News Stories Posted Friday May 2, 2025



GCSU's Spring Concert Rocked with Local Favorites and L.A. Stars

Student Engagement, Office of : Friday May 2, 2025

Story by Kylie Rowe, Photos and video by Caroline Wood, Jaffeth Tequia, Maggie Forrester and Kylie Rowe

On April 25, students gathered at the Centennial Center – some arriving at noon – to see their favorite band. The 2025 Spring

arriving at noon – to see their favorite band. The 2025 Spring Concert catered to indie and alternative Bobcats with performances by Wallows, Medium Build and Subatomic.

The spring concert was electric, and an exciting opportunity for the GCSU students and alumni in attendance.

Wallows, comprising Dylan Minnette, Cole Preston, Braeden Lemasters and their set musicians, were this year's headliners. Based in Los Angeles, Wallows just released their fourth studio album "More" on March 28.

Students who showed up early were in the very front of the crowd, excited to interact with the band members as they performed. Lead singer Minnette even managed to walk through some of the crowd while playing the harmonica.

Nick Carpenter, aka Medium Build, is a Georgia native who grew up in Alpharetta. Medium Build recently performed at Coachella, the world-famous annual music festival.

While on stage reminiscing about his own undergraduate years, Carpenter joked with the audience that he hadn't been accepted to GCSU. "Georgia College was my number one pick!" Carpenter told the crowd.

Local band and 2025 'Battle of the Bobcats' winners Subatomic opened for Wallows and Medium Build, performing covers of classic hits. Subatomic is a self-proclaimed "sexy" band and has definitely proved their appeal with crowd-pleasing performances.

News Stories Posted Tuesday May 6, 2025



Class of 2025: Meet GCSU's Valedictorians, Each with a Perfect 4.0 GPA

Commencement : Tuesday May 6, 2025

By Amanda Respess

Nearly 1,500 students will graduate from Georgia College & State University this weekend, including 12 valedictorians from across the university's four academic colleges. Georgia College valedictorians are students who complete their academic career with a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

Meet the Valedictorians

Charlotte Aexel is a triple major earning a Bachelor of Arts degree with majors in: English, concentrating in creative writing; World Languages & Cultures, concentrating in French; and Liberal Studies. Aexel – from Wind Lake, Wisconsin – chose GCSU in large part because of the university's connection to Flannery O'Connor. Like O'Connor, Aexel was editor-in-chief of "The Peacock's Feet,"

the university's literary journal. Aexel also served as chapter president of the Sigma Tau Delta English honor society.

Jordyn Bausch, of Richmond Hill, Georgia, will earn her bachelor's in business majoring in accounting and is an officer in the GCSU chapter of Beta Alpha Psi international honor society for accounting and finance. Bausch participated in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program this spring – a program led by professor Scott Burns in which students help complete tax returns for local residents. Bausch is also an active member of the GCSU Pride Alliance.

Kathryn Brook is from Calhoun, Georgia, by way of Hopkinsville, Kentucky. After earning her Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Brook will return to her home state to complete a Ph.D. in experimental psychology at the University of Louisville. Brook was an active participant in undergraduate research at GCSU through numerous campus labs and completed a National Science Foundation REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) at the University of Michigan.

Lily Gauntt is a double major earning a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and World Languages & Cultures, concentrating in French. She also earned a minor in Information Studies. Gauntt served as a French language tutor and is a student assistant in the Georgia College Special Collections. Gauntt's time in the collections has inspired her to pursue a career in archival work. An active member of the John H. Sallstrom Honors College and Sigma Tau Delta English honor society, Gauntt hails from Marietta, Georgia.

Kristin Gurley will earn her Bachelor of Science in Nursing, with a minor in public health. Gurley is from McDonough, Georgia. She is a member of the John H. Sallstrom Honors College, the Georgia Association of Nursing Students, the Public Health Student Organization and active in both Phi Kappa Phi and Sigma Theta Tau honor societies. Gurley relished her practicum hours spent in critical care and leaves GSCU with a job as an intensive care unit nurse.

Kali Holierhoek, of Canton, Georgia, will earn her Bachelor of Science in Biology, concentrating on marine sciences. Holierhoek is a member of both Eta Sigma Alpha and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies and vice president of the Georgia College women's club soccer team. Holierhoek was active in mentored undergraduate research at GCSU and presented at conferences including the Association of Southeaster Biologists, Georgia Academy of Science and GCSU Research Day.

Grace Milton is earning a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science in the pre-professional track. Milton is an active member of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, the Pre-Dental Club and Gamma Beta Phi national honors and service society, as well as participates in many of GCSU's robust intramural teams. Milton's hometown is Waycross, Georgia.

Elise Mirabella will earn a Bachelor of Science in Biology, concentrating in marine sciences. Mirabella is originally from Canton, Georgia. Last summer, she participated in a GCSU study abroad program studying coral reef biology in Okinawa, Japan, which Mirabella calls a once-in-a-lifetime experience. During her time at Georgia College, Mirabella also volunteered with Shelter Buddies.

Jonathan Rodgers is earning his bachelor's in business, majoring in accounting. Rodgers' favorite class at GCSU was microeconomics because of how the class relates to real world business and life. Hailing from McRae, Georgia, Rodgers competed in GCSU intramural teams including co-ed softball and 5x5 basketball.

