

News Stories Posted Tuesday April 1, 2025



Meaningful mentorships guide more women into STEM

[Biology & Environmental Sciences, Department of](#) : Tuesday April 1, 2025

by Margaret Schell

In a field once dominated by men, Dr. Melanie DeVore, professor and paleobotanist at Georgia College & State University, noticed biology has taken a turn. More women are pursuing their degrees in science thanks to mentors like her. DeVore sees science as the ultimate team sport where collaboration is key to solving problems.

“We are building bridges,” DeVore said. “There are practical, real-life connections within academia.”



Dr. Melanie DeVore (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

DeVore makes a point to place students within her strong, collaborative network of peers just as her mentors did when DeVore was a student. She learned the power of networking during her undergraduate years at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh.

“I had incredible mentors in the Geology Department where faculty taught me how to navigate ways to stand up for myself,” she said. “There were many successful folks, programs and other things that came out of that program. Since then, there has been an increase in women in the geological sciences.”

DeVore learned a great deal about navigating her career from her mentor Dr. Neil Harriman, a former professor at UW-Oshkosh. Harriman told DeVore about Dr. Vicki Funk at Ohio State University,

who became established at the Smithsonian in the Department of Botany. Harriman also put Beryl Simpson's "Economic Botany" textbook on DeVore's desk and told her to read it as an example of an "outstanding textbook."

Simpson was chair of the Department of Botany at University of Texas at Austin, mentoring DeVore while DeVore was a graduate student there. DeVore went on Ohio State University and later took a graduate fellowship with Funk at the Smithsonian.



Alumna Laura Griffin examines specimens under a microscope in DeVore's lab. (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

"I've been incredibly blessed to work with people whose pictures I saw in my college textbooks," she said. "I got to do things and go places in the world because of fossil plants. I want the same for my students."

DeVore emulates her mentors in teaching students from the [Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences](#), one of whom was M. Witt Taylor ('01) ('03). Taylor collaborated with DeVore on paleobotanical side projects and Dr. Al Mead, professor of Biological and Environmental Sciences at Georgia College, on his thesis

research on fossil mammals. Taylor's dissertation work was based on his study of fossil plants with a National Science Foundation grant secured by Georgia College and Arizona State University. His

work is featured on the front cover of the International Journal of Plant Sciences: Vol 184, No 4.

Another one of DeVore's students who recently studied fossils with support from an NSF research grant, Laura Griffin ('24) got her degree in environmental science and will get her master's in biology this spring. She went to Arizona State University to work in DeVore's cohort's laboratory. Griffin also worked alongside ASU graduate students.

"This kind of interaction is invaluable for undergraduate students," DeVore said. "They see firsthand what the reality and expectations are for graduate school."

Griffin's thesis research involves fossils found in a plant stem. She plans to become an environmental scientist, working in a manufacturing or processing company with a focus on state and federal environmental laws.

"Whether it's asking questions or voicing my opinion, I learned to never be afraid to speak up," Griffin said. "Dr. DeVore has been a strong advocate for me to take advantage of the opportunities my master's degree has to offer. I also gained valuable techniques to give me the upper hand when applying for jobs."

DeVore is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Center of Excellence in Biodiversity & Natural Resource Management at the University of Rwanda for a portion of February and May each year. She collaborates with Rwandan students to study vegetation and botany as it relates to biodiversity and gorilla conservation in the area. Her work in Rwanda is made possible by the Fossey Fund and Cleveland Metropark Zoos.

“

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hand when applying for jobs.

- Laura Griffin

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“It's incredible to collaborate with Rwandan students,” DeVore said. “I share the conservation methods I learn from them to Georgia College students in my GC1Y class. We’ve even conducted Zoom talks in the University of Rwanda Fossey Research Gallery.”

Now, DeVore will do educational outreach, working on fossils with local students at [Stonerose Interpretive Center](#) and Eocene Fossil Site in Republic, Washington. On behalf of Georgia College, DeVore submitted an NSF proposal in December 2024 with the Smithsonian, University of California, Davis, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University.

“We work with our researcher on fossils from that site,” she said. “It’s the perfect model for integrating science in public schools and for all to be on an equal playing field, so you establish this natural integration and friendships. Someday I hope these students fill the shoes of the people who keep nonprofits like Stonerose going.”

Header Images: Dr. Melanie DeVore advocates for mentorship from herself and her peers for students like Laura Griffin. (Photos: Anna Gay Leavitt)

News Stories Posted Wednesday April 2, 2025



College of Business & Technology professor earns prestigious state teaching award

[Business & Accounting](#) : Wednesday April 2, 2025

by Maggie Forrester

Professor Jehan El-Jourbagy, associate professor of [business law](#) and ethics in the [College of Business & Technology](#), has been awarded the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award.

