

# Front Page News Story Archive

January 2024



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# News Stories Posted Wednesday January 10, 2024



## Grant-funded program improving diversity in research

[Health & Human Performance, School of](#): Wednesday January 10, 2024

*In the header (from left to right): Dr. Damian Francis, Justine Savizon, Brittany Jones, Jasmine Harrison, Christine Hughes and Dr. Ernie Kaninjing.*

At Georgia College & State University, a three-year program is in motion to provide underrepresented minority students access to research and mentorship in the biomedical field.

The Diversity in Cancer Research Institutional Development Grant, funded by the American Cancer Society, encourages students to join research activities, attend graduate school and either pursue careers in research or the biomedical workforce.

“The goal is to address the lack of diversity in the biomedical workforce by first engaging students early on in their educational pursuit,” said co-investigator of the program and Associate Professor of public health, Dr. Ernie Kaninjing. “By giving them the opportunity to participate in research and be mentored, we hope they will

be pursuing careers, leading them into biomedical research.”

“So, they can actually become researchers themselves,” he said.

Initially the grant was offered to the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, but the school extended the program to Georgia College through a collaboration.

“We’re having our students interact with graduate students at Morehouse,” Kaninjing said. “They’re benefitting from seeing other students, role models not much older than them, pursuing research or a master’s program.”

“They can ask them questions, learn from them and see what it looks like to pursue something like this at the graduate school level,” he said.

The Diversity in Cancer Research program began this summer and provided mentorship to four students under the guidance of Kaninjing and Dr. Damian Francis, assistant professor of public health and co-investigator.

To help them focus on their studies, program participants received a \$2,000 stipend from the American Cancer Society.

Over the summer, chemistry and psychology graduate Brittany Jones, '23, with senior public health majors Jasmine Harrison, Justine Savizon and Christine Hughes, trained to develop their research competencies. Fine tuning questions, collecting data, conducting and analyzing research, communication and career development were the focuses of the first year.

Jones wants to be a behavioral scientist for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, and she thinks this experience set her up for that future. Now at Emory University for her master’s in public health, it would seem the program is already a success.



(From left to right) Jasmine Harrison, Dr. Ernie Kaninjing, Christine Hughes and Justine Savizon at the American Cancer Society conference.

"I have noticed that I am very rare in that I got a lot of research experience in my undergrad at Georgia College," she said. "Reading research papers and doing your own writing is very new to my classmates. I was very lucky that I got that experience firsthand."

After developing their concept and conducting research, students presented their work twofold. Once in July at a one-day symposium in Opelika, Alabama, and a second time in October at the American Cancer Society Atlanta forum.

"To see them capture what they learned during the course of those eight weeks and present that poster at an academic event was really gratifying," Kaninjing said.

Harrison, a public health and French double major from Fayetteville, Georgia, conducted research on racial disparities in care and post-treatment complications for breast cancer survivors. That's why it's important to improve diversity in research, she said, so researchers better understand the population they're studying.

"Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer in the United States, and I'm also a Black woman," Harrison said. "Looking at the numbers and seeing racial health disparities really motivated me because it's something I could see in my life, my family members and my friends. That's what got me started."

After conducting her research this summer, Harrison presented for the first time. The program prepared her to stand out in a place where everyone's research matters. Now, she'll pursue this research for years to come, hoping to have it published.

"I really just want to create awareness, even if I'm unable to make a great difference," Harrison said. "I want this information to be available so other people with more funding or different resources can look at this research and work with it, as well."

"I really loved this experience, and I think it's a great opportunity for public health students at Georgia College," she said. "I loved the collaboration with Dr. Francis and Dr. Kaninjing—it shows how much of a collaborative effort public health is, and how different minds bring different things to the table."





# News Stories Posted Friday January 19, 2024



## Senior instills excitement for art in others

[Art, Department of](#) : Friday January 19, 2024

Growing up, studio fine art senior Mattie Thompson of Savannah was never one to color inside the lines. Instead, she spent most of her life not believing in her art ability until her sophomore year of high school. She took a class in painting in order to graduate and fell in love with it.

Thompson's creation "Milly Squared" was on display at the Leland Gallery in November as part of Georgia College & State University's [Art Department](#) exhibit, "Ephemera." The exhibit celebrated senior art students and their capstone projects.

Milly Squared is comprised of two community paint-grid projects, showcasing two Milledgeville icons—famed American author Flannery O'Connor, '45 and Country Music Artist Logan Crosby, who Thompson has known since their days attending John Milledge Academy.

Thompson chose this project to become more comfortable working with larger audiences. She wanted to find a way to inspire creativity in adults and focus on the community.

