

Front Page News Story Archive

September 2023



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News Stories Posted Thursday September 7, 2023



GCSU Truman Scholar attends summer leadership conference and finds hope

[National Scholarships Office at Georgia College](#) : Thursday September 7, 2023

It's an age-old question: Are leaders born or made?

While certain characteristics and natural affinity are necessary, it's also true great leaders are made—through multiple opportunities to practice the skill and the resources to get there.

That's why, every summer, the [Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation](#) immediately invites its selection of [new Truman Scholars](#) to Truman Scholars Leadership Week. Georgia College & State University's first Truman Scholar, Colin Hall, was at this summer's shindig at William Jewel College in Liberty, Missouri.



A banner welcomes the Truman Scholars.

Hall got straight to what he loves best: the business of diplomacy, rubbing elbows with 61 other 2023 Truman Scholars and learning the art of leadership. By the end, everyone was calling him “Mr. Georgia” and “Governor Hall”—a moniker of his political goal to become governor of Georgia.

“I made it a mission to meet every single scholar, and I can say I met all of them,” Hall said. “We were getting lots of knowledge, and it was really good stuff. It was just a lot. You got up in the morning; ate breakfast; you went to class; had lunch; more classes. It was a lot of information.”

“

It seemed like we just instantly connected with one another.

- Colin Hall

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“But one of the best experiences,” he said, “was the big bond that I made with a certain group from the Southern states—Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Florida. It seemed like we just instantly connected with one another.”

At Georgia College, Hall is a senior [political science](#) major and seeks to become the first student at Georgia College to complete the [Election Administration Certificate](#). The Truman Scholars Leadership Week took him far from campus and his home in Gray, Georgia, to the Midwestern state where President Truman was born and raised.

In addition to classes about higher education, leadership, ethics and morals, scholars did eight hours of community service and worked on a group project. Hall’s group created a policy on making schools safer and wrote a proposal letter to Congress, outlining what their law would accomplish.

The week was also packed with fun activities and field trips. Scholars played ping pong and foosball, had a cookout and dance and went on trips to see President Truman’s house, the Truman Library Institute and Clinton’s Soda Fountain shop in Independence, Missouri, where Truman worked his first job at age 14.

Hall enjoyed learning more about the man behind his scholarship. The Missourian never got a college education because he was needed on the family farm. Before he died, Truman asked they not set up a stone monument but a living memorial to

encourage more Americans to get an education and seek public service. This became the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation. Years later, following Truman's vision, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Higher Education Act.

“That probably made this scholarship much more important—way more important to me,” Hall said, “Truman was a true public servant, and that’s one of the things the Truman Foundation wants to find through this scholarship—public servants. We have too many people who serve themselves instead of serving their constituents and the people of this country.”

Former Truman scholars were present throughout to help mentor the incoming group. Information was provided on future opportunities for scholars—like next year’s [Truman Summer Institute](#), a 2 ½-month program where scholars can work with government agencies and nonprofit organizations.

“

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- Colin Hall

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Scholars who attend this fully paid summer institute can also participate in a yearlong fellowship following their master’s. The [Truman-Albright Fellowship](#), [Truman Democracy Fellowship](#) or [Truman Governance Fellowship](#) are internships with public service agencies.



Of course, Hall would like a political job. Prior to this summer's leadership week, he intended to go directly to graduate school.

Now, he feels like so many doors and options are open to him.

And he feels he has the support and friendship of 61 other 2023 Truman Scholars.

"We call ourselves TruFam now," Hall said, "No matter what, we all came together and put aside Republican/Democrat, put aside things that are happening in our world, all the rancor."

"I still believe that when we come together, and we talk about things, we want the same thing for America," he said. "We want to make a positive difference. We just have somewhat of a different vision of how to get there. But at the end of the day, if you're making a stand for something that's right, suddenly that's all that matters."

“

And that's what they taught us about—good leadership skills, being organized, being accountable. This is our next generation of doctors, teachers, leaders. We're a little scared, but being there gave me hope.

- Colin Hall

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News Stories Posted Monday September 11, 2023



Student's second study abroad in Costa Rica focused on sea turtles

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#): Monday September 11, 2023

Junior Parker Luke Wilson can tell you firsthand how after-school jobs and study abroad help you zero in on a correct career path, boost your skills and put you ahead of others in the job market.

Growing up with a love for animals, Wilson got his first crack at being a veterinarian assistant as a senior in high school working at Gadd's Animals Doctors of Gray. Since then, he's been on track to double major in [biology](#) and [Spanish](#) at [Georgia College & State University](#), while getting a minor in [Latin American/Caribbean Studies](#) and a concentration in [pre-veterinary medicine](#).

If that's not enough?

Well then, there's always a really cool two-week, study-away, veterinarian-in-training program called [Loop Abroad Costa Rica](#).



Parker Wilson, right, with a study abroad group in Costa Rica.

In 2022, Parker enjoyed working with sloths there so much, he signed up for another stint this summer with Loop Abroad—this time researching sea turtles.

“
Sea turtles always have been special to me. I am genuinely taken away by love for these animals and plan to devote my life to helping them. Many people feel a closeness to them, and it's a very curious phenomenon. They have this beautiful nature and are such an important part of the ecosystem within the ocean.

- Parker Wilson

“Sea turtles always have been special to me. I am genuinely taken away by love for these animals and plan to devote my life to helping them,” Wilson said. “Many people feel a closeness to them, and it's a very curious phenomenon. They have this beautiful nature and are such an important part of the ecosystem within the ocean.”

Wilson worked with a conservation organization called [Latin American Sea Turtles](#) (LAST). A group of students and veterinarians from around the world spent time on land and sea, scooping turtles up by net. The first turtle Wilson saw was a Hawksbill Sea Turtle, “so little and cute.” Like the others, it was checked for health and shell damage, measured, weighed and then released.

The team helped repopulate mangrove trees by potting, building soil containers and watering. Students were also trained in data collection and analysis—crucial elements for career readiness when working with nature.