The Felton Jenkins, Jr. award is part of the University System of Georgia's Regents' Teaching Excellence Awards program, and

recipients represent “the best values and standards of the USG,” according to the Board of Regents.

El-Jourbagy's dedication to student development shines in her innovative teaching methods, which blend community service, professional networking and hands-on learning into the business ethics and legal curriculum.

“I am deeply honored to represent Georgia College & State University with this recognition, and I'm grateful to the inspiring students who make teaching a joy every day. Their curiosity and growth fuel my passion for creating meaningful connections between classroom learning and their future aspirations,” said El-Jourbagy.

Through creative approaches of linking theory with real-world practice and contributing over 1,700 hours of community service, her courses are practical and impactful.

El-Jourbagy has created transformative experiences through [study abroad](#) programs, [leadership tours](#) and guest speakers to prepare students for success, while also helping nurture them as ethical, community-minded leaders.

El-Jourbagy is the most recent Georgia College faculty member to receive the [Felton Jenkins, Jr. award](#) in the 20 years since it was established. She will be recognized at the Board of Regents' Scholarship Gala in August.





Prof. El-Jourbagy (seated, at front) took her students on a two-week sustainability study abroad experience in New Zealand last summer. (Photo: Jehan El-Jourbagy)

News Stories Posted Tuesday April 8, 2025



Awards encourage budding writers to embrace their creativity to achieve their dreams

[English, Department of](#) : Tuesday April 8, 2025

by Margaret Schell

The Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award Ceremony took place April 2, 2025 at Georgia College & State University. Five finalists each received a significant cash prize made possible by the family of Margaret Harvin Wilson ('34).

Maggie Creekmore, a sophomore and

English/creative writing major, from Hampton, Georgia, placed first in the first-year and sophomore division of the 2025 Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award for her short story "The Fourth Ballerina."

She has first-hand experience in the subject matter.

"I've been a ballerina since I was 2 years old and trained in multiple kinds of dance for 17 years," Creekmore said. "I've written about being backstage, on stage and in a dance studio. I've seen all the dark parts they don't typically put in a tutu."



Maggie
Creekmore
(Photo: Caroline
Wood)

She has been writing for many years, and her work was published.

"Every time something writing-related happens, I get super excited," Creekmore said. "My heart was racing as I waited to read my short story at the ceremony. It just means so much to me and my future because I want to continue writing, editing and doing graphic design for my book covers the rest of my life."

Charlotte Aexel, a senior English/creative writing and French major from Wind Lake, Wisconsin, took first place for her poem "Starling Menace" and second place for her poem "Such Beautiful Things" in the junior and senior category.

"Winning the Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award means everything to me," she said. "It makes me feel validated as a writer."



"It's fun to read literary work in a room full of people who care a lot about good writing," she said. "I think it really extends confidence. It's a beautiful thing."

"Writing is my entire life," Aexel said. "I'm



Charlotte Aexel
(Photo: Caroline Wood)

published in a couple different places. Every time something writing related happens, I get super excited."

Aexel 's grandfather's hunting story was the inspiration for her poem, "Such Beautiful Things."

"He told me the story of how a BB hit his ear while he was hunting and how he and his friends had so much fun hunting together," she said. "And he said, 'Oh, such beautiful things.'"

"I decided to write about his experience, because he's such a great storyteller and sometimes can't articulate it," Aexel said. "So, I want to give the story the justice it deserves."

For the past three years, Aexel has been the editor-in-chief of the Peacock's Feet, Georgia College's literary journal where students' work is published.

Aexel plans to pursue her master's degree in literature at Georgia College, then a Ph.D. so she can become a literature professor.

"Writing is an important method of self-expression and human representation," she said. "When you read something and see yourself or others in it, it's a huge deal."

Additional Margaret Harvin Wilson Writing Award finalists include junior Kennedy Welker of Thomaston, Georgia, who placed third for her short story "Wings;" first-year student Isabella Hsiung of Suwanee, Georgia, who placed second for her short story "The

False Siren;" and sophomore Dhara Weaver of Hoschton, Georgia, placing third for her play "A Beginner's Guide to Haunting."

News Stories Posted Thursday April 10, 2025



Usery Fellow is a first-generation student making the most of campus life

[Institute for Leadership and the Public Good](#) : Thursday April 10, 2025

by Kylie Rowe, photos by Maggie Forrester

Paige Blakemore – a senior Mass Communication major from Flintstone, Georgia – is the 2024-2025 Usery Fellow at Georgia College & State University.

The Usery Fellowship is named for W. J. Usery, Jr., the 15th United States Secretary of Labor, and is dedicated to recognizing students who exemplify excellence in leadership for the public good.