Each painting has 96 different squares, which means several individuals came together during a community event to paint the 3-inch by 3-inch squares. She wanted the result of the two Milledgeville icons to be a surprise, unveiled for the first time at the Ephemera exhibit.

“For people who normally don’t create art, I think it’s important to get them to try doing something outside their comfort zone,” Thompson said. “Then, they see the final piece that looks amazing. Maybe they think this is something they’d like to do more of. They can step back and say, ‘I helped make this—I’m a piece of this puzzle.’”

“I’ve seen a lot of kids bring their parents to my tables, and they end up painting together,” she said. “The family bonding was really special to see.”

Some senior citizens stopped by Thompson’s project table and said, “I used to love painting, but I haven’t picked up a paintbrush in 30 years.” Then, they tried it and loved it again.

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**Painting gives people a space to control. Especially in the last couple of years, there’ve been very few things we can grasp and have complete control over. Having a blank piece of paper in front of you and making whatever you want is the most freeing feeling in the world. It’s a great outlet for anyone.**

**- Mattie Thompson**

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“Painting is very therapeutic,” Thompson said. “To be able to create something—there’s no other feeling like it to be able to say, ‘Hey, this is something that was in my brain, and now it’s real.’ That’s the coolest thing ever.”

She credits Matthew Forrest, interim chair and associate professor of art and



Mattie Thompson instructs kids on how to paint their square.



printmaking, as well as William “Bill” Fisher, professor of art, with being “extremely helpful” with Milly Squared.

“Matt always recognized my talent,” she said. “One day in class he said, ‘You’re smart and talented beyond belief, but you just don’t push yourself enough.’”

This was the first time anyone said this to Thompson regarding her art ability. Forrest also helps Thompson solve problems and teaches her leadership skills.

Fisher taught Thompson how to be patient with others when explaining concepts. Both professors showed Thompson how to bridge the gap of art and teaching.



Mattie Thompson stands in front of Milly Squared in the Leland Art Gallery.

“I really admire Bill—he’s really passionate about his work,” she said. “I have printmaking with him. It’s not something I’m great at, but every day he takes baby steps with me.”

Thompson learned a lot as a member of Alpha Omicron Pi Sorority. It taught her how to be a team player, while honing her art and leadership skills. When she was on the Art Committee for Rush Week, Thompson did several creative art projects for the sorority, like painting banners, signs and decorations.

“I learned how to work in a group setting with art,” Thompson said. “It’s one thing

to paint something on my own and another thing to instruct 12 girls sitting in someone's living room, all working on the same poster. This validated that my art can be appreciated on a larger scale.”

After graduating from Georgia College & State University in spring 2024, Thompson plans to instill her love of art in others by teaching it.

“It's important to foster that creative spirit at a young age, because not many subjects in school focus on giving kids full rein of their creativity,” Thompson said. “It's really important for art teachers to do that.”

“Teaching art is different from teaching creativity,” she said. “That's an important distinction, because you can make good art but not be a good artist. I can look at a tree and copy it perfectly. But if I'm not inspired and taking some sort of risk, it doesn't really hold much weight. It's so important for kids to use their natural creativity to think outside the box.”

Working as a teacher's aide in a Pre-K after-school program reinforced Thompson's decision to teach art. Each day, she created coloring books for students, using a Sharpie®. Then, students colored the pictures. Thompson was surprised by her creativity.

“It made me realize I have this huge passion for art, and I can learn from it,” she said. “A student came to me and said, ‘I want a marshmallow with a ponytail playing ping pong.’ I could never come up with that idea on my own.”

“Somewhere in the process of working with the kids and seeing their creative sides grow through encouragement was the coolest thing ever to me,” Thompson said. “And I thought, ‘I could do this forever.’”



A community member paints a square for Milly Squared.



If she was going to spend most days of her life in a profession, Thompson knew it should be something she loves—and there's nothing she loves more than art.

Thompson feels more individuals should reap the benefits of getting in touch with their creative side—something she can't wait to teach her future students.

"Painting gives people a space to control," she said. "Especially in the last couple of years, there've been very few things we can grasp and have complete control over. Having a blank piece of paper in front of you and making whatever you want is the most freeing feeling in the world. It's a great outlet for anyone."

# News Stories Posted Wednesday January 24, 2024



## Consul General discusses tea, royals and all things British

[Leadership Programs](#) : Wednesday January 24, 2024

Rachel Galloway, His Majesty King Charles' Consul General to the United States, spent an afternoon and evening at Georgia College & State University this week meeting with students, faculty and community leaders about leadership and her role as an ambassador.



