate through an international Christian missions organization called Youth With A Mission (YWAM).

How he's changed during four years of college: I don't think anyone can go through college without experiencing some level of change. For me, I changed in regard to priorities and what means most to me. I quickly realized that living for anyone or anything else but for Jesus Christ will always be a failed pursuit. As I surrender every aspect of my life to Jesus, I realize that there is nothing else in life that will fill you the way he does.

Key to success: The key to success in college is simply a relationship with Jesus. As I look back on these past four years, I can see God's hand through it all. Without Jesus, fear would have remained unconquered.

Advice for first-year students: One piece of advice I would give any student is that when rejection comes your way, not to identify with it but rather know that there is a God who loves you, will never reject you, and nothing can separate you from his love.

Future plans: Come September 2023, I'll be pursuing a career in cross-cultural missions through the global organization YWAM. I have no doubt my musicianship will follow me wherever I go. But my life has been captivated by two things: knowing God and making God known. I have found that there is no greater pursuit in life than to seek these two things.

How Georgia College helped: Georgia College has helped me explore different career possibilities, eliminating some and highlighting others, which helped me narrow it down to pursuing a lifestyle of cross-cultural missions.

News Stories Posted Monday April 24, 2023



The Graduate School celebrates Outstanding Graduate Assistants

[The Graduate School](#) : Monday April 24, 2023

The Graduate School at Georgia College & State University awarded five students the Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award for the 2022-2023 academic year.

The Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award, established in 2019, recognizes the contributions graduate assistants provide in supportive roles to students, faculty, staff, and the university while pursuing graduate studies.

The 2022-2023 Winners include:

Brooke Bowen – Master of Education, Library Media, assisting the College of Education in the Maker Space

Cherisse Howell – Master of Science in Nursing, Nurse Midwifery, assisting the



Cherisse Howell

School of Nursing, Clinical Placement

**Victoria Massey – Master of Management
Information Systems, assisting The Learning Center**

**Logan Timm – Master of Science, Biology, assisting
Herty Hall and the Integrated Science Center**

**Nathanael Williams – Master of Fine Arts, Creative
Writing, assisting The Writing Center**

**The award package includes \$200.00 from the
Georgia College & State University Foundation, a
framed certificate, and a GCSU gift bag.**

**Faculty, staff and administrators make nominations
for the Outstanding Graduate Assistant Award based
on work ethic, performance, significant contributions
and evidence of potential as a professional in their
chosen career field.**



Victoria Massey



Logan Timm

New
Wed
Posted
April 26, 2023



Nathanael Williams



Class of 2023: Student-athlete's grateful for well-rounded experience

[Commencement](#) : Wednesday April 26, 2023

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

Student-athlete Jesus Villamizar Abia of Valencia, Venezuela, took in the full Georgia College & State University experience by learning transferrable skills that will better equip him in life and well into his career.

"GCSU taught me that no matter how overwhelmed you feel some days, you can always smile, be the best version of yourself and do a great job in anything you do," Villamizar Abia said.

He'll graduate with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Business in May 2023.

Villamizar Abia's applying for marketing jobs in the greater Atlanta area and would like to become a marketing executive or marketing coordinator/manager.

"I enjoy creating strategies for marketing campaigns and seeing how people react to the campaigns and marketing plans I create," he said.



Jesus Villamizar Abia

Ultimately, Villamizar Abia plans to create his own businesses, including a coffee shop and a tennis/fitness center.

"I would also love to help my mom build her own restaurant, because it is one of her dreams," he said.

His inspiration comes from helping people, especially those he loves.

"My family showed me to always be humble and give 100% in anything I do," Villamizar Abia said. "My brother, Juan, is my idol. I've gained so much inspiration from him. He showed me that no matter what you are going through, you'll start feeling better every day. This is more than just a sentence; it's a culture. It's become my way of living."

Villamizar Abia came to Georgia College his sophomore year on a tennis scholarship, an international scholarship and with J. Whitney Bunting College of Business academic scholarships.