Blakemore is a member of the John E. Sallstrom Honors College, the 2024 [Omicron Delta Kappa](#) Emerging Leader of the Year and an alumna of the [Leadership Program](#) and [Georgia Education Mentorship](#) (GEM) Program. She is also the current chairwoman of the [Council of Student Ambassadors](#) and Managing Editor of “[The Colonnade](#)” student newspaper.

“My on-campus positions have taught me

extensive leadership skills and the example I wish to set for others,”

said Blakemore. “Through these opportunities, I found my passion for people and what it means to be an empathetic and effective leader.”



2025 Usery Forum on Leadership, from left: The Hon. Steve C. Jones, Usery Fellow Paige Blakemore and Director of Leadership Programs

Harold Mock (Photo: Maggie Forrester)

“As a first-generation college student from a rural county, I am particularly passionate about promoting educational opportunities for individuals with similar backgrounds,” said Blakemore. “I strongly believe that education is a powerful tool for social mobility and that everyone is entitled to a quality education.”

Fellows contribute to [Georgia College Leadership Programs](#), assisting with events such as the Usery Forum on Leadership, the Leadership Ideas Festival and TEDxGeorgiaCollege. In March, Blakemore helped host the [Usery Forum on Leadership](#) featuring the Honorable Steve C. Jones, Senior United States District Court Judge. Before the Forum, Blakemore acted as Judge Jones’ campus host, accompanying him to coffee with President Cathy Cox.

At the forum in Magnolia Ballroom, Judge Jones spoke to an audience of Georgia College nursing students, members of the Georgia Education Mentorship (GEM) program, honor students, and Georgia College faculty and staff members. Jones spoke for ten minutes before sitting down for a Q&A session with Blakemore and Director of Leadership Programs Dr. Harold Mock.

Usery Fellow nominees are evaluated on the basis of their potential for civic and public leadership, as well as a demonstrated commitment to connecting the academic life of the university to questions of leadership and citizenship, civic affairs and public life. The fellowship is funded by the Kim Usery Foundation along with Melvin and Lisa Usery ('72) and includes a financial award to support academic and research pursuits.

“There are countless people to thank for helping me become the leader I aspire to be. Any teacher or professor who has taken the time to mentor me or cheer me on, I have endless gratitude for you,” said Blakemore. “Throughout my academic career, I have been lucky enough to learn from extraordinary educators that have wholeheartedly shaped me into the person I am today.”

The next event sponsored by Georgia College Leadership

Programs is the [Leadership Ideas Festival](#) on April 11.

“

Throughout my academic career, I have been lucky enough to learn from extraordinary educators that have wholeheartedly shaped me into the person I am today.

- Paige Blakemore

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News Stories Posted Tuesday April 15, 2025



Chemistry and art students team up to recreate WWI history

[Art, Department of](#) : Tuesday April 15, 2025

Story by Cindy O'Donnell, Video by Chris Brown

In a unique research project combining [forensic chemistry](#) and the [art of printmaking](#), GCSU students collaborated to make reproductions of a 1918 propaganda poster originally used to recruit African American soldiers during World War I. The interdisciplinary project exemplifies the foundational hands-on

interdisciplinary project exemplifies the foundational hands-on, liberal arts education provided at Georgia College.

The WW1-era recruitment poster, “Colored man is no slacker,” that the students researched is on display at Georgia College’s [Sallie Ellis Davis House](#). Davis was a prominent educator in Baldwin County’s Black community.

The project gave chemistry students an opportunity to use new X-ray fluorescence technology. The digital spectrometer sends X-ray beams to the core electrons of the atoms in the poster. When the X-rays hit the sample, the atoms inside the sample start to glow (fluoresce) in a unique way. This glow tells scholars exactly what the sample is made of — whether it’s gold, silver, copper or something else — without damaging it.

“Using novel technology and instrumentation like this will make my students more competitive when they go out to the job market,” said [chemistry](#) associate professor Dr. Peter Rosado-Flores. “The main goal is to educate our undergrads ... to have confidence handling instruments like this one that cost almost \$40,000. They get nervous, but I say ‘I’m trusting you to take care of it.’ And they do.”

With a handheld scanning gun, sophomore Camille Hodek of Peachtree City, Georgia, expected to find toxic materials like lead and phosphorus. She mostly discovered safer metals like iron, aluminum, calcium and magnesium in the early 20th century paint.

Hodek has a concentration in forensic chemistry. Her dream job is to work for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

“I’ve really loved being able to do research so early in my undergraduate years,” she said. “I don’t believe I would get the same experience at any other school in Georgia. I’m very grateful for this program.”

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I don't believe I would get the same experience at any other school in Georgia.