Heather Vincent will earn a Bachelor of Science in Biology, with minors in both chemistry and global health. Vincent is president of Tri-Beta biology honor society. For all four years of her time at GCSU, Vincent volunteered with the Georgia College Science Education Center, assisting with STEM outreach programs to K-12 students around the state. Vincent's hometown is Talking Rock,

Georgia.

L. Allison “Allie” Wiernicki is graduating with her Bachelor of Science in Middle Grades Education, with concentrations in both mathematics and English/language arts. Hailing from McDonough, Georgia, Wiernicki is active in Collegiate Middle Level Association and the Awakening Collegiate Fellowship, holding leadership positions in both organizations.

Elizabeth “Liz” Williams will earn a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Williams is an active member of the John H. Sallstrom Honors College and the Georgia Association of Nursing Students. Williams’ hometown is Marietta, Georgia. Williams completed numerous nursing practicums, as well as an externship at Northside Cherokee in the NICU. Williams is a member of Kappa Delta sorority.



Class of 2025 Valedictorians from left to right (top row) Charlotte Aexel, Jordyn Bausch, Kathryn Brook, Lily Gauntt, Kristin Gurley and Kali Holierhoek (bottom row) Grace Milton, Elise Mirabella, Jonathan Rodgers, Heather Vincent, Allie Wiernicki and Liz Williams.

Celebrate with Us

Commencement at GCSU is organized into four events, with one ceremony for each academic college.

College of Health Sciences – 2 p.m. Friday, May 9

College of Health Sciences – 2 p.m. Friday, May 9

- Keynote speaker is Dr. Joy L. King (’10, ’15, ’17) President-Elect of the Georgia Nurses Association and healthcare leader dedicated to advancing health equity and empowering communities.
- Student speaker is Maggie Glover, an exercise science major and star intramural athlete from Gray, Georgia.

John H. Lounsbury College of Education – 7 p.m. Friday, May 9

- Keynote speaker is Hon. Nathan Deal, former Governor of Georgia. Following former First Lady Sandra Deal’s passing in 2022, Gov. Deal continues her mission to promote childhood literacy through The Deal Foundation and his work as an author, educator and advocate.
- Student speaker is Mark Higginbotham from Gray, Georgia, earning his specialist degree in educational leadership.

J. Whitney Bunting College of Business & Technology – 9 a.m. Saturday, May 10

- Keynote speaker is Mr. Cade Joiner, founder of Shred-X Corporation and a member of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents. A longtime advocate for small businesses, Joiner chaired the Georgians First Commission.
- Student speaker is Emily Chambers from Cumming, Georgia, earning her bachelor’s in management information systems with a concentration in data analytics

College of Arts & Sciences – 3 p.m. Saturday, May 10

- Keynote speaker is Mr. Christopher Eby (’11) an attorney at King & Spalding. Eby graduated summa cum laude from GCSU in 2011 and earned his law degree from The University of Chicago in 2015. Eby is the 2025 recipient of the GCSU Honors College Alumni Achievement Award.
- Student speaker is Axel Hawkins from McDonough, Georgia, outgoing president of the Student Government Association earning her bachelor’s degree in history and political science.

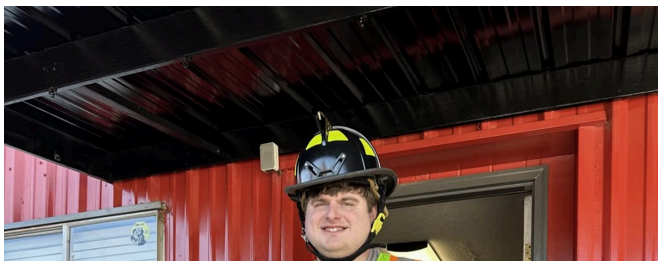
News Stories Posted Wednesday May 7, 2025



Middle Georgia's only post-secondary program for students with intellectual disabilities celebrates first grad

Commencement : Wednesday May 7, 2025

By Maggie Forrester and Amanda Respess



Spencer Kirkley is the first graduate of the GC THRIVE program at Georgia College & State University. Middle Georgia's first and only

inclusive post-secondary education program, GC THRIVE enables young adults ages 18 to 28 with intellectual disabilities to attend college with their peers.



The GC THRIVE program's first graduate, Spencer Kirkley, interned with the Milledgeville Fire Department. (Photo: GC THRIVE)

While GC THRIVE students are non-degree seeking, graduates earn a Certificate of Completion in Liberal Arts Education by enrolling in two Georgia College courses each semester. The course curriculum is modified as needed by an academic coordinator and peer mentors. GC THRIVE students also complete internships each semester and participate in Student Life activities.

Kirkley took courses through GC THRIVE including media literacy and theatre appreciation, along with a variety of classes from the Department of World Languages & Cultures, the outdoor education program and the creative writing program. Kirkley also interned with Georgia College Athletics, the Milledgeville Fire Department and Wolf Country radio 97.5 FM.

GC THRIVE was founded by Rob Sumowski, associate professor of education; Stephen Wills, professor of special education; and Nicole Declouette, professor of education and interim associate dean of the John H. Lounsbury College of Education.