At the wildlife rescue center, Wilson worked with many other animals as well, like two- and three-toed sloths, many species of birds, porcupines, ocelots (a type of

panther cat), kinkajous (a small, big-eyed mammal), opossums, owls and racoons.

Wilson loved the experience so much, he volunteered extra weeks prior to his study abroad and after.

“

I learned so much there and gained a ton of leadership skills. I assisted in and viewed many surgeries and necropsies, performed husbandry care and was even able to feed baby sloths. My Loop Abroad program was out of this world. All the animals we saw were wild, and free and that was beautiful.

- Parker Wilson

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Loop Abroad is the largest pre-veterinary study abroad program in the United States. This year, it spent more than \$1 million on conservation projects worldwide. It hosts students in nine countries and six continents throughout the year.

“

The main thing I took away from my time in Costa Rica is the beauty that the earth has to offer.

- Wilson



A baby sloth being fed.

The experience reinforced Wilson's desire to become a vet.

Now, he'd like to go to veterinarian school and work in Latin America. He credits Georgia College with helping him find this path and connecting him to multiple opportunities, like Loop Abroad. Various student organizations, like the GCSU Pre-Vet Club, also allied him with similar-minded peers.

“The main thing I took away from my time in Costa Rica is the beauty that the earth has to offer,” Wilson said. “So many times, I feel so stressed and worried with classes and schoolwork.”

“But when I take a step back and realize how beautiful this world is that we live in—and the amazing animals that we share a home with,” he said, “it's extremely

comforting to know that people exist in the world who devote their entire lives to protecting these animals. It's a very beautiful thing."

News Stories Posted Wednesday September 13, 2023



Immersive Chilean experience pays off for GCSU students

[World Languages & Cultures, Department of](#): Wednesday September 13, 2023

Thanks to this past summer's Georgia College & State University [Chile Study Abroad program](#)—where students participated in an internship while learning about Chilean culture and enhancing their Spanish language skills—program participants are one step closer to getting the jobs they desire.

The Chile Study Abroad program also demonstrates the strength and importance of Georgia College's liberal arts experience in preparing students for today's complex and increasingly globalized working world. Students representing a broad spectrum of fields including data analytics, business management, early childhood education, biology, environmental administration, business administration and others benefited from the opportunity.

Dr. Brantley Nicholson, associate professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies and director of the Chile Study Abroad program, emphasized two points about the program. First, “students were exposed to the target language in a way that can’t be replicated in the classroom.” Second, they were accruing “real-world” international experience that would not only just appear on their resumes, but genuinely make them stand out and apart from other applicants.

“In at least one case, a student actually got a good job, because they could say they completed an internship in a foreign language in another country, which is no easy feat,” Nicholson said.

Before departure, Nicholson matches each student’s professional interest to opportunities, including internships in human resources, journalism, nursing, teaching and more. He’s even had a future physician participate in the Chile Study Abroad program by making rounds in a teaching hospital.

Nicholson knows the importance of combining language study with practical and cultural experience.

“It’s not only learning about another culture, but it also improves their Spanish while gaining professional experience,” he said. “It’s something that checks so many boxes for them.”



GCSU students learn from a guide at Palacio Pereira—a cultural event space that houses the Ministry of Culture for the Chilean Government.



During the StartUp Chile presentation, GCSU students learned about the startup scene, Chile's importance in the international business world and tips on founding a company.

In the classroom, Nicholson strives to emulate real-life situations. Nothing can match the everyday learning of a language while living in the country where that language is spoken.

“The students begin to feel differently about the language—it’s not just something that’s in a textbook,” Nicholson said. “They interact with others daily. So, there’s an emotional connection students make when they meet people in a foreign country—it’s the sink-or-swim aspect that makes them acquire a second language more quickly.”

“

Studying in Chile provided a valuable global perspective and enhanced my understanding of different cultures, languages and traditions. This is beneficial in various fields, such as international relations and global business.

- A GCSU student

”

“When students are challenged to go out of their comfort zone, while they go about their daily lives and gain professional experience in another country,” he said, “it nurtures their malleability and adaptability.”

In a more global society, bilingualism is common and often expected. The United States is the second largest native Spanish-speaking country in the world, behind Mexico.

“I can’t overstate how important bilingualism is,” Nicholson said. “No matter what students do professionally, I can’t think of a major that wouldn’t be well complemented by speaking a second language, especially Spanish. It’s going to open students up to a wider group of clients and the public.”

Nicholson is fascinated by Chile and always bases the program in Santiago, the nation’s capital. The location benefits students in many ways. He chose Chile because it’s a well-developed country with good public transportation. Most students had a list of things to do and places to visit, like museums and attending a theatre performance.



GCSU students visit Imagine Ventures, a venture capital firm.

Students stayed with host families, which allowed them to navigate their daily lives in Spanish. They established a connection with their host family, in addition to using language to maneuver work situations and getting to know their employers and coworkers.

The group also hosted luncheon speakers who spoke about Chilean culture and professions. A Chilean attorney provided an overview of the country’s contemporary government and how it fits into the last 20 or 30 years of local politics. Students also heard from the head of a digital marketing company.

“I enjoyed how I was able to intern in something I want to do when I graduate college,” one student said, “and that it just wasn’t any internship.”

Another student said, “I really enjoyed my internship. Everyone was so friendly and helpful. I learned a lot and can’t wait to use my new knowledge.”

“Studying in Chile provided a valuable global perspective and enhanced my understanding of different cultures, languages and traditions,” another student

said. "This is beneficial in various fields, such as international relations and global business."

When the students return from the Chile Study Abroad program, Nicholson often notices how they've matured, progressing in the language and cultural awareness.

"Some students in my upper-division classes have an improved ease with the language and confidence in talking about Latin American culture," Nicholson said. "It just feels good for them to have met that challenge."

Applications for next summer's Chile Study Abroad program will open soon. Students of all majors are welcome to join the 2024 program.