- Camille Hodek

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Hodek shared her findings with senior art major Carolyn Cantrell of Loganville, Georgia, who used the chemical makeup to mix safe pigments and screen-print replicas of the historic poster. Cantrell is taking a printmaking class taught by Matt Forrest, associate professor of art and interim chair of the [Department of Art](#).

“It's quite interesting to see the techniques and tools chemistry students use. Their research is very computerized and while our part also has a computerized element at the beginning, our process is very physical,” Cantrell said.

“That's part of why I love printmaking,” she added. “You involve your body in the process.”

This merging of printmaking and forensics using state-of-the-art technology is the kind of [liberal arts](#) alliance that makes Georgia College special.

“It's a great experience from the student aspect,” Forrest said, “but it's also inspiring for the faculty. Students from chemistry may not have thought they'd be going to printmaking to see the results of their research. To have a physical object at the end of it, knowing all the history that goes with it, helps our understanding of what art is and what chemistry can be.”

Header Image: Carolyn Cantrell holding a reproduction of a WWI-era poster. Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt.

News Stories Posted Thursday April 17, 2025



Sports Marketing Students Partner with Bobcat Athletics for Hands-On Experience

[Management, Marketing, & Logistics, Department of](#) : Thursday April 17, 2025

Maggie Forrester is a senior Mass Communication major from Monroe County, Georgia. She works as a student assistant in the

Office of University Communications and will graduate this May. Maggie takes us behind the scenes of a hands-on collaborative project for MKTG 3168 - Sports Marketing.

Story and Photos by Maggie Forrester

For 15 years, Dr. Joanna Schwartz has taught Sports Marketing, which includes an assignment to market a Georgia College & State University baseball or softball game during spring semester.

Dr. Schwartz is teaching two sections sports marketing this spring, each with about 70 students, and I am in her 2 p.m. section. In the first week, we formed groups of four and chose either a [baseball](#) or [softball](#) game to promote during the spring season.

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It's been a win-win for marketing students and for Athletics, as GCSU teams have had a variety of student groups coming up with clever ways to increase attendance and improve the fan experience.

- Dr. Joanna Schwartz

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Between the two sections, there are 18 groups. More than half chose to promote a baseball game, while the rest chose softball.

One group promoted a baseball game by organizing a canned food drive. The group donated all the items to a local food bank in Milledgeville.

“It's been a win-win for marketing students and for Athletics, as GCSU teams have had a variety of student groups coming up with clever ways to increase attendance and improve the fan experience,” said Dr. Schwartz, professor of [Marketing](#).

Dr. Schwartz's classes have also promoted basketball and tennis. In the fall, her students promote soccer and volleyball matches.

Michael MacEachern, assistant director of athletics for communications, said, “Partnering with Dr. Schwartz's sports marketing classes each spring has been invaluable. They help us

spread the word about [GCSU Athletics](#), especially baseball and softball. We leave it up to the students in the class to come up with ideas on how to market an event and we try to help them with giveaway items and other ways to help promote their event.”

My group chose the April 8 Bobcat baseball game [against Erskine College](#). We brainstormed ways to make this game the ultimate experience for fans and decided on ‘Chick-fil-A x GCSU’ night.

One of our group members, Abby Pollock, was assistant marketing director at Chick-fil-A Milledgeville for three years and she used her community connections to help make our event happen.

I work as a student assistant in the GCSU Office of University Communications, so I also had help and advice from my colleagues to promote our event through the college’s social media channels.



Attendees could claim an exclusive reward in the Chick-fil-A app. Photo: Maggie Forrester

We gave away free Chick-fil-A sandwiches to the first 50 attendees at the game. Chick-fil-A also allowed us to do a geofence giveaway: anyone who attended the game received a free chicken biscuit reward in the Chick-fil-A app.

Chick-fil-A Milledgeville posted about the game on its social media to help attract more attendees from our community. The game started at 5 p.m., and we got there early to set up our table and

hand out the sandwiches. Once we were set up, the sandwiches were gone within five minutes!

Leading up to each group's game, other students used various types of advertising to spread the word. Most groups put up flyers, chalked around campus and partnered with the GCSU baseball and

softball Instagram accounts to promote their events.



More than 175 people claimed the geofenced reward in the Chick-fil-A app. Photo: Maggie Forrester

There were actually two other groups doing promotions at the April 8 Erskine game as well. One group hosted a dog contest since their original game was rained out. The other group ran a variation on the canned food drive: bring a canned good and receive a free GCSU t-shirt or cup.

Thanks to the geofence feature in the Chick-fil-A app, our group was able to confirm that 176 people attended our game and downloaded the promotion. Using real world tools and being able to track marketing metrics was a really

valuable learning experience for my group.