British Consul General Rachel Galloway.

While here, she also enjoyed talking about things that

fascinate Americans about Britain, like the monarchy and royal family; what we have in common—history, music, military partnership—and excitement generated by sports like the World Cup.

Oh, and tea.

When senior mass communication major Elizabeth Newlin of Hoschton, Georgia, asked Galloway how she liked Southern Sweet Tea, the ambassador laughed heartily.

She's been at the British Consulate in Atlanta since July 2022 but admitted "I just can't get past it psychologically. I always think, 'Oh, my tea's gone cold' and then, 'It happened again.'"

The Leadership Programs at Georgia College sponsored Galloway's visit.



Before her talk at the Usery Forum on Leadership, Rachel Galloway met with Georgia College President Cathy Cox.

After meeting with Milledgeville city officials, members of the media, GCSU President Cathy Cox and Provost Costas Spirou, Galloway spoke at the university's Usery Forum on Leadership.

The Usery Forum is Georgia College's presentation-discussion series on leadership. Named in honor of W. J. Usery, the 15th U.S. Secretary of Labor, it



explores leadership that brings people together, bridges division, finds value in new perspectives and showcases innovation and service.

About 150 faculty, students and staff attended the forum. Afterwards, Galloway had dinner with a dozen students from the leadership program.

“We were deeply honored to host Consul-General Rachel Galloway at Georgia College,” said Dr. Harold Mock, director of Leadership Programs. “She brings, of course, her expertise in world politics, diplomacy and leadership. But she also gave deeply of her insights practiced over a career of public service and gathered from rich experiences across the globe.”



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“I am especially grateful for her insights on how we can build relationships beyond our differences,” he said, “and communicate productively with those with whom we might disagree.”

Good leadership is about recognizing what people have in common, as well as their differences, Galloway said. By talking and listening to each other, she is confident people can work together.

From 2018 to 2022, Galloway served as the late Queen Elizabeth II’s ambassador to the Republic of North Macedonia. At the time, that territory wanted to change its name to allow membership in NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.



Galloway mingles with GCSU students.

Galloway helped strengthen diplomatic relations in the region by working closely with Americans and Europeans.

“Once they came to an agreement,” Galloway said, “they were able to join NATO. They are an ally of the West. They’re a friend of the United States and United Kingdom. We want our

friends to be with us in NATO.”

“And, of course, while I was there,” she said, “Russia invaded Ukraine. People in North Macedonia woke up that morning and thought, ‘We’re in NATO.’ That means something. It was really important to them.”

Galloway was only four weeks into her new job as Consul General in Atlanta when Queen Elizabeth II died. It was a tough situation for her, especially being far from home.

The British Consulate had a book where people could sign their condolences.

But it’s a trip to the grocery store that stands out most in Galloway’s memory.

“It was quite a sort of personal warming experience to actually see how supportive and caring people were,” she said. “A gentleman came up to me in the Kroger and said, ‘You’re British,’ and he took my hand and said he was so sorry about the Queen. It happened again and again, you know, people genuinely sharing their relationship with me about the UK, because they could hear my accent.”

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**Really, it’s about building these relationships, and another really important element is building relationships between universities, so young people can have the experience of knowing about the UK.**

**- Rachel Galloway**

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Galloway is now responsible for building relationships with the UK and Southeastern United States.

As generations go by, fewer and fewer young people have personal experience or knowledge of Winston Churchill, World War II (WWII), the Beatles and other things culturally British.

These days, young women are likely to recall styling themselves after Kate Middleton, the current Princess of Wales. Most recently, people may have seen the hit Netflix series, “The Crown.” Galloway still find it surprising how popular the monarchy is in the U.S. and how many magazines sport pictures of the royal family.

Along with assisting British nationals with consular affairs in the U.S. Southeast, Galloway’s biggest goal is to introduce a new generation of Americans to the UK.

She emphasizes our special relationship and common heritage, language, interest in writers like Shakespeare and Milton and military alliance in war and peace.

“Really, it’s about building these relationships, and another really important element is building relationships between universities,” she said, “so young people can have the experience of knowing about the UK.”

She pointed to the Marshall Scholarship, set up as a thank you to the United States after WWII. It’s one way students can get funds to attend university in Britain. Georgia College alumnus Kevin Morris received the scholarship in 2019 to study at the London School of Economics.

“We want more to come. We want more to apply from the U.S.,” Galloway said. “That’s one of the reasons I’ve come to talk to the students. To tell them about the UK and about opportunities, because we want those students to come back to America to work and use what they’ve learned and have a lifelong relationship with the UK.”