While all three faculty remain deeply involved as co-directors, Heather Cox, lecturer of special education, runs the day-to-day operations as the program's academic coordinator.

"I had a professor tell me this, after having his second THRIVE student this semester, that it has really helped him grow as a

professor, which meant a lot to me," Cox said. "He said, 'It's challenging me, it's pushing me to think outside of the box. It's changing the way I teach, and I'm happy about it.'"

Cox helps modify the courses students take, helping them develop the skills they need to be successful and employable. Currently, GC THRIVE has three students enrolled and hopes to expand enrollment to support many more students with intellectual disabilities in Middle Georgia.

Declouette said, "We are really speaking to the mission of Georgia College, the values that Georgia College holds dear, and our strategic plan. We foster a sense of belonging in a campus community that values diversity of intellectual thought, experiences and identifications."

Sumowski is quick to point out that GC THRIVE wouldn't have been possible without the support of Georgia College President Cathy Cox, Provost Costas Spriou, Interim Provost Holley Roberts, University Registrar Kay Anderson and Angela Criscoe, executive director of the School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

While in the program, GC THRIVE students are assigned peer mentors – fellow GC students who assist with classroom support, social interactions, navigating college life and internships.



GC THRIVE program co-founders from left: Declouette, Wills and Sumowski (Photo: GC THRIVE)

Just as the peer mentors foster meaningful relationships and support GC THRIVE students, the special education program plays a vital role in preparing future educators to carry that same mission of inclusion

and empowerment in their own classrooms.

“That’s our culture here. It’s who we are … We shape lives. We have a spirit. We share a bond and pride in this community we all have built together,” said Sumowski.

The special education program is one more way Georgia College is working to solve widespread teacher shortages. According to the Southern Regional Education Board, special education is one of four subject areas with the most widespread teacher shortages over the past four school years. This Friday, 64 GCSU students will graduate with bachelor's, master's and specialist degrees in special education.

“One thing that makes us unique in our teacher preparation is that we have a mentor-led, cohort-based and field-based model,” said Wills, who is also co-coordinator of the special education program in the College of Education.

> **That’s our culture here. It’s who we are … We shape lives. We have a spirit. We share a bond and pride in this community we all have built together.**
>
> **- Rob Sumowski, GC THRIVE co-founder**

News Stories Posted Thursday May 8, 2025



From Georgia College to Global Affairs – Senior Earns Scholarship to Prestigious Tufts University Graduate Program

Institute for Leadership and the Public Good : Thursday May 8, 2025

By Amanda Respess

Brigitte Rivard knew early on that she wanted to pursue a career in advocacy. Georgia College & State University showed her the many different paths she could take to achieve her goals, and now the class of 2025 graduating senior has



been accepted to the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.



Senior Brigitte Rivard

“The faculty at Georgia College is so special because they're so willing to support and communicate and connect with you on a personal level, which honestly is really hard to find at other at other universities,” Rivard said. “That's something I've really valued, and that's helped me feel seen and heard and given me the room to explore the things that I wondered about. It's a place for open discourse and that's something that I definitely appreciate and has been very formative for me.”

Rivard is graduating with her Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication degree, as well as a Leadership Certificate. She was selected to participate in the Georgia Education Mentorship program and for membership in Omicron Delta Kappa – “The Circle” collegiate honor society for leadership and scholarship – and Lambda Pi Eta national communication honor society.

“I owe a lot of the opportunities and doors that have been opened to me to Dr. Mock,” Rivard said. Harold Mock is the director of Leadership Programs at Georgia College and an assistant professor of history.

> **The faculty at Georgia College is so special because they're so willing to support and communicate and connect with you on a personal level, which honestly is really hard to find at other at other universities.**
>
> **- Brigitte Rivard, 2025 graduate**

“Dr. Mock is one of those professors that just knows you so well.

He's so intelligent, and you always feel really good about yourself leaving a conversation with him. He's uplifting and enthusiastic about learning. He definitely gave me the confidence to pursue this program at Tufts," said Rivard.

Rivard completed the Intercultural Leadership Program led by Mock, which includes a five-week study abroad in Strasbourg, France, seat of the European Parliament.

"In nearly twenty years of teaching, I have seldom found a student whose motivations for advanced study are as noble as Brigitte's," Mock said. "She has a profound grasp of international affairs and diplomacy. As she leaves Georgia College, she is bound for one of the world's foremost graduate programs in world politics — truly one of the most competitive and distinguished academic programs in the world."

As part of the Mass Comm curriculum, majors complete two on-campus practicums to gain experience and build a portfolio in their chosen concentration, including strategic communication, journalism and digital production.