“The project is a real-world experience that contends with the variables that our Athletic Department – and sports marketers generally – deal with in promoting events such as determining who their target audiences are for their specific promotions, and pivoting around unexpected variables such as weather,” said Dr. Schwartz.

Through these projects, my class has been able to bring together Milledgeville residents, university partners and the GCSU campus community to Bobcat games this spring.

News Stories Posted Monday April 21, 2025



GCSU Research Day grows to largest ever with over 250 student projects

[Mentored Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors \(MURACE\)](#) : Monday April 21, 2025

Story and photos by Anna Gay Leavitt, Video by Chris Brown

An annual celebration of all the mentored research taking place across the university, Georgia College Research Day is significantly larger in 2025 than ever before. More than 250 projects were showcased – an increase of 32% over last year's event – including 29 graduate projects and 216 undergraduate projects.

50 graduate projects and 210 undergraduate projects.

In collaboration with the Women's & Gender Symposium, which hosted 23 student presentations, [Research Day](#) offers a chance for students to share their research outside the classroom with the broader campus community.

Research is foundational to the experience of Georgia College students. In the latest graduating class for instance, a total of 67% of all graduates conducted [undergraduate research](#) during their time on campus – many as early as their freshman year.

This experience puts GCSU grads firmly ahead of the pack when launching their careers. A recent study by [The American Association of Colleges and Universities](#) showed that employers are “much more likely” to hire job candidates with specific experiences, including those who have worked as interns, held leadership roles, conducted undergraduate research or performed community service.

All of these high-impact learning experiences are fundamental to GCSU's liberal arts mission. They also contributed to the university being ranked [No. 1 most innovative](#) by U.S. News & World Report last year.

Sophomore Sarah Carter is a [biology](#) major from Marietta, Georgia; her research analyzes protein structures within an enzyme found in [Cherokia georgiana](#), a millipede species common in the Southeast and known for producing hydrogen cyanide as a defense mechanism. Carter cites the importance of the hands-on, experiential nature of her work in the labs of assistant professor of biology Dr. Arnab Sengupta and associate professor of biology Dr. Bruce Snyder.

“I think it is very useful to have research experience as an undergrad to possibly get into master's programs, and just have hands-on research experience,” said Carter. Carter and the rest of the research team are also using generative AI software to predict the protein structures.

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I think it is very useful to have research experience as an undergrad to possibly get into master's programs, and just have hands-on research experience.

- Sarah Carter

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In addition to honing their skills in the lab, research provides students with the real-world problem solving, analytical and communication skills needed to be successful beyond the classroom.

“Students are learning all about their particular research area, but they’re also learning those communication skills, those collaboration skills,” explained Snyder. “They’re learning about how what they do fits into the broader picture of the world, and the importance of the work they are doing.”

News Stories Posted Tuesday April 22, 2025



President Cox's legacy of service is honored with Lifetime Achievement Award

[President, Office of the](#) : Tuesday April 22, 2025

By Amanda Respess

Georgia College & State University President Cathy Cox received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Supreme Court of Georgia on April 15 during the 25th Annual Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service.

The Lifetime Achievement Award is the highest recognition given

by the Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism, which organizes the annual Justice Robert Benham Awards.

The Benham Awards recognize the commitment of Georgia lawyers and judges to volunteerism, encourage lawyers and judges to be involved in community service, and raise the public image of lawyers and judges.

Recipients of The Lifetime Achievement award not only meet Benham Award requirements, but also demonstrate "an extraordinarily long and distinguished commitment to volunteer participating in the community throughout his or her legal career," according to the Supreme Court of Georgia.

President Cox graduated magna cum laude from Mercer Law School, then practiced law in her hometown of Bainbridge and in Atlanta for 10 years, during which time she was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives. Cox subsequently broke new ground in her election as Georgia's 25th Secretary of State in 1998, becoming the first woman in Georgia's history to serve in this Constitutional office.

Following terms as President of Young Harris College and Dean of Mercer Law School, Cox became the 12th president of Georgia College & State University October 1, 2021.

**The 25th Annual
Justice Robert Benham
Awards for Community Service**



The Nathan Deal Judicial Center
Atlanta, Georgia
April 15, 2025

Honorees from the 25th Annual Justice Robert Benham Awards for Community Service - President Cathy Cox seated left, front. (Photo: Office of Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism)

News Stories Posted Wednesday April 23, 2025



Georgia College targets critical teacher shortage at statewide summit

[College of Education](#) : Wednesday April 23, 2025

By Mike Cavaliere

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission hosted the inaugural Teacher Pipeline Summit today at Georgia College & State University, in Milledgeville, with the goal of addressing the critical need for K-12 teachers throughout the state. Organized by Gov. Brian Kemp, the summit tasked education leaders to design a plan to elevate the profession and attract new teachers to the field

by providing multiple career pathways, as well as boosting teacher retention.