News Stories Posted Monday September 18, 2023



GCSU's excellence noted as top 10 public university in South by U.S. News & World Report

General Institution : Monday September 18, 2023

Continuing its upward momentum, [Georgia College & State University](#) (GCSU) climbed to top-10 status as a public regional university in the South and rose in several additional major categories in [U.S. News & World Report's](#) newly released 2024 [Best Colleges](#) guidebook.

Georgia College ranks sixth for [Top Public Schools—Regional Universities in the South](#). In the category of Undergraduate Teaching Programs, Georgia College ranks third in overall teaching excellence when compared to other public regional universities in the South. In addition, Georgia College is fourth in the Most Innovative category among public regional universities in the South.

"I am thrilled that Georgia College & State University continues to be recognized as a top-tier public university," said [President Cathy Cox](#). "This ranking shows the world what we already know to be true—the personal, transformational experiences

that Georgia College embeds in a contemporary liberal arts education ultimately prepares our students best for successful careers.”

“

Being sixth in the South—and the only state university in Georgia to make the top 10 as a best public Southern school—reflects the different kind of experience we offer our students. This recognition also exemplifies the success of our dedicated faculty, high-achieving students and innovative offerings.

- President Cathy Cox

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The category for best Undergraduate Teaching Programs for public regional universities in the South focuses on schools that “have faculty with an unusually strong commitment to undergraduate teaching,” according to the U.S. News & World Report [website](#), and “whose faculty and administrators are committed to teaching undergraduate students in a high-quality manner.”

In the [Overall Ranking for Regional Universities](#) category—comparing private and public schools in the South—Georgia College jumped six positions to 16th, a considerable increase from 22nd in the 2023 ranking and 31st in 2018.

Georgia College's [Nursing](#) program is tied for the number one spot among public universities in the state of Georgia.

Georgia College was in the Best Value category as well.

Among public universities in the state of Georgia, the following programs were also recognized within U.S. News & World Report's Regional Universities in the South

category:

- Number one for its Undergraduate [Business](#) Program
- Number one for its [Psychology](#) Program
- And number two for its Undergraduate [Computer Science](#) Program

U.S. News & World Report is a multiplatform distributor of news and information, which publishes annual print and e-book versions of its prestigious rankings of best colleges, best graduate schools and best hospitals.

The Best Colleges methodology uses a wide variety of data with graduation and retention rates the most heavily weighted factors. Other data relates to social mobility, graduate indebtedness and graduate earnings compared to high school graduates.



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News Stories Posted Thursday September 21, 2023



Addressing global health problems from Milledgeville

[Health & Human Performance, School of](#): Thursday September 21, 2023

[Dr. Ernie Kaninjing joined Don Reese in his barbershop to discuss his prostate cancer journey and raise awareness.](#)

About one out of every eight men in the U.S. will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in his lifetime.

In 2020, about 18.8 per 100,000 men in the U.S. died of prostate cancer (American Cancer Society). But this rate is doubled for non-Hispanic Black men, who die from the same disease at a rate of 37.5 per 100,000 men.

Why?

That's what Dr. Ernest Kaninjing is working to find out.

An associate professor of public health at Georgia College & State University,

Kaninjing is part of a global effort to understand why Black men of different ethnicities experience worse prostate cancer outcomes. One of his research projects focuses on African immigrant men, who have even worse survivorship numbers.

“We’re trying to prevent that—and narrow the gap,” Kaninjing said.

“The communities we work with are counting on us as the experts—the scientists in the field—to update them about trends, recent developments in treatment, care and survivorship,” he said. “We’re not just doing research to collect data for the sake of it, we’re doing research to help improve health outcomes.”

Instead of comparing Black and white patients, Kaninjing is investigating “within group differences”—differences between cultures that shape many Black ethnicities.

“Caribbean immigrants, African immigrants, African Americans—there are significant cultural differences that may influence or impact some of the disparities we’re seeing,” he said.

His research is particularly relevant to Milledgeville-Baldwin County, where 42% of the population identify as Black or African American.

“

If found early, prostate cancer is very treatable, so we're trying to change the culture.

- Dr. Ernie Kaninjing

”

For the last five years, he’s worked with Georgia College students and residents to discover what’s causing these differences in survivorship for Black men and what healthcare providers can do to stop it.

In the meantime, Kaninjing and his community of advocates are sharing all the information they can to prevent those high death rates. The good news is: When found early, prostate cancer is curable with a survivorship rate of over 97% over five years.

Kaninjing is connected to more than 100 members of the Milledgeville-Baldwin community, and that number continues to expand. At each town hall he hosts alongside community leaders, there are new people willing to help spread the word.

“Right now, I have a community partner, Donald ‘Don’ Reese, who’s a master barber. He’s been in Milledgeville for over 17 years, he’s well known and he’s a survivor,” Kaninjing said. “He’s an advocate, speaks about prostate cancer and knows how to bring people together.”

“Maintaining these relationships means you never go to the community empty-handed,” he said. “You go to them with something that could enhance their life.”

They bring educational materials, like flyers and pamphlets, host clinical speakers and bring in specialists to provide the community with useful information that will improve their health.

They raise awareness of preventative care, the importance of knowing your family history and understanding your options after diagnosis through town hall meetings and seminars.



Dr. Kaninjing responds to questions about his seminar at a local senior center.

Now, they’re working to create a support group for survivors and those experiencing prostate cancer treatment to encourage other men on the road to recovery. But most important, Kaninjing says, is sharing awareness.

“Some men are reluctant to talk about this,” he said. “We’re slowly trying to overcome this barrier with education and patience. We want to influence the culture to be more open to talking about health matters.”

That’s one of a few significant challenges to prostate cancer survivorship for those in Milledgeville and other rural areas in Middle Georgia. Not having specialists nearby and transportation challenges add to

the disparities already present.

They’re already making a difference.

“It’s good to see the openness and receptiveness of the community,” Kaninjing said. “You’re not going to get success overnight, but men who have gone through that road are making it a lot easier for us.”