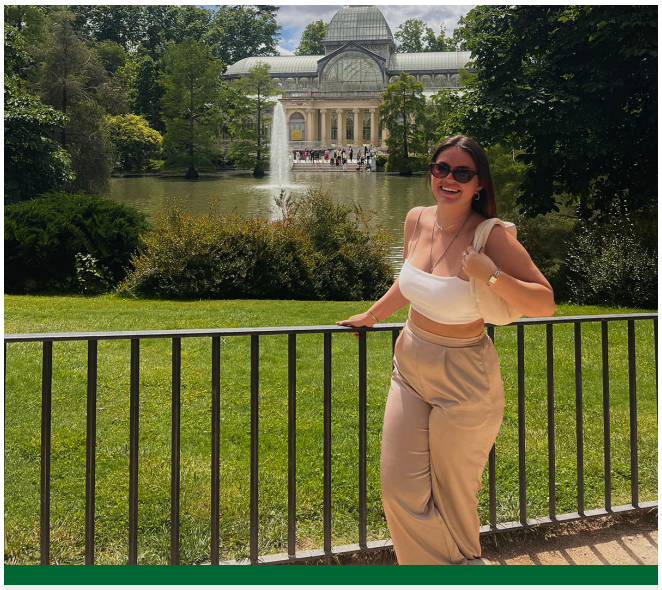
"I had my second practicum in the International Education Center. And I really connected with Dr. [James] Callaghan," Rivard said. "He helped me get where I wanted to go and what I wanted to pursue with study abroad. He's been a really big mentor to me as well, just navigating the world of international schools and being very understanding and helpful."

The first study abroad program Rivard chose, with Callaghan's help, was in Geneva, Switzerland, where she studied global governance and the United Nations.

"I met Michel Veuthey, United Nations Ambassador of the Order of Malta, and asked him to give me some insight into what he feels is



lacking in the workplace and which skills are most valuable," Rivard said. "He told me the ability to communicate and articulate thought strategically. That's what really drew me to Mass Comm."



Rivard at El Retiro park in Madrid, Spain.

"This is where I fell in love with so many aspects of advocacy and diplomacy, especially within the United Nations," Rivard explained.

Rivard is a long-time resident of Cumming, Georgia, but was born in Canada. Now she is bound for Boston and Tufts, earning a sizable scholarship to pursue a Master of Global Affairs degree.

"It's a little intimidating, but I'm so motivated because I feel so prepared from Georgia College." Rivard said. "I'm really excited."

Leadership for the Public Good

Through its unique liberal arts mission — which encourages students to collaborate across disciplines in a wide array of experiential learning opportunities — GCSU is training the next generation of leaders to create a better world by solving the

systemic challenges that cause societal pains. Read about recent projects and success stories.

Header Image: Rivard at the Palace of Versailles in France (All photos courtesy of Brigitte Rivard.)

News Stories Posted Saturday May 10, 2025



Commencement 2025: Nearly 1,500 students graduate from Georgia College

Commencement : Saturday May 10, 2025

By Amanda Respess

On Friday and Saturday, May 9 and 10, Georgia College & State University conferred 1,425 degrees on both undergraduate and graduate students in the class of 2025. There were four spring commencement ceremonies – one for each of the university's academic colleges – held in the Centennial Center on the Georgia College campus.

The class of 2025 included students earning bachelor's, master's, specialist and doctoral degrees. Members of the class hail from 16 different states, as well as several countries internationally.

There were 12 valedictorians in the class of 2025, each having earned a perfect 4.0 final grade point average while completing their undergraduate degree.

Georgia College President Cathy Cox welcomed the graduates and their guests, and the university faculty, staff and students at the beginning of each ceremony,

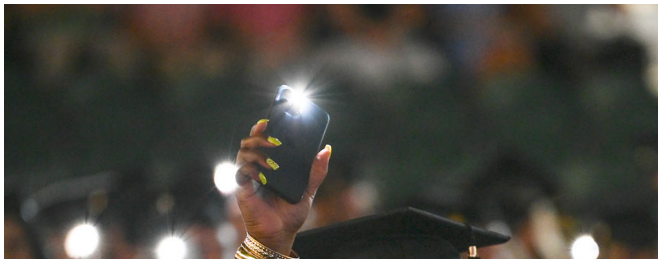
"Georgia College & State University empowers students to think independently, lead creatively and advance professionally," Cox said. "With 34 undergraduate majors and 32 graduate programs – including two doctoral programs – that meet the needs of scholars, professionals and the dynamic workforce of our state, Georgia College & State University prepares students to make a difference in the real world, regardless of the major they choose, or the opportunities and challenges they may face."

COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES – FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2 P.M.

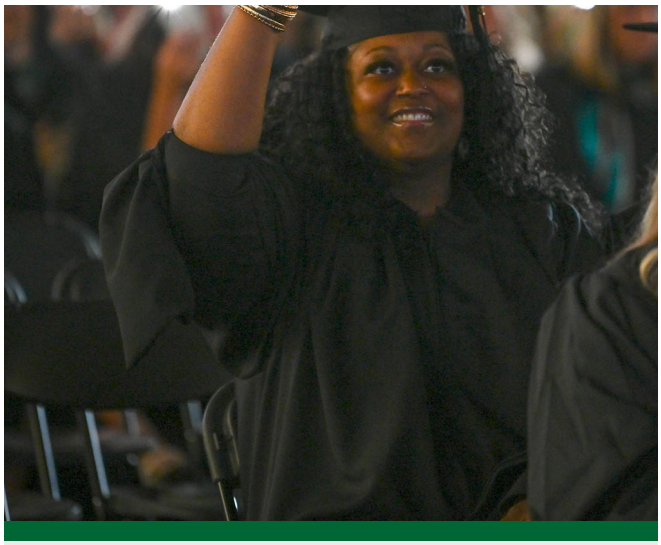
The commencement keynote address for the College of Health Sciences commencement ceremony was given by Dr. Joy L. King ('10, '15, '17), a three-time Georgia College alumna and healthcare advocate.