He chose Georgia College to be closer to his brother, who lives in Florida. He also enjoyed his conversations with Assistant Athletic Director and Head Tennis Coach Steve Barsby. In addition, he was impressed with GCSU's website and videos.

"I saw that I could have more interaction with the professors, and that was important to me," Villamizar Abia said. "Because of this, I've created strong relationships with people, which is hard to do when you are far from your home country. My tennis teammates, professors and friends have been incredibly nice. I've felt welcomed since my first day here."

He belonged to the International Club (his favorite) and the Student Athlete

Advisory Committee. These organizations helped him grow his leadership and communication skills.

“

GCSU taught me that no matter how overwhelmed you feel someday, you can always smile, be the best version of yourself and do a great job in anything you do.

- Jesus Villamizar Abia

”

“Working with groups of people with different backgrounds and points of view helped me open my mind and start seeing things and situations from different perspectives,” Villamizar Abia said.

He feels the staff at the International Education Center has been extremely helpful since his first day at Georgia College.

“Susie Ramage, who I refer to as a mom from the United States, helped me so much throughout my GCSU career,” Villamizar Abia said. “When I got Covid-19 in 2020, she asked how I was feeling every day and provided me with meals and groceries so I could survive those weeks—she’s the best!”

“Jason Wynn also helped me incredibly with all the legal processes with my Visa status,” Villamizar Abia said. “He made sure that everything worked out fine.”

Another person he wants to highlight is Isabella Echeverria, '20, who was president of the International Club during his first year at Georgia College.

“She made this place feel like home,” Villamizar Abia said. “Isabella became my best friend and was like a sister to me, who was always there in the good and bad moments.”



Villamizar Abia plays tennis.

Lecturer of Business Law/Ethics Dean Copelan, J.D., also made an impression on Villamizar Abia. Copelan explained class content well and helped the student-athlete catch up on assignments.

"He often asked me how the tennis seasons were going," Villamizar Abia said. "I felt he wanted to see me succeed in school and tennis."

Being on the Georgia College Tennis Team, practicing Monday through Saturday with up to three matches a week, taught Villamizar Abia how to manage his time with schoolwork and tennis.

"Since I play intense matches and do intense trainings, I always try to have everything done before hand, so I can rest after playing tennis," he said. "This helped me to be more effective and efficient when preparing for tests, presentations and homework. Sometimes I even did my schoolwork on the bus when traveling for matches."

Prior to playing tennis at GCSU, Villamizar Abia thought that tennis was an individual and lonely sport. But he learned the value of teamwork from his teammates. They pushed and supported him to become a better tennis player every day.

"They've become family to me, and I feel they have my back," he said. "I love that I

don't play for myself anymore, now I play for my teammates and an entire community."



Class of 2023: Psychology major learned the art of letting go

Commencement : Wednesday April 26, 2023

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

Anna Marie Boughton

From: Dallas, Georgia

Major: Psychology

Why this major: By the end of high school, I knew I wanted to study [psychology](#) to be a therapist and better understand people in general. A Careers in Psychology course gave me confidence I would find fulfilling work with this degree.

Why Georgia College & State University: Both of my older siblings graduated from Georgia College. I wanted to attend a smaller school with a personal experience with professors. Georgia College stood out as providing a promising academic education, as well as an opportunity to experience community in a new way. I am beyond grateful I came here. I've met some of the most incredible people—both students and professors—that have encouraged my growth tremendously. I can't imagine going to school anywhere else.

Activities: This past year I had the privilege of serving on an incredible leadership team with a Christian ministry called Kudzu. I've also been a part of Psi Chi, the honors society for psychology students.

Most impactful: I studied abroad five weeks in Montepulciano, a small Italian town in Tuscany. Traveling with close friends, exploring different cities, going on educational excursions, learning the art and history, and experiencing the people and culture changed my worldview tremendously.