“We cannot keep hoping the pipeline will fill itself because it won't,” said Sen. Sonya Halpern of Atlanta, a member of the Senate Education and Youth Committee, who spoke at the event. “We need to be intentional about how we recruit, how we prepare, how we retain, and how we connect this work to Georgia's long-term goals for economic growth and community stability.”

According to the job board [Indeed](#), there are currently over 2,000 active teacher openings throughout the state of Georgia. Those openings create an opportunity for those interested in pursuing or advancing a career in education, according to Dr. Joanne Previts, interim dean of the [John H. Lounsbury College of Education](#) at GCSU.

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We cannot keep hoping the pipeline will fill itself because it won't. We need to be intentional about how we recruit, how we prepare, how we retain, and how we connect this work to Georgia's long-term goals for economic growth and community stability.

- Sen. Sonya Halpern

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“Ensuring we have high-quality teachers is essential for quality K-12 education in Georgia and throughout the country,” Previts, said. “Teacher shortages have countless negative consequences, including limiting special education services, reducing school and extracurricular programs, requiring instructors to teach outside of their fields of specialization, creating and compounding learning gaps, and necessitating larger class sizes.”

In the past five years, Georgia College has prepared 1,021 new

teachers — specialized across elementary, middle, special and secondary education — including 194 new teachers in 2024. That level of impact is part of GCSU's mission, according to university President Cathy Cox.

"The quality of a state's public education system is a critical barometer in determining a state's overall success — the success of its people and of its business community — which is why it is vitally important to attract new, high-performing and passionate teachers to the field," Cox said. "As a historical leader in talent development for Georgia schools, Georgia College & State University is proud to host this inaugural event, which should herald in a new and exciting era for educators, and students, throughout the state."

Several state legislators attended the summit, which also featured a series of strategic work sessions for education professionals throughout the state.

"If we want to address the educator shortage and prepare for the Georgia we are becoming, then we need a coordinated, fully resourced plan to recruit, prepare, support and retain a high-quality, high-capacity education workforce," Halpern added. "We need a statewide strategy that's as bold as the challenge itself, one that brings together our data, our expertise, our institutions, to ask and answer the hard questions."

The summit plans to reconvene annually at other Georgia institutions.

"Today is really about what can be done at the local level," explained Dr. Penney McRoy, director of educator preparation for

the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. "All of these actions that are being developed in small groups today will inform ... a cohesive



statewide plan for recruiting educators.”

The Georgia Professional Standards Commission was created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1991 to assure the

preparation, certification and professional conduct of certified personnel employed in Georgia’s public schools. Its responsibilities include the support of recruiting functions throughout the TeachGeorgia.org website.



From left: Rep. Lydia Glaize - District 67, Rep. Will Wade - District 9 and Sen. Sonya Halpern - District 39. (Photo: Amanda J. Respass)

Amanda Respass contributed to this report.

Header Image Carousel: The inaugural Teacher Pipeline Summit had more than 150 attendees, including educators, K-12 administrators, college faculty, elected officials and policy makers from around the state. (Photos: Amanda J. Respass)

News Stories Posted Friday April 25, 2025



Class of 2025 international students help drive Bobcat Athletics' Academic Success

[Athletics](#) : Friday April 25, 2025

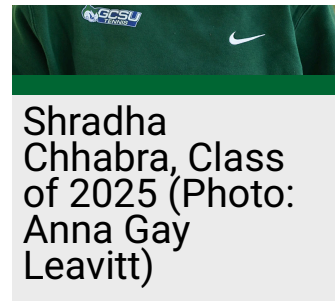
By Margaret Schell

Ranked No.1 in the nation for [academic success rate](#), Georgia College & State University is home to hundreds of multi-talented scholar-athletes — four of whom are class of 2025 international students, who credit sports with creating life-



changing opportunities for them to thrive, both on and off the playing field.

Shradha Chhabra from New Delhi, India, started playing tennis when she was 10 years old. She loved the sport so much that she plays on the GCSU women's tennis team. Another passion of hers is psychology — learning about human behavior.



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I learned that grades, awards, wins and losses will come and go, but the relationships built over these last four years will last a lifetime.

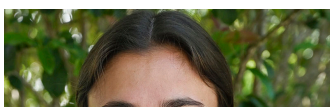
- Shradha Chhabra

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“Psychology helps me understand people in a deeper way,” Chhabra said. “I love reading various research papers and working in a research lab.”