King showed the audience a flashlight she brought with her to the podium. As the lights in the arena dimmed, King asked the audience to hold up their phone flashlights.

"Why a flashlight?" King asked. "Because each of you, no matter your discipline – nursing, public health, exercise science, athletic training



and beyond – are stepping into a role where you will be asked to illuminate. You will shine light on the unseen, the misunderstood and the underserved."



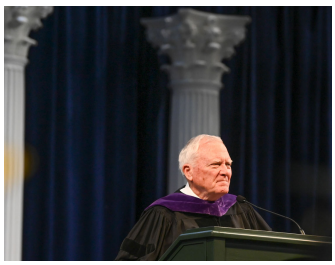
Keynote speaker Dr. Joy King told graduates, "You will shine light on the unseen, the misunderstood and the underserved." (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

The student speaker was Maggie Glover, an exercise science major from Gray, Georgia. Glover was a standout player on the Georgia College & State University championship women's and co-ed flag football teams, placing in the top three at the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association Championship for two consecutive years.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION – FRIDAY, MAY 9, 7 P.M.

The keynote speaker for the John H. Lounsbury College of Education commencement ceremony was the Hon. Nathan Deal, former governor of Georgia. Gov. Deal's late wife Sandra is an alumna, having earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Georgia College. GCSU is home to The Sandra Dunagan Deal Center for Early Language and Literacy.

For his address, Gov. Deal quoted Aristotle, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all."



"By virtue of the diplomas that are going to be conferred upon you today, you have evidence that your minds have been educated," Deal said. "But what about your hearts? Have they been educated as well?"



Former Gov. Nathan Deal gave the keynote address for the College of Education. (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

“I can assure you that that is a question that you will be continuing to ask yourself for the rest of your career,” Deal told the audience.

The student speaker was Mark Higginbotham, Jr., who earned his specialist degree in educational leadership. Higginbotham is the assistant principal of Mattie Wells Elementary in Jones County, Georgia.

Higginbotham spoke with the perspective of a veteran teacher. “Entering into a career in education is fraught with challenges and naysayers," Higginbotham said. "I want my fellow graduates to know that they have the ability to show everyone that education is a worthwhile and rewarding endeavor.”

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS & TECHNOLOGY – SATURDAY, MAY 10, 9 A.M.

The keynote address for the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business & Technology ceremony was given by Cade Joiner, founder of Shred-X Corporation and member of the University System of Georgia Board of Regents.

Joiner told the graduates, “This institution is nationally ranked, steeped in tradition and is one of the top colleges in the South. GCSU is a major contributor to this region, this state and this nation, and now each of you are part of that unfolding legacy. Go into the world and create a future that not only serves you, but also honors this great institution behind you.”

Management information systems major Emily Chambers, from Cumming, Georgia, was the student speaker. Chambers completed undergraduate research in artificial intelligence and served on the

executive council of GC WIT Club. She encouraged her fellow Bobcats to embrace change.

“The real magic of Georgia College wasn't just what we learned from our textbooks or lectures, it was what we learned about ourselves,” Chambers said. “We learned to think critically, communicate clearly, collaborate effectively, reason ethically and lead with purpose. That's what makes this place different. The growth we experienced here wasn't just academic. It was personal. It was emotional. And it was powerful.”

> **The real magic of Georgia College wasn't just what we learned from our textbooks or lectures, it was what we learned about ourselves. ... That's what makes this place different. The growth we experienced here wasn't just academic. It was personal. It was emotional. And it was powerful.**
>
> **- Emily Chambers, class of 2025**

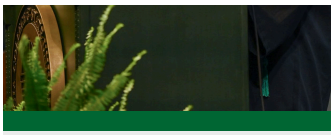
COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES – SATURDAY, MAY 10, 3 P.M.

For the final commencement ceremony, the College of Art & Sciences welcomed alumnus Christopher Eby (’11) as keynote speaker. Eby earned his law degree from the University of Chicago and is deeply committed to pro bono work, securing asylum for clients and advocating in criminal appeals and wrongful conviction cases.

The student speaker was Axel Hawkins, a first-generation college student from McDonough, Georgia, who served as president of the Student Government Association. Hawkins double majored in history and political science. She



participated in the GC in DC program and interned with Sen. Raphael Warnock in 2024. Hawkins is also Georgia College's second-ever Truman Scholar.



Student Speaker Axel Hawkins (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

Both Eby and Hawkins brought messages of unity and shared experiences into their commencement speeches.

"From here on out, when you run into your fellow Bobcats in Georgia – around the southeast and across the country – the fact that you have a common bond with them as an alum will allow you to connect and appreciate each other, despite having a multitude of different interests and experiences," Eby said.