Research: I joined Dr. Heppner's Social Psychology research lab my junior year and immediately helped design the GC Mental Health Resource Look Book. Being a part of Dr. Chiang's Social Emotional Development lab has also given me greater confidence in my abilities. We worked with children at the Early Learning Center (ELC) in Baldwin County, running studies on emotional competence and teaching lessons on empathy. In both, I had incredible opportunities to create research designs, run experiments and present findings at several different conferences.



Anna Boughton with a child in the Social Emotional Lab at Baldwin County's Early Learning Center.

One of my study abroad classes, Interpersonal Relationships Across Cultures with Dr. Chiang, required us to observe relationships. I see a lot of Americans using their phones while spending time together. It made me wonder how phone distraction impacts relationships. I decided to observe and compare phone use in the U.S. and Italy. I learned, when sharing meals together, Americans get distracted by cell phones more than Italians.

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The biggest lesson I learned is to pursue peace rather than worry. I didn't come to college worry-free. Letting go and releasing control, trusting that everything is being worked out for the purpose God, changed everything about the way I view my life and the future.

- Anna Boughton

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Biggest Achievement: I received the Dr. Euri Bolton Award for Outstanding

Research from the psychology department. That was a huge honor.

Favorite Class: Easily the most unforgettable class was senior seminar in Adventure Therapy with Dr. Gillis. He's a phenomenal professor who challenges us to grow personally and professionally. My group and I bonded while doing adventure therapy challenges and reflections together.

Lesson learned: The biggest lesson I learned is to pursue peace rather than worry. I didn't come to college worry-free. Letting go and releasing control, trusting that everything is being worked out for the purpose God, changed everything about the way I view my life and the future. It's given me rest and joy, in exchange for fear and doubt. I try to take life day-by-day, work hard at what I do, and let the rest fall into place.

Key to success: The key is how you spend your time, and whether you accept or reject responsibility. There'll always be a million things fighting for your attention. Learning to choose wisely is what gives us time and balance. It's important to learn good study skills and do your work well without compromising your mental health, social life and sleep. Easier said than done but worth aiming for.



Alternate Text

How she's changed during college: I started at another school before transferring to Georgia College sophomore year. My mentality there was simply to get by.

Coming here, I can honestly say I was not the same person I am now in just about every way. My heart, attitude, how I spend my time, where I find my purpose and even my outward self has changed drastically. Not everyone will have this radical change. Mine wasn't due to my own efforts but because of the work Jesus did in me.

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Georgia College helped me discover and develop unknown talents and abilities.
- Boughton

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Advice for incoming students: Get involved in activities and groups that challenge you to grow and take risks. Try to learn from every person you meet. Be teachable, ask questions and get to know other people. Your time here will end, but the relationships don't have to. Enjoy life. It won't get less busy, so learn to delight in small moments and be content in any circumstance.

Future plans: My main goal is to do biblical Christian counseling and run my own practice or work with a church or organization of counselors. For this, I plan to get a masters in counseling.

How Georgia College helped: Georgia College helped me discover and develop unknown talents and abilities. I learned more about my passions and interests and was affirmed in my leadership abilities through opportune projects. I worked closely with professors who cheer me on, as I move forward to the next phase. My time here helped me grow tremendously into a more driven, passionate and professional student—while showing me how to live in and appreciate community. I'm truly grateful for my time here and each person I've met along the way.

News Stories Posted Thursday April 27, 2023



Yale assistant professor delves into research to help others stop smoking

[Psychological Science, Department of](#) : Thursday April 27, 2023

Story and award photo developed by University Communications.

When Dr. Danielle Davis, '14, came to Georgia College & State University, she majored in psychology so she could become a therapist.

"I always knew I wanted to help people in some way," she said.

Then, Davis discovered her love for research. The culmination of her undergraduate research led to several research posters she co-authored and presented at local and regional conferences. Her work was so impressive, she won the [Department of Psychological Science](#) Award for Outstanding Psychology Student three years in a row. Winning these awards validated that she was on the right track toward her career goal.

Davis' strong drive to research continues today. She is an assistant professor at

the department of psychiatry in the Yale School of Medicine. She oversees and conducts basic and applied research, assessing tobacco product regulation and cessation among youth and adults.