“We’re trying to be a resource to the community,” he said.

When it comes to prostate cancer, the key is early identification. Kaninjing encourages everyone to educate themselves, gently remind their loved ones to be proactive and ask questions.

“It’s heartwarming to see the community benefit from some of these resources that we provide,” Kaninjing said. “But ultimately our work is not done to eliminate those disparities, it’s one step at a time.”

If you or someone you know is struggling with prostate cancer, or willing to share their survivorship experience, please reach out to Ernie Kaninjing by email at ernie.kaninjing@gcsu.edu.

News Stories Posted Monday September 25, 2023



Want better food? More muscle? Stronger Wi-Fi? All you have to do is ask.

General Institution : Monday September 25, 2023



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It's a SLAM DUNK! Students spoke. The university listened.

On multiple issues, [Georgia College & State University](#) has taken student concerns into account and delivered.

Changes and updates have a lot to do with convenience—from additional food stations and bus shuttles to stronger Wi-Fi and lower printing costs on campus. Modifications were made after direct student input. For example, new equipment and fitness classes at the Wellness & Recreation Center were implemented after a student survey was conducted.

Here's some new things you'll notice.

In classes and when studying:

- Stronger, more reliable Wi-Fi
- Reduced printing costs
- 24-hour access to the [Ina Dillard Russell Library](#)'s first floor

At the MAX:

- Newly renovated [dining](#) hall with more than 100 extra seats
- Bigger selection of healthy dining choices like vegan and gluten-free options and expanded salad bar
- New UCook station, where diners make their own omelets, quesadillas, macaroni and grilled cheese sandwiches
- Green, renewable, to-go containers
- Extended hours Monday through Thursday until 10 p.m.
- Coming soon—a “Simple Zone” with grab-and-go options that are gluten and allergy free

Vending & Retail Dining:

- Pizza Hut Express with late-night convenience center at West Campus and a [Kiwibot delivery](#) option
- “To The MAX Mexican” in the Bobcat Food Court
- “Mariah's Cookies” and “Buddy V's Cake Slice” available on the Everyday app for pickup at “To The MAX Mexican” window
- New massive smoker for campus cookouts and BBQ events
- New “Micro Mart” in Atkinson Hall
- New drink and [vending](#) machines



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One of the new Pizza Hut delivery bots at West Campus.

Parking and Transportation:

- License plate recognition software reduces need for physical permits
- Redesignated [parking](#) spaces to better accommodate commuter students
- Two additional shuttle buses with a new, wrap-around look
- Extra late-night shuttle, West Campus to the MSU loop, 10 p.m. to 2:45 a.m. Thursday through Saturday.
- Evening shopping shuttle stops at Walmart, the Hobby Lobby shopping center and Milledgeville Mall
- Six additional AMP parking spaces at Bell Hall lot, open to everyone for \$2 per hour

At Barnes & Noble:

- New health products and larger selection of medicine at [bookstore](#)
- New merchandise with the Georgia College & State University brand name
- Increased selection of trade books and manga—Japanese comics and graphic novels



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At [Wellness & Recreation](#) Center:

- New cardiovascular equipment on fitness floor—about 25 pieces—additional treadmills, Stairmasters and virtual cycles
- Twenty new strength machines, including a hack squat and two glute-drive machines
- A multi-purpose “Functional Training Zone” with more squat racks and a bench press station to limit wait time in heavily used areas
- New “Group Fitness Classes” target traditional and contemporary Pilates and stretching; a “HIIT the Weights” circuit-style class combines strength and cardio training; and a “Water Work Aqua” class provides low-impact training, cardio and resistance

Here's how you can assist with our next slam dunk!

To make a suggestion or put forth the next, brilliant idea—please email Student Life at vpstudentlife@gcsu.edu.

News Stories Posted Tuesday September 26, 2023



Celebrating 10 years of leadership in learning

[The Learning Center](#) : Tuesday September 26, 2023

When students are struggling in their college classes, they have a few options. They can do nothing (not recommended), seek help from their instructor or head to tutoring.

At Georgia College & State University, our students in demanding classes have an additional option: to join The Learning Center and meet with a Supplemental Instructor, or SI leader.

An SI leader is a student who just finished a course with high marks. They're matched with professors within their discipline and audit a course alongside their peers. During the course, SIs offer close-knit study sessions, learning activities and advice.

This semester marks the 10th anniversary of Georgia College's SI program—the first tutoring program to be accredited in Georgia.

"To say that more than 30% of students utilize our sessions is astounding. It beats every international average across the board," said Jeanne Haslam, director of The Learning Center. "We get faculty buy-in and there's great mentoring that happens between faculty and the SI leader."

SI originated at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Now, The International Center for Supplemental Instruction located there accredits programs globally.

Georgia College's program is among them.

In the spring of 2023, 50% of Georgia College students attended SI sessions for classes that are difficult to pass. Of the students who attended SI sessions, only 11% dropped, withdrew or failed the class—compared to 27% of those who did not participate in SI.

"I think it's a wonderful resource that the school provides that you don't see in some other universities," said Dr. Kelly Lee, '15, lecturer of economics and former SI leader. "I think it makes a big difference for the students that use it."

"To have as many resources as you can for students is the goal, so I'm thrilled and proud to be a part of it," she said.

Lee attended SI sessions as an undergraduate, became an SI leader for the College of Business and Technology, and now those former professors are her colleagues.

"It really helped me get a deeper understanding of the material, because even if you do well in a class, it doesn't mean you understand it well enough to teach other people," Lee said. "That's really important if you're going to grad school, so it gives our students a head start."

And those same themes are echoed by students currently working as SI leaders and coaches (former SI leaders that now act as trainers and guides).

Senior biology and psychology double major Veronica Hein has been part of The Learning Center since she was a sophomore. Now, she's an SI coach.

When the laptop of one of her SI leaders broke during a session—the icing on the cake of a bad day—Hein dropped everything to take over the session and allow the SI to go home.