# News Stories Posted Wednesday January 31, 2024



## Dyslexia endorsement program equips teachers with tools for reading success

[Professional Learning & Innovation, Department of](#): Wednesday January 31, 2024

In preschool, a set of twins demonstrated their knowledge and reasoning skills differently than other children. The sisters had trouble remembering the shapes and sounds of letters.

Their special education teacher, Berinda Turk—a four-time graduate of Georgia College & State University—wasn’t sure, but she thought the twins might be dyslexic. She couldn’t get them out of her mind and heart.

“I wanted to learn more about dyslexia so this year, if I was presented with the same type of characteristics,” Turk said, “I’d be able to help kids like that a little better.”





Alumna Berinda Turk works with preschoolers at the Early Learning Center in Milledgeville.

Last spring, Turk signed up for a new [dyslexia endorsement](#) program at Georgia College.

She earned her bachelor's degree in business administration in 1992 at Georgia College; her master's in special education in 2008; and her specialist degrees in curriculum & instruction and educational leadership in 2011 and '17.

But as advanced as she is in her knowledge of teaching, Turk said her experience with the twins was puzzling. She wasn't sure how to identify and meet their specific needs.

Then two things happened.

1. In March 2023, state legislators passed [Bill HB538](#), Georgia's Early Literacy Act (K-3). It prioritized the detection and remediation of dyslexia in children and youth. It called for teachers to be trained in "structured literacy, knowledge of the science of reading" and other high-quality educational techniques.
2. Across the state, 20 higher-ed institutions and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), previously approved by the [Georgia Professional Standards Commission](#) (GaPSC) to offer [dyslexia endorsement programs](#) for K-12 teachers, received funding from the [Georgia Department of Education](#) (GaDOE) to increase awareness and support for children with reading difficulties.

These developments led to the creation of Georgia College's Dyslexia Endorsement Program, part of a nationwide push to ensure early and effective intervention for students who find reading difficult.

As many as 20 percent of the U.S. population—one in five people—display mild or more severe signs of dyslexia, a neuro-cognitive disorder, according to the [National Institutes of Health](#) (NIH). In addition, 37 percent of fourth graders in the United States score below basic reading levels, according to the [Nation's Report Card](#)—issued in 2022 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

In Georgia, Jan. 31st is designated "[Dyslexia Day at the Capitol](#)." The [International Dyslexia Association of Georgia](#) invited legislators for lunch and a group photo on the Capitol staircase.



In time for this celebration, Gov. Brian Kemp recently earmarked more than \$5 million for a list of approved statewide screening assessments to detect signs of dyslexia as early as kindergarten.

“There are lots of different states across the country who are all now passing similar legislation,” said Dr. Alexandra Berglund, assistant professor of Reading, Literacy, and Language Education and co-principal investigator for Georgia College’s Dyslexia Endorsement Program.



Dr. Linda Bradley, left, with Dr. Alexandra Berglund.

“But Georgia is on top of the wave,” she said, “with the big push for schools in the state to have programs like these, in addition to the mandatory dyslexia screenings that are going to start.”

Early screenings will be helpful in Turk’s job. She co-teaches preschool at the Early Learning Center in Milledgeville. Up to now, there weren’t any protocols to measure dyslexia in children that young.

When Baldwin County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Nora Price notified teachers about the dyslexia program at Georgia College, Turk jumped at the chance to sign up.

The university received its first grant of \$106,000 from the GaDOE in 2022, followed by another grant of nearly \$92,000 to continue the program this year. Funding pays tuition and fees, making the program completely free for teachers in Georgia.

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**I encourage anybody who really wants to learn about literacy to do this program. It’s been a godsend for me because it taught me to be more intentional with my teaching. If we’re going to increase literacy, we’ve got to be intentional about reading.**

**- Berinda Turk**

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Turk was in the university’s first cohort of 20, a mix of teachers from elementary

and middle schools from across the state, as well as high school special education, English language and math teachers. The new cohort just started with 11 additional students.

Georgia College's Dyslexia Endorsement Program is designed for graduate students, like Turk, who are already teaching in schools. This allows busy educators statewide to access the university's top-notch literacy programs, said Dr. Linda Bradley, program coordinator for Reading, Literacy and Language in the department of [Professional Learning & Innovation](#).

In 2023, Georgia College earned an A+ rating for teaching the science of reading from the [National Council on Teacher Quality](#) (NCTQ), putting the university among the top 48 schools in the nation and the only program in Georgia to go above standards set by literacy experts by using evidence-based practices.