Davis oversees several research studies. On any given day, she could be writing research papers, contemplating new research studies and doing lab work.



Dr. Danielle Davis



Dr. Danielle Davis processes saliva samples which are being tested for nicotine and cotinine (a byproduct of nicotine).

"I love to think of research questions and find ways to answer them, which is a big part of my job," Davis said. "It's just fun to work on science that's actually being used to hopefully change laws to improve public health."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration funds much of her work, which informs the

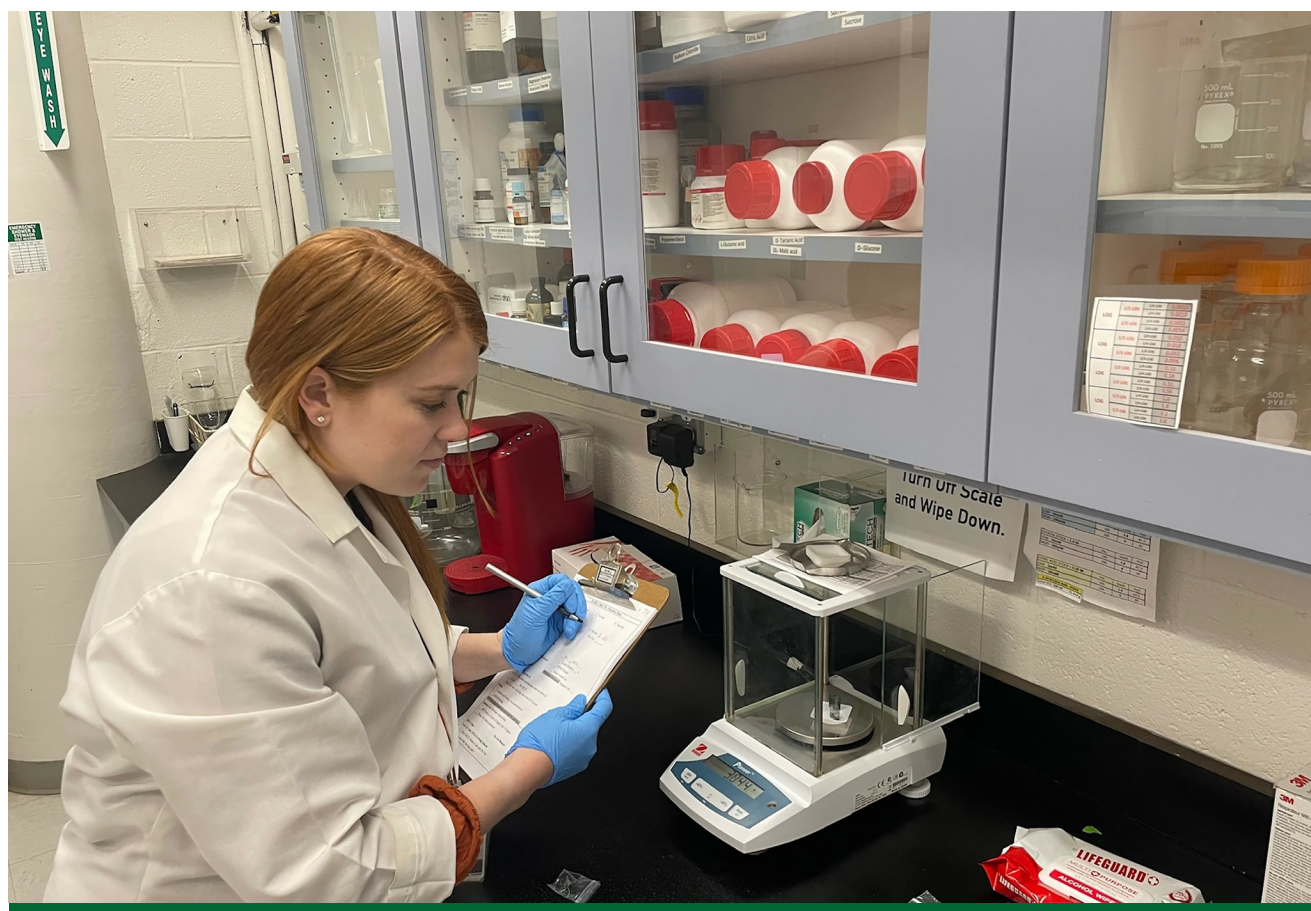
development of regulations for tobacco products. The abundant resources of the federal government enable Davis to work with researchers from a wide range of specialties.