"I hope that I can be a source of comfort for SI leaders, and someone they can go to when everything is wrong," Hein said. "I know that I have someone to fall back on if things get hard, I love working with the people in The Learning Center and I love talking about things I'm passionate about."



The Learning Center has drop-in tutoring Monday-Thursday from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Fridays 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"I love science, and I love telling people about that," she said. "It's a lot of fun, and it's a great little community that we have built."

She coaches students and SI leaders like Heather Vincent, a junior biology major. Vincent's been a leader for a year, and she instructs students in both biology and chemistry.



Heather Vincent is an SI leader and tutors for biology and chemistry.

"I get a lot out of it by presenting sessions twice a week—so it helps you get more comfortable talking to a crowd," Vincent said. "You get to work one-on-one with coaches on what you can specifically improve on."

"They really help expand my horizons by showing me different ways to engage with people," she said. "I've learned a lot academically, but it's keeping me on the ball and helping me be a better leader too."

From Sept. 25 to Sept. 29, The Learning Center is celebrating SI Appreciation Week. They will have food, giveaways and other fun activities to welcome newcomers and share what it's all about.

The center is already recruiting for their spring SI leaders, who will then be matched with faculty members who need extra help. If you're thinking about becoming an SI leader (or want to learn more), reach out to Rebecca Cofer, assistant director of The Learning Center, at rebecca.cofer@gcsu.edu or visit her office in The Learning Center.

"I love being a part of The Learning Center," Vincent said. "It's such a welcoming environment. You know when you walk into a house, and it smells like warm cookies? That's what I get when I go in."



Reach out to Rebecca Cofer to learn more about the SI program.

News Stories Posted Wednesday September 27, 2023



New chief diversity officer to grow department on and beyond campus

[Inclusion and Belonging, Office of](#) : Wednesday September 27, 2023

Dr. Michael Snowden has big plans in the works for [diversity, equity and inclusion](#) at Georgia College & State University.

Snowden began serving as Georgia College's new chief diversity officer in July. He feels honored and privileged to have been selected to spearhead the vital work of inclusion and belonging within the university community.

"Inclusion signifies granting individuals a seat at the table while belonging affirms their rightful place in that very space," Snowden said. "My commitment lies in empowering marginalized groups and guiding the majority through the ever-evolving landscape."

Georgia College President Cathy Cox welcomed Snowden to campus saying he "joined our university's leadership team at a time when we recently welcomed the

largest and one of the most diverse first-year classes we have had in years. GCSU will benefit greatly from his passion and deep experience in this field and his willingness to share that knowledge across our campus.”

Snowden’s professional journey began at the University of Minnesota Morris, where he was an educational and Gateway Program coordinator, providing students of color the tools they need to excel in college.

He was also chief diversity and Title IX officer for McNeese State University, where he was selected for the University of Louisiana Management & Leadership Institute. He served as director of Multicultural Affairs at Armstrong Atlantic State University, as well.

Snowden most recently served as vice president of Inclusion and Diversity at Northwestern State University. He developed a strategic plan and provided coaching seminars there for diversity, equity and inclusivity as part of the Northwestern Inclusive Coaching Seminar Series. He was also a keynote speaker at many high-impact events.

Snowden enjoys public speaking. He belonged to Toastmaster’s International, a public speaking club, where he served as president. The Louisiana Sports Hall of Fame invited him to be the Juneteenth keynote speaker in 2022. He spoke during Black History celebrations, for the City of Lake Charles on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and on how to be an overnight success during the Black Male Summit for the University of Louisiana system.

In all his speaking appearances, one thing is constant. Snowden strives to be an information liaison for the public.

“I hope to provide inspiration and guidance and be a person the audience can relate to,” he said. “It’s about shining a light on things many people may not know about. I emphasize things that people seek to expand their knowledge base on.”

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Embracing change entails embracing the principles of inclusion and belonging, for these are not just ideals but essential to our survival on this planet.

- Dr. Michael Snowden



Dr. Michael Snowden

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To complement other DEI programs Georgia College has in place, like Making Excellence Inclusive Day, Snowden recently started a birthday initiative geared toward student engagement. Each month, he and his staff recognize the birthdays of first-year students.

“One of the things we often leave behind in an inclusive space is focusing on the majority of students,” Snowden said. “We want everyone to know they're welcome and included in the work we do as we move the institution forward.”

He envisions Georgia College as a welcoming, inclusive campus where everyone can be their authentic self. This vision includes balancing student diversity numbers and bringing African American and Latino Hispanic numbers up. He began doing this by connecting with Georgia College Early College students.

“That's a big step toward letting that student population know they have a home here,” Snowden said. “All they have to do is matriculate.”

He appreciates Dr. Veronica Womack, Dr. Carolyn Dennard and Dr. Jennifer Graham, who previously served in this role and put DEI programs into place. He aims to further their work by incorporating new concepts that benefit the campus and community.

“I'd like to continue connecting the community to what we do here on campus,” Snowden said. “When people speak highly of the university in the community, you just don't know the impact that can have on how people feel when they arrive on this campus.”

He feels his staff—Jennifer Cash Birch, education outreach and training coordinator and Shelia Gray, office coordinator—do an outstanding job.

“They really make what I do here special,” Snowden said.



Dr. Michael Snowden speaks during Making Excellence Inclusive Day.

He plans to bring DEI to the forefront at Georgia College. After 25 years of working in this area, he's beginning to see the national demographics shifting.

"To be a competitive institution, we need to tap into new markets, particularly in Black and Brown communities," Snowden said. "However, we also want to continue instilling our liberal arts educational foundation. Diversity, equity and inclusion speak to our liberal arts message—someone who's a critical thinker, lifelong learner and aspires to be a global citizen."

"In DEI, there are always tough conversations that need to be had. As far as DEI has come in the last 30 or 40 years, there's still a ways to go," he said. "Considering all our work, there's still disproportionate, underrepresented folks—particularly in leadership on college campuses of predominately-white institutions."

Snowden is ready to take on the challenge.