"Collectively, the class of 2025 represents all corners of Georgia, all regions of the United States and nations as far away as India. Yet what brings us together is the education that we have received at this unique institution in the heartland of Georgia, an education centered in the liberal arts," Hawkins said.





Congratulations to the class of 2025. Go Bobcats! (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

Header Images: Commencement photos and video by the Office of University Communications Multimedia Team - Stacey Lumley, Chris Brown, Anna Gay Leavitt, Joshua Smith, Savannah Greene, Caroline Hubbard, Jaffeth Tequia, Janelle Tyler and Caroline Wood. The complete gallery of commencement photos can be found here. Live stream recordings of the spring 2025 commencement ceremonies can be found on the Georgia College & State University Facebook Page.

News Stories Posted Monday May 12, 2025



Retiring professor's lessons live on through GCSU students and alumni

Communication, Department of : Monday May 12, 2025

Story by Margaret Schell

After 23 years of teaching at Georgia College & State University, Dr. Scott Dillard, professor of rhetoric and interim chair of the Department of Communication, will retire June 30.

"When I came here my first semester, we started the rhetoric major from the ground floor," he said. "It was a fun experience."

Dillard's journey to teaching began when he earned his B.A. in speech communication from Blackburn College. He also earned his M.S. and Ph.D. in speech communication at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.



Dr. Scott Dillard (Photo by Anna Leavitt.)

Dillard taught speech at the University of Hawaii, then became a theater professor at Central Michigan University. Later, he taught speech and theatre at Fort Valley State University before coming Georgia College.

Dillard also teaches performance studies.
This class is of particular interest to him, as he's performed in community-based theatres since he was a teen. Dillard even played the father in the Georgia College play "Eurydice," based on a Greek myth. He's also done commercial and web-based voiceovers.

After June 30, he'll see what he aspires to do beyond Georgia College. He's already partnered with Milledgeville Baldwin County Allied Arts Inc.

"This endeavor really speaks to my creative side," he said. "Acting really feeds me in a way that other things don't. Creative outlets enrich everyone in some way."

Through his teaching years, Dillard believes the key to mentoring students is to listen.

"We support students in a way they need," he said. "You can't prepackage that. Our students each need something different from us. I listen for what they need, and how I can best serve their needs."

The students are the best part of teaching for Dillard. "They're the

reason I'm here," he said. "I tell myself that when I come to work every day. If my first thought isn't about those students, I've already failed."

> **"I just love being with my students — they're all good young adults. I love learning from them and teaching them. They taught me so much about the world."**
>
> **- Dr. Scott Dillard**

Senior, rhetoric major Grayton Samples of Cumming, Georgia, aspires to be a pastor. Although he learned a lot in Dillard's rhetoric class, he knows he'll apply one important concept when interacting with others.

"Dr. Dillard has a unique ability to connect with anyone, and I admire that quality and want to do that as well," Samples said.

Samples will miss Dillard's teaching style the most.

"He meets students where they're at and provides an environment where we can ask questions and not feel like we're judged," he said. Dillard also connects with many of his former students.

"They'll contact me if they need something, like a letter of reference or information about something I may know about," he said.

"Our former students end up doing great things," Dillard said. "We give them a lot of different skills to apply in a breadth of various fields."

Many of his former students became successful advertisers, businesspeople, lawyers, pastors, teachers and actors in the film

industry. Some even earned their doctoral degrees in rhetoric.”

“They're my little legacies. I just love being with my students — they’re all good young adults,” Dillard said. “I love learning from them and teaching them. They taught me so much about the world.”

Header Images: Dr. Scott Dillard leads students through warmup exercises in the classroom. (Photos: Anna Gay Leavitt) The Department of Communication hosted a retirement party for Dillard on the porch of Terrell Hall. (Photos: Evelina Galova)



Small improvements key to big success — in sports and life — says alumna coach

Alumni : Monday May 12, 2025

By Margaret Schell

When Georgia College & State University alumna Melanie Stephens Walls (’96, ’98) first picked up a basketball in fourth grade, she was hooked.

She discovered her competitive spirit, which she still taps into daily in her role as associate head coach of the Tennessee Tech University’s Women’s Basketball Team.

“I love to win no matter what,” Walls said. “In doing so, I've failed a ton. As I've gotten older and having coached for 26 years, it's not about being afraid to fail.”



Walls got her first taste of competition

growing up on a dairy farm. As one of 13 grandchildren all vying for the same toys, she learned to go for what she wants.



Melanie Walls (Photo: Tennessee Tech University)

She also learned teamwork.

"The biggest thing was to try to find success with four others on the court," Walls said. "They relied on me, and I had to rely on them."

In coaching, she realized the same rules apply.

"You can't ask of others what you're not willing to do yourself," Walls said. "Early in my coaching career, I figured out that being a good leader meant I had to be a servant leader — the most effective type of leader. You must be willing to find out what your players need from you and serve them in that way."

She began practicing servant leadership when she was captain of the Georgia College & State University Women's Basketball team.

Her first year as a player-coach, as a junior, the team made it to the Peach Belt Conference Championship. The following year, they became PBC Champions then competed in the NCAA Tournament.

"That was the first time Georgia College had been to the NCAA in a while, so it was a huge experience for us," she said. "I was a grad assistant the next year, and we were able to compete in the NCAA Tournament back-to-back."