“Collaborating with team members ensures our science is relevant and within scope,” Davis said. “It also helps with FDA funding. I work on other people's projects, and they work on mine, which places many different experts on each project.”

She’s currently working on a study, in which her team uses different techniques to motivate youths to quit vaping. If participants can abstain from vaping for multiple days in a row, they receive monetary rewards. Plus, her team encourages cognitive behavioral therapy during that time.

“We hope these two things will replace the nicotine reward,” Davis said. “This therapy will work together to hopefully help them achieve long-term success and product abstinence.”

Recently, Davis and her team have started thinking about how to expand this work to include cannabis use.



Dr. Danielle Davis prepares and weighs e-liquids for human experimental studies.

Another recent undertaking puts Davis alongside chemists running a pilot study on

the effects of adjusting the water content in E-cigarettes. They alter the amount of E-cigarette liquid by adding sterilized water. Participants then sample the product.

“We're doing this study, because the liquid found in E-cigarettes can be toxic,” Davis said. “If E-cigarettes aren’t going to come off the market, we at least want to find ways to make them safer. So, we're testing this in humans to see if it changes the sensory effects, and if they will still use the product if it feels less irritating and potentially less harmful.”

“

I love to think of research questions and find ways to answer them, which is a big part of my job. It's just fun to work on science that's actually being used to hopefully change laws to improve public health.

- Dr. Danielle Davis

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Davis has published her addiction-focused research in top-tiered, peer-reviewed journals, including “Nicotine & Tobacco Research,” “Drug and Alcohol Dependence” and “Addictive Behaviors.” She’s also contributed to a few books, highlighting different treatment therapies. Plus, Davis co-authored articles on contingency management therapy, the technique she and her team used in the youth E-cigarette cessation study.

When Davis learned almost half a million people die directly from cigarette smoking each year, she was alarmed. This fact inspires her to lower the incidence of drug use and abuse every day.

“This is still a huge number, even though we have so many people who have successfully quit smoking” Davis said. “We still have so many people who’d like to quit but are unable to. If there's something, even something small, that I can contribute to help people feel empowered to quit or feel like they're able to take control of their substance use—that’s important to me.”

Recently, GCSU recognized Davis' accomplishments by awarding her the 2023 College of Arts & Sciences Young Alumnus of the Year Award.

“Danielle Davis embodies Georgia College’s mission of pursuing knowledge and truth for the public good,” said Dr. Kristina Dandy, professor of Psychology. “Her focus on research to improve public health outcomes related to drug use and abuse makes her more than deserving of this award. I have no doubt she will continue to succeed in her field of study, serving not only the scientific community, but the public at large.”



Dr. Danielle Davis (right) accepts the 2023 COAS Young Alumnus of the Year Award from Dr. Kristina Dandy.

News Stories Posted Friday April 28, 2023



Art major spreads hope through murals in local communities

Commencement : Friday April 28, 2023

Name: Maggie Morgan

Hometown: Alpharetta, Georgia

Major: Studio art with a concentration in graphic design

As part of her senior capstone project, Morgan completed murals for non-profits in local communities— both for The Bright House in Milledgeville and the Habitat For Humanity Re-store in Eatonton.

“These organizations offer bright hope to those they aid, and it is my honor to give back to them through art,” said Morgan.

As an artist and designer, she believes it’s her duty to use her artwork for good. She works towards this goal every chance she gets.

"If my work encourages one person that encounters it," she said, "then my goal is accomplished."