He most looks forward to establishing a legacy and being a community partner—someone people can call to get their questions answered. He constantly strives to be transparent in this work and to provide a welcoming atmosphere for everyone.

Snowden recognizes the immeasurable value of this role.

"Embracing change entails embracing the principles of inclusion and belonging," he said, "for these are not just ideals but essential to our survival on this planet."



For this alumnus, community comes first

[Health & Human Performance, School of](#): Wednesday September 27, 2023

Dylan Amerson, '12, grew up in Milledgeville but always wanted to explore beyond the area. Once he did, he came right back to where his heart is—the community—and transformed the family store into Huff's Market.

Amerson's passion for sustainability and the outdoors started with Georgia College & State University.

He went to Armstrong State University for two years but moved back to home due to a health condition. When he started school at Georgia Military College, he heard about Georgia College's Outdoor Education program and realized it'd be a perfect fit.

Amerson met with Dr. Jeff Turner, associate professor of Outdoor Education and liked



Dylan Amerson rings up a customer at Huff's Market.

what he had to say about the program. Amerson also met with his surgeon, who encouraged him to find a job where he could stay active. It would be best for his health.

"I've always loved being outside," Amerson said. "I spent a lot of time surfing, kayaking and backpacking throughout college. So, I decided to give this major a try."

He took Theory of Outdoor Education and other classes with Dr. Will Hobbs, a former assistant professor of kinesiology at Georgia College. Hobbs taught him the foundational skill of critical thinking.

Amerson considers the program "life changing."

"It was incredibly thought provoking to think how people connect through adventure, pushing boundaries and just being outside," he said. "That really resonated with me. I was hooked after his second class. Dr. Hobbs was incredibly challenging and just awesome."

"He challenged me to think about things in a different way," Amerson said. "Anytime I made a statement, he would constantly ask 'Why?' I had never been challenged to think about why I see the world the way I do."

Amerson was in classes with a cohort of 15 other students. Some became his best friends. He especially enjoyed the trips they took nearly every other week.



Dylan Amerson looks after his chickens.

“It was good to grow and learn a lot together and even be challenged by each other,” he said. “There were some people who I just didn’t mesh with, but learning how to work with them was one of the most beneficial things for me in the long run. That great lesson has helped me throughout my career.”

After Georgia College, Amerson worked at a wildlife center in Mansfield, Georgia. Then, he got a job at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont in Tennessee. He taught environmental education and led backpacking trips each summer. He lived in the national park for four years, and that’s where he met his wife, Kensey.

“It was the most formative job I’ve ever had,” Amerson said. “It helped me solidify some things that started to form in college—like who I wanted to be, what I cared about and what work values I had. That was very beneficial for me.”

Turner was professional in the classroom. But when he went on a trip with students, he showed a more personable side.

“

It’s tough for people who live out here to get produce. We want people to have healthier food options, so we can go to bed at night feeling good about what

we've sold to people.

- Dylan Amerson

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“That has carried with me, especially when I worked in wilderness therapy with kids who were very challenging,” Amerson said. “It's better to start off as a professional, like showing them what we're here to do. Then, slowly peel back those layers as a person, letting more of your humanity show in a thoughtful way.”

In 2021, Amerson's mother called to ask if he'd be interested in buying the family business. The store had been his great uncle William Huff's, then his great aunt Dorothy “Dottie” Huff's for over 60 years. His wife also talked about raising their now two-year-old son, Sawyer, closer to family.

The couple sold their Tennessee home and moved to Baldwin County to run the family business. They wanted to make it their own and alleviate a missing food element in the area—so they challenged themselves and transformed Huff's Store into Huff's Market to sell local produce, meats, dairy and more.

Before Huff's Market, there was no store in this part of the county to get local produce, meats, dairy and more.

“We wanted to cater to people, who live out this way, who didn't have access to fresh, whole food,” Amerson said. “It's also a place where you can feel a sense of community.”

The couple has built relationships with the local residents, including the most of the local farmers where they get their meat from. They even know the individuals who make the cheese straws where only quality, wholesome ingredients are used.



The Amersons sell fresh produce in their market.

They recently visited a cattle farm for the third time.

“These cows are sustainable,” Amerson said. “We get to go see them out in their pasture to know how well they're cared for. We try to have the same relationship with our other farmers. And that's really cool—feeling so tight with the community.”

“We’re taking care of our neighbors by buying their products,” he said. “We care a lot about that.”

The Amersons are happy they’ve been part of alleviating what was a food desert in this area.

“It’s tough for people who live out here to get produce,” Amerson said. “We want people to have healthier food options, so we can go to bed at night feeling good about what we've sold to people.”

His son, Sawyer, inspires Amerson to do his best every day.

“Eventually, I'd like for him to see the value in working hard, taking pride in what you do and caring about the people around you,” Amerson said. “I want to show that I value these things, so as he gets older, he will hopefully value those things, as well.”

“What we're doing now is perfect at this point in our lives, while we’re starting to raise a family and connecting to the community. I'm really grateful for the experiences I had,” he said, “because it's made me more grounded to be able to do this and feel fulfilled.”



Recent alumna finds niche helping others through the justice system

[Government & Sociology, Department of](#): Wednesday September 27, 2023

As a teenager, Grace Cooper, '22, was intrigued by the "X-Files" TV series. She thought it would be cool to work with the FBI. When she took her [criminal justice](#) classes at Georgia College & State University, she quickly learned the fiction behind the television series depicting law enforcement.

"I once thought it would be so cool to be an investigator," said Cooper, transitional case manager for the Continuum of Care program at Riverbend Correctional Facility in Milledgeville. "Then, I learned the big differences between TV and real life in the justice system that I never expected."

In Dr. Alesa Liles' Inside Out class, 15 Georgia College students met with 15 incarcerated students at Riverbend Correctional Facility to discuss the different aspects of the justice system and share their perspectives.

"I loved this class, because I saw prisoners are not like what movies and TV shows portray," she said. "I truly believe that some of the best individuals I've ever met we're in that class as incarcerated people."