Walls' 148 three-point baskets rank eighth in GCSU history. She also once scored seven three-point baskets in a single game — the second in school history.

A Coach-in-the-Making

She didn’t do it on her own. Walls credits GCSU coach John Carrick for recognizing her ability to impact the game in a new way.

“He hired me as a grad assistant and gave me a few years to get a feel for coaching,” she said. “I really appreciate my coach for seeing that ability in me when I didn't see it in myself.”

After graduating from Georgia College, Walls landed her first women’s basketball coaching job at Binghamton University in New York, which led to her current role at Tennessee Tech.

As associate head coach there, Walls often steps in for Head Coach Kim Rosamond who gets pulled in many directions.

“When coaching at this level, I must take over and run things smoothly,” she said. “I enjoy being an extension of her.”





Melanie Walls strategizes with Kim Rosamond about a play. (Photo: Melanie Walls)

The 1% Rule

Walls motivates each player by listening to the goal they plan to achieve by the end of the season then challenging them to come up with ways to improve 1% each day.

“I find out what they want then help them achieve it,” Walls said. “When it's their idea, motivation becomes a lot easier.”

> **The team’s chemistry is so vital. Each player must find a way to function together to be successful on the court. That dynamic also works in corporate America and other aspects of life.**
>
> **- Melanie Walls**

Walls sees a strong correlation between performance in class and on the court; in fact, six of her players had perfect GPAs this year.

The team’s average GPA was 3.793 — the highest of the 15 sports on campus.

“I believe how you do one thing is how you do everything,” she said. “Although perfection will never be achieved, excellence is what we are always chasing.”

Wall’s team members are successful in the classroom. Six of her players had perfect GPAs.

The Golden Eagles Women’s Basketball team won its conference in the 2024-2025 season then fell to the South Carolina Gamecocks in the NCAA national tournament.

“Getting to the NCAA tournament spoke to our team’s hard work,” Walls said. “Most Division 1 student-athletes don't get the chance to participate in that tournament, and our team did it in two of the last three years.”

As Walls transitioned through playing then coaching basketball, she learned the value of transferrable skills.

“The team’s chemistry is so vital,” she said. “Each player must find a way to function together to be successful on the court. That dynamic also works in corporate America and other aspects of life.”

News Stories Posted Tuesday May 13, 2025



Introvert to public servant: Grad finds her 'why' at GCSU

Institute for Leadership and the Public Good : Tuesday May 13, 2025

By Margaret Schell

Recent graduate Madison Marcinkowski has always been reserved, but that was before her tenure at Georgia College & State University changed her forever.

“I hated talking to people,” said the Canton, Georgia, native, who toured six SEC universities after high school before finding GCSU. There, she remembers, something felt different.

“I loved the community feel,” she said of Georgia College. “I could see myself involved in different campus organizations. This meant a lot to me.”

Her involvement started right away. In her freshman year, Marcinkowski became a campus tour guide. That’s when everything changed.

“It allowed me to connect with people,” she said of the role. “It was cool to share my story and make that impact on other students the way GCSU had made an impact on me.”

It also led to her chosen major: political science, with a career path in advancement. She wants to represent people “who can’t come

to the table.”



“My classes taught me to emphasize other people's voices,” said Marcinkowski, who only four years prior used to fear conversation with others. “I've learned the

‘why’ between government and society. I loved learning about why we operate the way we do, and what I can do to better uplift the people around me.”



Madison Marcinkowski (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

Marcinkowski walked the commencement stage May 10 in Milledgeville, Georgia. Now, she plans to launch a career in advocacy.

“I can’t wait to advocate and emphasize voices through advancement and development work,” Marcinkowski said. “I also want to get people involved philanthropically to see the good they do.”

The power of showing up

To Marcinkowski, extracurricular activities were the key to her success at Georgia College.

She was a member of the Council of Student Ambassadors, the Leadership Program’s leadership cabinet, the Georgia Education Mentorship program, worked as a campus tour guide and activity planner, and served as vice president of the Eta Mu chapter of Kappa Delta.

> **If you don't put yourself out there, you're not going to grow as much as you can. Despite the challenges, these opportunities made me the person I am. If I wasn't involved, I wouldn't be ready to move on to the next stage of my life.**
>
> **- Madison Marcinkowski**

In the mentorship program, Marcinkowski was matched with mentor Jessica Walden, president and CEO of the Macon Chamber of Commerce. She shadowed Walden to learn about business models, economic development and how to be a better leader.

In Kappa Delta, Marcinkowski helped her sorority sisters achieve the chapter's highest GPA on recent record.

And as a student assistant in the Office of University Advancement, she met with donors and represented the student body to the GCSU Foundation and Alumni Boards.

"It's been a rewarding opportunity to make an impact on students who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend college without scholarships," Marcinkowski said.

GCSU's unique campus environment — highlighted by its ultra-low 16:1 student-to-faculty ratio and wealth of experiential learning opportunities — gave Marcinkowski the chance to grow in ways she never imagined. Looking back, taking advantage of those programs and personal connections is the advice she'd leave to incoming freshmen.