While working on the projects, Morgan sharpened her skills in large scale-painting. She also forged important connections in the local communities.

Upon graduation, Morgan plans to pursue a career in design and branding in the food and hospitality industry.

"Combining my love of the food industry with design," she said, "I will work with brands to create logos & packaging that are functional and professional."



Morgan stands in front of the Habitat Re-store mural in Eatonton



Morgan's mural at the Bright House in Milledgeville



Aspirant epidemiologist breaking the medical mold

Commencement : Friday April 28, 2023

Decorated basketball athlete Brandon Thomas spent his time at Georgia College & State University balancing athleticism, academics and community service.

Now, he's graduating with the dream of becoming an infectious disease epidemiologist—and hoping to study emergent tropical diseases like malaria.

Thomas worked one and a half years at the Center for Health and Social Issues, assisting Dr. Damian Francis, assistant professor of public health. He's also gone above and beyond to serve communities in Baldwin County, earning him the center's Community Service Medallion.

"He was integral in planning breast cancer outreach events and in working with the Georgia War Veterans Home to bring awareness to lung cancer and conduct lung function screenings," Francis said. "As an aspiring epidemiologist, Brandon not only exhibits the intellect but also the empathy required to change lives through advocacy and public health."

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Brandon not only exhibits the intellect but also the empathy required to change

lives through advocacy and public health.

- Dr. Damian Francis

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Thomas says he learned the key to serving communities through work for the center: acceptance. Understanding the dynamics of a community from the inside out is vital to the trust needed to help underserved communities, he said.

“Working with the CHSI gave me experience communicating with people,” Thomas said. “Those people then open up and give suggestions, which I can follow up on and offer solutions.”

His family in McDonough, Georgia, is made up of a registered nurse, physical therapist and future internal medicine doctor. He was motivated to break the mold after seeing how devastating a pandemic like COVID-19 can be.

“My whole family has always been in the medical field, but I didn’t want to do individualized medicine,” he said. “I wanted to stay on a structural level, so I branched out after taking public health and seeing I could still influence people’s lives on a large scale.”

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You don’t have to go to medical school to do things in health. You can still influence people’s lives from a broader perspective, and I want to do that.

- Brandon Thomas

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His next step to achieving that dream is a master’s in infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Georgia. He plans to earn a Ph.D. and work for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

“I used to visit Jamaica a lot, where malaria is a problem in smaller communities and people are suffering,” Thomas said. “So, I want to do more research and find out how we can address issues like that.”

“You don’t have to go to medical school to do things in health,” he said. “You can still influence people’s lives from a broader perspective, and I want to do that.”

The William Heard Kilpatrick Education Center



Class of 2023: Special education major planted garden with exceptional kids

Commencement : Friday April 28, 2023

Story and photos developed by University Communications.

Taylor Casey



Alternate Text

From: LaGrange, Georgia.

Major: Special Education

Why that major: When starting, I knew I had a heart for service and helping people and kids. This is what led me to teach! I was an early childhood education major and a middle grades education major, before going into [special education](#). To say I didn't know who I wanted to teach was an understatement. Finally, I attended a major/career fair where I went to the College of Education table and talked to a special education professor who happened to be Dr. Grimes. She doesn't know this, but I wholeheartedly credit her to being a special education major today. She told me

all about special education, explained to me what students I would teach and made me fall in love with it. I changed my major to special education the next day. I never turned back on that decision and am so grateful I didn't.

Why Georgia College: I was looking for a college that was the right size for me and not too far from home. When touring here, I also heard about the phenomenal education program Georgia College offered. I decided it would be a fun new adventure for me to come here and create new friends, relationships and experiences. I wouldn't change the decision I made for anything in the world. Being a part of a campus where I can see new people and old friends every single day has stolen my heart. I have been a part of many organizations, classes and friend groups that have changed my life for the better in so many ways. The close-knit feeling of this campus has made my experience here personal and life-changing.