Cooper now works at the same facility with many of the incarcerated students she



Grace Cooper as GCSU's Bobcat Mascot "Thunder."

worked with as a student. She enjoys her duties so much that she even got the Employee of the Month Award after being there for just four months.

"It felt really cool to get that recognition," Cooper said. "I'm doing my job, and they recognize that. It made me feel more confident in what I'm doing."

"It's absolutely mind blowing how our experiences differ," she added. "My involvement with my Inside Out class made a big impact on me and in getting this job."

Liles, an associate professor of Criminal Justice, holds a special place in Cooper's heart. When Cooper was indecisive about her

career path, Liles was supportive and talked her through it.

They still keep in touch today.

"Dr. Liles helped me figure out what I felt my purpose is," Cooper said. "She also showed me how to stick up for myself in a respectful way. In this profession, that's something I really had to find my footing with."

It's inspiring for Cooper to see the change in these students. "They come into my office, often soft spoken and polite. They each have their own story to tell." And it's clear to Cooper one mistake does not define a person. It's all about who they've become while incarcerated.

Working with her clients, Cooper sees the hope many of them have for the future. Some say, "When I get out, I have so many dreams, plans and ways to stay out of prison again."

“

... It feels good to see people who see themselves as having the potential to be successful. That helps me know I'm doing something that matters.

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Many find religion in prison.

“That's just really cool for me to see how they found a purpose while incarcerated,” Cooper said. “It's very fulfilling, because eventually, I want to work with at-risk youth. So, now I'm intervening, only at a later stage.”

Her responsibilities include checking in with every student at least once every 90 days. She enters parole addresses and updates client information. She also helps with releases, transfers and getting information on work details.

Cooper applies different intervention techniques. Her clients use workbooks, roleplay various scenarios and conduct motivational interviews. These actions help them see through their problems so they can improve themselves.

“As it gets closer to their release, I help them find housing and employment, to set them up to be successful and to reduce the overall recidivism rate,” she said. “I cannot tell you how many hours I've spent on hold with the IRS, because an inmate needs me to help them get their stimulus checks.”

Although she enjoys her profession, there are times when she exercises her patience and grit.

The biggest challenge Cooper faces in her role is a few of her clients have lost hope for their future.

“There are some people, who'll get out in the next six months, and they just don't care,” Cooper said.

“They're just like, 'I'm just going to be back in prison in seven months anyway.' That's really hard, because you can't make them change their mind.”

She tells them, “Why can't you like see yourself the way I see you—as someone who's competent?”

“There's not a whole lot I can do,” Cooper said. “But it feels good to see people who see themselves as having the potential to be successful. That helps me know I'm doing something that matters.”

She wants for her clients to get out of prison and learn from their mistakes. But she also hopes others will see past her clients' mistakes and give them a chance.



Grace Cooper

“I want for them to know—just because they've messed up doesn't mean they're stuck,” Cooper said. “They can keep going. There are a lot more opportunities these days for previously incarcerated people, where they really have the ability to be successful if they will go out and find it”

To learn more about how Cooper’s experience from Liles’ Inside Out class has carried over to her career, check back to listen to Dr. Liles’ podcast—Episode 1 of Season 2 titled “Thunder goes to prison.” It’s a tribute to Cooper’s time in the famous fur suit as Georgia College’s Bobcat Mascot “Thunder.”

News Stories Posted Thursday September 28, 2023



Summer REUs: Eight students participated in undergraduate research experiences

[General Institution](#) : Thursday September 28, 2023

Eight Georgia College & State University students—majoring in biology, chemistry, math and environmental sciences—expanded their horizons this summer at Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REUs).

Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), REUs and International Research Experience for Students (IRES) provide Georgia College students the chance to professionally network while working on algebra and graph theory, synthesizing molecules, investigating fatty acid proteins, researching curves in geometric space and testing toxic soils in Zambia.

Chair of [Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy](#) Dr. Sayo Fakayode said these summer experiences allow students to further their research at other institutions, enabling them to use facilities not available here.

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"REUs connect them with peers at other institutions, promoting their professional development. It also boosts students' confidence to work with their peers at a research-intensive or R1 institution.

- Dr. Sayo Fakayode

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Georgia College has a longstanding record of students being accepted for REUs, which are highly competitive. In recent years, about 30 students were chosen for these transformational experiences.

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This gives our students a competitive edge and the ability to make creative contributions early in their educational years.

- Dr. Donovan Domingue

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The high number is due to Georgia College's focus on undergraduate research where students conduct original investigations as early as freshman year.

“This gives our students a competitive edge and the ability to make creative contributions early in their educational years,” said Dr. Donovan Domingue, professor of [physics](#) and astronomy.

Research is generally conducted at another university or online and lasts seven to 10 weeks. Students practice high standards of work ethics and research techniques, use state-of-the-art equipment and learn to take ownership of their work, often acquiring leadership skills and self-assurance.

“That our students are selected for these competitive REU experiences speaks very well for Georgia College, and for the way in which we are able to engender in our students a love of learning and a passion for exploration,” said Dr. Robert Blumenthal, chair of [Mathematics](#).

Math

Two math majors accepted REUs this summer.

Senior **Monica Lichtenwalner** of Cumming, Georgia, did a virtual math REU with Virginia Commonwealth University, involving connections between graph theory

and Lie Theory.

Lichtenwalner had never applied for anything like this and was happy to learn she got in. Investigating various ways to “construct a Lie algebra from a graph” intrigued her. The group’s goal was to simplify the study of complex Lie algebras.

“I definitely learned a lot throughout this experience,” Lichtenwalner said, “about the actual topic we were looking at and math research in general. The idea of mathematical research was somewhat intimidating beforehand, and this experience has made it a lot less so.”

Lichtenwalner plans to get a Ph.D. in math and pursue a career in academia. The REU confirmed her desire to get into research.

Sophomore Anna Marti of Loganville, Georgia, did her REU at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania. The project, called “Incidence Geometry Over Finite Fields,” was developed specifically for first-year students who hadn’t done mathematical research before.