She's enjoyed compiling and describing her research at conferences, as well as assisting in the [Sleep-E Lab](#) under faculty advisor Dr. Taylor Elsey — who enlists students' participation in every step of the research process answering questions about human sleep.

Chhabra will apply the skills learned from Georgia College at The University of Akron in Ohio pursuing her Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology. Then, she hopes for a career where she can elevate employee well-being.



“Playing tennis helped me become disciplined,” Chhabra said. “I also learned that grades, awards, wins and losses will



Chiara Santoro Martinez, Class of 2025 (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

come and go, but the relationships built over these last four years will last a lifetime.”

Chiara Santoro Martinez of Santa Ursula, Spain, will graduate from Georgia College with her Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science. She began playing tennis at age 6 and has enjoyed playing women’s tennis as a Bobcat.

“Playing tennis gives me a sense of relief whenever I’m stressed about something,”

she said. “I can just let it go on the tennis court and have fun with it.”

Santoro Martinez will use the tools she learned in exercise science and apply it to physical therapy school.

“Physical therapy relates well with sports,” she said. “I’ve always wanted to stay in that environment, helping professional team members or tennis players recover.”

Chhabra, Santoro Martinez and the other members of the Bobcat women’s tennis team — ranked sixth in the Southeast Region, earning the No. 4 Seed in the Peach Belt Tournament — will play in Columbus, Georgia, beginning noon Friday, April 25, and possibly lasting until the championship on Sunday.

Since age 5, Gabriel “Gabe” Cizek of Prague, Czech Republic, has played tennis. He’s on the GCSU tennis team and an exercise

science major with a pre-professional and sports medicine concentration.

For four years, his teammates became his “second family.”

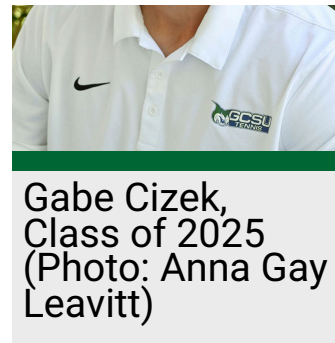


“I’ll miss every person I shared the court with and my roommates,” Cizek said. “I’ll also miss [Coach Barsby](#).”

Dr. Mike Martino, interim director and professor of exercise science, had a tremendous, positive influence on Cizek throughout his academic journey.

“I hope he knows how much of an impact he’s had on me,” Cizek said. “He inspired and shaped me and built the foundation of my passion for exercise science and sports performance — I’ll carry this with me for the rest of my life.”

At Georgia College, Cizek learned the importance of building close, personal, respectful relationships with others.



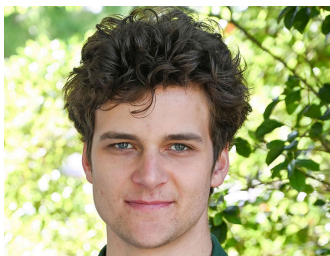
“

[Dr. Martino] inspired and shaped me and built the foundation of my passion for exercise science and sports performance — I’ll carry this with me for the rest of my life.

- Gabe Cizek

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“Life’s not just about giving instructions or corrections,” he said. “It’s about making meaningful connections that have the power to transform lives on and off the court and inside and outside the classroom.”



Cizek and the Bobcats men’s team — ranked fourth in the Southeast Region, earning the No. 5 Seed in the Peach Belt Tournament — will play in Columbus, Georgia, beginning at 9 a.m. Friday, April 25, and possibly lasting until the



Dallas Clayton,
Class of 2025
(Photo: Anna Gay
Leavitt)

championship on Sunday.

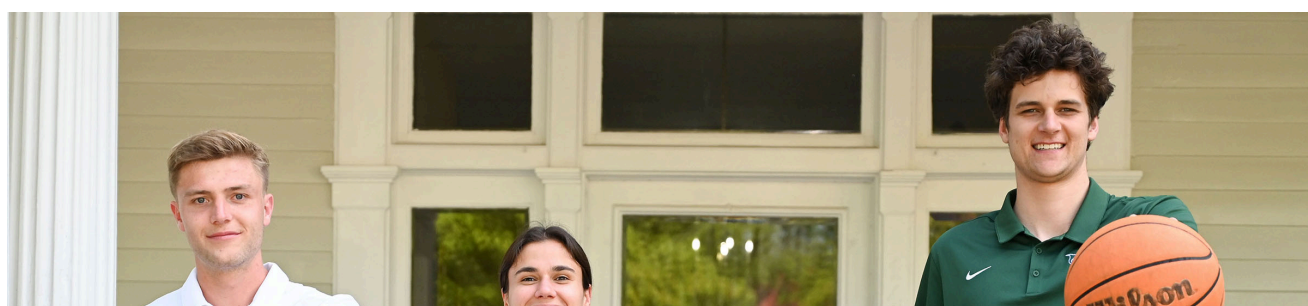
Dallas Clayton is a basketball player and marketing major from Auckland, New Zealand. He was drawn to Georgia College for its community, weather and facilities.