Activities: I'm part of the Council of Exceptional Children through the Special Education cohort. We raise money and supplies for local schools. I've held multiple leadership positions in my sorority, Zeta Tau Alpha. I served as a Think Pink Chairman (service chair for ZTA philanthropy, Breast Cancer Education and Awareness), our Family Relations Chairman and Recording Secretary.

Student Teaching Internship: **A.P.P.L.E.** stands for Adapted Purposeful Personalized Learning Experiences. This is the term my partner teacher and I used to describe our class in my student teaching internship. This class has sixth- to eighth-grade students with exceptionalities. For my service-learning project, I created a learning service experience that helped fill an authentic need in the community. Our students are very hands-on learners so we knew the service project would have to be hands-on and give quick results. I was placed in Putnam County Middle School, so we partnered with the Butterfly Garden in Eatonton. Our project was planting flowers, but it also included research, learning and community service. My students were excited and happy to be outside. We planted in 10- to 15-minute shifts with plenty



A newspaper article about Taylor Casey's internship project.

of breaks, so the students could run and explore. They learned about pollinators and different habitats and the importance of taking care of our environment.

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The people I've known through Georgia College prove to be my biggest accomplishment every single day.

- Taylor Casey

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Biggest accomplishment: My biggest accomplishment in college has to be the relationships I've created while here. I have so many more friendships, professional relationships and mentors than I could ever have imagined. These people have given me advice, taught me life skills and experienced important lessons with me. The people I've known through Georgia College prove to be my biggest accomplishment every single day.

Favorite Professor: My favorite and most noteworthy professor by far has to be Dr. Rob Sumowski. I cannot begin to say enough great things about this professor. He is my cohort leader, mentor and biggest cheerleader. He has taught me countless real-world and special education lessons and shared the craziest education stories I've ever heard. He knows exactly what to say and when to say it and seems to know the answer to everything. He's calmed all 15 of my cohort members' nerves many times and will always remind us to enjoy life no matter what. Dr. Sumowski has shown me what it means to be a great teacher, leader and friend. I've learned more in two years from him than I thought possible—whether it be about special education or life in general. He's an awesome “dude” and will definitely be a mentor for me for all my life.

Fondest memory: My time living in the ZTA sorority house was a fun year! I have very fond memories of Greek Weekend, homecoming, tent city and my first Deep Roots Festival. But I also have to include countless hours of junior- and senior-year placements through the special education cohort. I learned to be inclusive and accepting. I learned to become an advocate. I learned what to do and what not to do. I learned that I love middle schoolers. These placements have made me the teacher I am today.

Advice for first-year students: The biggest advice I could give is to follow your heart and dig deep. The person you are when you choose your major as a senior in high school is not the person you have to remain. Don't be afraid of change. You will learn so much about yourself, others and life.

Key to success: The key to success in college is balance. Be well-rounded through schoolwork, involvement in the community and stay active in your social life and



Casey works with kids in Putnam County, planting a garden. Photo credit: From the Putnam County Charter School System Facebook page.

organizations. College offers so many new things. Being able to balance all of them, while taking time to learn about yourself, is crucial.

Future plans: I've accepted a job at Richmond Hill Middle School as a 6th-grade ELA ESS (exceptional student services) teacher. This means I'll work alongside a general education co-teacher and serve students with differing abilities in an inclusive environment. I've also been admitted to the Special Education M.Ed program here at Georgia College.

How Georgia College helped: GCSU provided the environment and community needed to push me toward my goals and dreams. I've been involved in an inclusive and diverse environment since I

stepped foot on campus. GCSU gave me real-world experiences—such as my student teaching internship—that showed me the kind of person and teacher I want to be. Georgia College also helped me develop many skills I didn't know I had, like leadership and communication. GCSU helped me cultivate my passion in life and create plans for a future career that will be successful. My education and experiences at Georgia College have proven to me I'm ready for my future and can be successful in any path I take.

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Georgia College also helped me develop many skills I didn't know I had, like leadership and communication. GCSU helped me cultivate my passion in life and create plans for a future career that will be successful.

- Taylor Casey

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