Marti felt prepared, because “even before I stepped on campus, GCSU provided unique one-on-one support from student mentors, faculty and professors. So I knew GCSU would be there to help me succeed.”

Her classes in geometry and linear algebra II last spring were especially helpful. She was already familiar with the terms, symbols and procedures.

Her group was tasked with finding bounds “on the proportion of curves in finite affine planes that are transverse-free.” To do this, they read published studies, analyzed different strategies, wrote computer code, drew diagrams, made guesses and collaborated with other groups to solve the problem. They hope to present their findings in January at the Joint Mathematics Meeting in San Francisco, California.

Marti wants to further her knowledge in math after graduation and conduct research for a career.

“Mathematics research can be very stop-and-start,” Marti said. “One minute you’re excitedly following a new path, and the next you’re banging your head against the wall in frustration. It’s important to pace yourself, record any and all ideas you have—even the stupid ones, and take breaks to walk around and rest your brain.”



Sophomore math major Anna Marti.

Biology



Senior biology major
Sophia McNeill.

Senior Sophia McNeill of Dacula, Georgia, is majoring in [biology](#) with a minor in [chemistry](#). Her REU was on molecular biology and genetics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

McNeill chose to attend Georgia College specifically because of its “emphasis of diversifying the curriculum to broaden students’ experiences in the classroom” with high-impact practices like REUs.

Cornell’s REU was competitive. McNeill and her cohort of 11 were selected from more than 660 applicants. She credits Dr. Ellen France for taking an interest in her and preparing her for the rigors of research.

“I knew I wanted to be a scientist,” McNeill said, “but I didn’t know the proper steps to get there. Dr. France really took me under her wing and saw potential in me.”

Her REU focused on “fatty acid transport proteins.” The team used techniques to bind and isolate a protein. They cloned the gene responsible for encoding the protein into a replicating plasmid, cultivated cells in a dish and took various other scientific steps.

Dr. Arnab Sengupta’s course on cloning and cell cultures prepared McNeill for this exploration. She was able to participate more confidently, too, because of France’s biology of cancer and cellular/molecular physiology class.

“

Georgia College prepared me for the REU with its amazing faculty who nurtured my curiosity for a career in biology research, as well as offering classes that gave me a leg up in this experience.

- Sophia McNeil

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She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in molecular biology, cell biology or chemical biology and do research in industry or a government organization like the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Chemistry

Senior Nicole Snyder of Marietta, Georgia, is majoring in chemistry with a minor in [dance](#). She came to Georgia College, where she knew she'd be "a name and not a number."

Her REU was at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—another competitive program. Snyder was one of nine chosen in a pool of more than 200. She and her mentor worked to synthesize "a type of molecule called 'PROTAC'" that could someday lead to a cure for cancer.

"I learned so much from this experience, both inside and outside the lab," Snyder said. "I learned new lab techniques, how to operate new instruments and how a graduate lab works."

"In addition, I learned being a chemist doesn't always mean you'll get the right answer," she said. "It means you have the background knowledge and skill to make an educated guess and figure out how to move forward with your project. It means collaborating with those around you and knowing when to ask for help."

Snyder was pleased she'd already been exposed to many REU instruments and procedures at Georgia College. This helped her produce four products for biological testing, instead of one.

Snyder plans to get a Ph.D. and become a chemistry professor. She feels confident of reaching this goal, thanks to the REU and her time at Georgia College.

"I have a clear picture of what my future academic path looks like," she said. "The various volunteer opportunities that I've had at the GCSU Science Education Center helped me realize I thoroughly enjoy explaining different topics and working with students of all ages."



Senior chemistry major Nicole Snyder (left).

Environmental Science

This was the second cohort of Georgia College students to go to Zambia on an NSF IRES grant. Four Georgia College [environmental science](#) majors accompanied Dr. Samuel Mutiti to [mining towns that suffer from heavy-metal pollution](#).

They conducted research on phytoremediation, value addition to plants and carbon sequestration in an effort to cleanse soil of contaminants.

I believe this experience has impacted their lives ...

- Dr. Samuel Mutiti

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“This was a great group of students who rose above every challenge we faced and carried out the research with great professionalism and enthusiasm,” Mutiti said. “They were able to learn, adapt, collaborate, network and collect a lot of good data that we’re still analyzing.”

“I believe this experience has impacted their lives and will continue to have an impact on them, myself and the people in Zambia for many years to come,” he said.

The students were seniors **Shannon Northen** and **Wiley Bundy**, first-year graduate student **Tori Morgan** and graduate assistant **Ashley Clark**. Working to find a sustainable solution to the problem, they analyzed soils and plant samples to determine heavy metal concentrations and hyperaccumulation potential. They assessed a plant’s ability to store soil carbon and tested methods for extracting heavy metals and energy from plant biomass.



Dr. Mutiti (front left) with graduate assistant Ashley Clark (behind). Senior Wiley Bundy (front right), senior Shannon Northen (middle) and graduate student Tori Morgan (back right).

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This trip has been one of the best decisions I have ever made.

- Tori Morgan

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Students also learned how to use scientific equipment like a resistivity meter for profiling and surveys. They attended the Zambia Water Forum Exhibition (ZAWAFE) international conference in Lusaka and volunteered to distribute clothing and shoes to local school children.

Their work will help improve the health of residents in polluted areas and provide alternative sources of energy for Zambians. Working in a different country and

collaborating with other university faculty and students from the University of Zambia and Eden University was great experience too.

“The best takeaway from this trip for me was being submerged in a completely new culture,” Bundy said. “We talk about different cultures and we see things on the news and we learn a little in school, but there is nothing that compares to being completely in a different culture. Every part of it was amazing.”

The group also worked with government agencies, political leaders and community members in Zambia. This helped them become critical thinkers, problem solvers and global contributors, Mutiti said.

“This trip,” Morgan said, “has been one of the best decisions I have ever made.”