“Basketball is a great mix of human potential — fitness, athleticism and coordination,” he said. “It’s also fun. On average, you score around 50% of every shot you put up.”

Clayton started playing basketball at age 6 and by age 16, he was traveling with the New Zealand national team, participating in NBA events.

Last summer, Clayton hosted GCSU College of Business & Technology students on a study abroad program in his home country. Now, he’s considering playing basketball professionally in Europe, Thailand or Canada. Later, he may work in marketing in the U.S.

“I’m leaning towards professional basketball,” Clayton said. “I’m not ready to give up the sport.”





Class of 2025 International Bobcat student-athletes from left: Cizek, Santoro Martinez, Chhabra and Clayton (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

News Stories Posted Tuesday April 29, 2025



Tackling Georgia's Maternal Mortality Crisis with Unique Midwifery Program

[Nursing, School of](#) : Tuesday April 29, 2025

By Caroline Duda, Contributing Writer

For faculty, staff and students in the Georgia College & State University [School of Nursing](#), combating maternal mortality is the ever-present mission that drives their efforts. More than half of Georgia's counties have no or limited access to maternal care, but GCSU alumni are actively resolving that deficit.

Georgia College offers both a Master of Science and post-master's certificate [concentrating in nurse-midwifery](#).

Through the first public program of its kind to be [accredited in Georgia](#), GCSU's midwifery faculty and nurse-midwife graduates hope to turn the tide on Georgia's history of poor maternal care.

"Georgia has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the U.S., with significant disparities affecting rural and underserved communities," said Dr. Monica Ketchie, associate professor of nursing and WHNP and Nurse-Midwifery coordinator.



The nursing simulation lab allows midwifery program students to train for assisting with birth and providing patient care. (Photos: Kristen Simpson)

In 2024, Georgia ranked [No. 46 out of 50 states](#) for women's health, but training more certified nurse-midwives offers one strategy for improving maternal outcomes. In support of that goal, the program will celebrate its sixth graduating cohort this May.

To date, 26 nurse-midwives have graduated from the program. According to Ketchie, nearly all of GCSU's graduates have remained in Georgia with a "significant percentage" opting to work in rural and underserved communities.

Dameka Wilson-Vickers is one of those alumna nurse-midwives.

She earned her Master of Science in Nursing in May 2024 and now works in a rural area of South Georgia near Valdosta.

“The area is growing, but we serve so many of the nearby communities — even people in north Florida,” she said.

Access to prenatal care can be a challenge for expectant mothers in rural areas. In Georgia, rural counties have maternal mortality rates [up to 2.5 times higher](#) than their urban counterparts.

“Our nurse-midwifery program at Georgia College was developed with this crisis in mind,” Ketchie said. “We have a strong curricular focus on rural and underserved populations, ensuring students gain hands-on experience in these areas.”

That hands-on experience includes clinical placements in rural and underserved settings, where students learn to provide patient care that is sensitive to the needs of Georgia’s rural and underserved population. The program curriculum directly addresses disparities in healthcare access and teaches strategies for improving maternal outcomes in such settings.

“

Our nurse-midwifery program at Georgia College was developed with [the maternal mortality] crisis in mind. We have a strong curricular focus on rural and underserved populations, ensuring students gain hands-on experience in these areas.

- Dr. Monica Ketchie

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A year after her graduation, Wilson-Vickers has seen the tremendous impact nurse-midwives can have. “The office I work in

serves a large low-income community and we are making a difference,” she said.

“Women are seeking early prenatal care and that is amazing. We see very few women who have had no care. It is encouraging,” she added.

Nurse-midwives are experts in more than pregnancy. As women’s healthcare specialists, they provide a continuum of care from adolescence through menopause to include annual physicals, gynecology visits, STI prevention and treatment, prenatal care and of course labor support with the delivery of an infant.

“For aspiring nurse-midwives looking to make a difference, GCSU offers a unique and mission-driven education that prepares students to become change agents in maternal healthcare,” Ketchie said. “Graduates leave prepared to advocate for women’s health.”

Wilson-Vickers echoes this sentiment. “The instructors were always available for support and for questions, and the on-campus labs were a very key point in my comprehension. I loved the program. They treat students like they matter and that goes a long way.”

Header Image: The nursing simulation lab features an array of technology and patient interaction scenarios to provide students with an average of 16,000+ total contact hours annually. Photo by Kristen Simpson.