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**Collectively, we're working with educators across the state to make a difference.**

**- Dr. Linda Bradley**

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The university recently ranked number two in the nation for “Best Online Master's in Early Childhood Education Programs” by [Best Colleges](#). Georgia College is also home to the [Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy](#), which opened in 2017.

“What really makes us unique is we're in a state where there is now a real emphasis on dyslexia—where teachers, policy makers and our accrediting agencies are committed to ensuring that students have every opportunity to learn to read successfully,” Bradley said.

“I think we're also unique in the sense that this is for graduate credit. That's important for a lot of our teachers. Collectively,” she said, “we're working with educators across the state to make a difference.”

Georgia College's Dyslexia Endorsement Program consists of three online, graduate courses in the spring, summer and fall.

Each course meets three times on Saturdays. Teachers learn about the foundation of language; literacy development in special populations; dyslexia and language difficulties; structured interventions; and how to identify, access and support

students with dyslexia. They work on strategies for helping children with dyslexia recognize letters and words.

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**That has been an eye opener, to let me know we need to start laying a better foundation. They're still talking about having issues in middle school and high school with literacy. That blew my mind.**

**- Berinda Turk**

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Between classes, teachers are given additional reading, group discussions and activities to complete. At the end, teachers are asked to create a portfolio as a final project. In it, they reflect on concepts and strategies they've learned and how to apply them in the classroom.

A big surprise for Turk was hearing from teachers at different grade levels. Some middle and high school teachers said their students struggle in ways similar to what she sees in preschoolers.

“That has been an eye opener,” Turk said, “to let me know we need to start laying a better foundation. They're still talking about having issues in middle school and high school with literacy. That blew my mind.”

Educators are getting better at making sure readers get the support they need, Bradley said. Helping students with things like expressive language, letter shapes, phonetic awareness and word decoding increases self-confidence—a critical ingredient for success.

Last summer, teachers were asked to practice new strategies with one student. Turk immediately chose a preschool boy who rolled on the floor screaming and crying for most of last year. He wasn't able to absorb academic lessons and express himself through oral language.

“I chose him as my student for this particular class, because he's active,” Turk said. “It's hard to get him to sit. He's a genius, though, and we didn't know because we've never been able to get much out of him. What



we didn't know was what he knew, because all he did was run around with very severe behavioral issues."

Berinda Turk works with a little boy on letter recognition.

Turk applied strategies she learned in Georgia College's dyslexia program. She knew the boy loved music. She used this interest to gain his attention. He also works well with his hands, so she incorporated plenty of hands-on techniques.

"I tried to get to know him, to figure out what would motivate him," Turk said. "He loves manipulating things on the board. He got it every time. He's very smart. That little boy is a genius. But it's been hard for us to show that, because we had to combat the behavior first."

This year, the boy is doing better. He's able to pay attention and share his emotions in more appropriate ways.

Kensley Brown, another Georgia College alumna, works as a preschool special education teacher at the Early Learning Center too.

She was in the program's first cohort with Turk and enjoyed learning multi-sensory strategies like clapping out word syllables, using rhyming activities and tracing the shape of letters on sandpaper or in shaving cream.



Kensley Brown works on reading skills with preschoolers at the Early Learning Center.

Much of her job is engaging students in prereading tasks and modeling good conversation skills.

During these activities, she notices signs that possibly point to dyslexia, like inventive spelling.

"We might not know if they have dyslexia yet, but we know when there are issues," Brown said. "This course has helped me know what we're doing with these kids is so important. It encouraged me to keep doing what we're doing, so kids have a good foundation of literacy by kindergarten and first grade."

Bradley and Berglund said they've learned a lot from program participants too.

They're inspired each day by the dedication of teachers statewide, who truly care about their students.

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**Dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence. Someone who is experiencing difficulty with reading may often demonstrate creativity and highly intelligent problem-solving skills. Being neurobiologically diverse simply means the wiring is slightly different in how they put things together.**

**- Dr. Bradley**

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Some teachers participated in the program, because they had dyslexia as children and wanted to share their stories and coping strategies.

Older readers with dyslexia often talk about feeling dumb, because they couldn't read like everyone else or do school tasks the same way others around them could.

“Dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence,” Bradley said. “Someone who is experiencing difficulty with reading may often demonstrate creativity and highly intelligent problem-solving skills. Being neurobiologically diverse simply means the wiring is slightly different in how they put things together.”

“For me, one of the goals of the dyslexia endorsement is to bring a joy, a motivation and an awareness that there are many ways to be successful with reading,” she added. “It's about the empowerment and independence that reading and literacy can bring.