"If you don't put yourself out there, you're not going to grow as much as you can," she said. "Despite the challenges, these opportunities made me the person I am. If I wasn't involved, I wouldn't be ready to move on to the next stage of my life."

News Stories Posted Tuesday May 20, 2025

THE COLONNADE

VOL. I — GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, MILLEDGEVILLE, GA., JULY 20, 1925 — NO. 1

MANY ALUMNAE ATTEND SCHOOL

Summer School Has Wide County Representation

The Georgia State College for Women has a large number of its alumnae back at summer school of '25. They are from the following counties:

Baldwin—Mary B. Brooks, Allie Myrick (Mrs. E. T. Bowden), Cecile Humphrey, Benita Bass, Mattie Mae Torrance, Emily Hall, '24; Evelyn Miller, Kathryn Shivers, Estelle Stembridge, '24; Ruth Reid, '25; Hattie Tisdale, '24; Sue Belle Cox, Kathryn Scott, Agnes Scott.

Bibb — Mildred Wright, Claire Smith.

Butts—Mary Downs, Estelle Watts, Virginia McPhail (Mrs. Elmer Morton), Corinne McPhail, Julia Widenon, Mrs. Annie F. Womble, Mary Alice Leath, '24; Evelyn Shewmach.

Bartow—Mildred Fleetwood, '21; Alta Spinell, Carrie Neal Porral.

Burke—Cliff Taylor, '24.

Coweta—Johnella Camp, '17.

Clayton—Thelma Edwards.

Candler—Amy Jones.

Camden—Myrtle Godley.

Carroll—Mary Candler, '22.

Crisp—Ima Williams.

Colquitt—Ellen McKee, '25.

Chatham—Mary Newsome.

Dooley—Maggie Jenkins.

De Soto (Florida)—Corrine Nash (Mrs. L. G. Harrell.)

Dodge—Gladys Bordeaux, Mary Zaron, Martha Anderson.

Dougherty—Macela Slappey.

Emanuel—Cora Bell Hall.

Effingham—Rosa Simmons, Josie Sackinger, '25.

Elbert—Corinne Gross.

Fulton—Myrtle Lynch, Eugenia Lynch, Margaret Lwarence, Evelyn Northcutt, Callie Patton.

Floyd—Daisy Daniels.

(Continued on Page Four)

SUMMER SCHOOL Y. W. ORGANIZED

Work of Year Continued by Organization that Served Regular Term

In our Summer School voyage it was necessary to have some pepole who would guide us on our way. So the girls who had been here last year, because they perhaps knew a bit more about its organization, came together to choose the captain and the crew of the good ship Y. W. C. A.

The success of the voyage? That, of course depends on the passengers, but we would like to congratulate the crew.

First, there is the captain of Ship Y. W., Anna Elizabeth Branch. "Well done, good captain," comes from our hearts. Then the secretary to see that nothing went wrong on board, Polly Moss.

People even on a voyage like to lead a well rounded life, so in the early morning came Morning Watch services that meant much to the passengers. These were planned by the chairman, Rosabel Burch.

There was the Bulletin Board work by Cornelia Ledbetter, and closely associated with this was the Poster

THE COLONNADE, FIRST COLLEGE PAPER AT G. S. C., MAKES DEBUT

ONE THOUSAND COPIES OF FIRST EDITION.

This issue of **The Colonnade** marks the first edition of a college paper in the history of the Georgia State College for Women. Although for many years there was an annual supported by the college this is the first publication of its kind.

Students have long felt the need and desire for a news edition which dealt with campus interests. This desire was partially fulfilled when in 1923—the Y. W. C. A. sponsored **Triangled Thoughts**, a bi-monthly paper which continued for two years and was given to the students by the Y. W.

During the past spring, definite steps were taken for the establishment of a college newspaper, beginning with a four-page paper, 19 x 12½ inches, this to be published twice a month. A subscription fee of fifty cents per semester is to be charged in order to secure funds for improvement.

Because of the number and beauty of the columns which are so characteristic of this campus, **The Colonnade** has been suggestd as a name for the college paper. No doubt there are others which would be just as fitting ,if you have a suggestion, give it to the editor.

If you like this edition of **The Colonnade**, then boost those that are to follow by placing your subscription today.

Dr. Parks Commends Summer Scho ol Spirit.

EXPRESSES THANKS TO OFFICERS, FACULTY AND STUDENTS

It has been a pleasure to know the teachers and students at the S mmer School. It has been a joy to see the fine spirit of work and co-operation manifested by so many peop e. The College is trying to give service to the Teachers of Georgia, and the success of the Summer School is gratifying.

The Summer School is endeavoring to afford an opportunity for students to continue advanced work with college credits, and for teachers to secure work leading towards State Certificates. But most of all, it is hoped that the inspiration and information gained at the Summer School will result in better schools next year for tens of thousands of Georgia School children.

My thanks are due the Officers, and the Students for the great Summer School of 1925.

M. M. PARKS, President.

VARIETY ADDS TO EXERCISES

Speakers During Summer School Chapel Add Interest

During summer school we have had several interesting speakers at our chapel exercises. They have served to inspire us, and to make our chapel exercises more interesting.

First of all, the ministers of all the churches came to chapel, to welcome us to Milledgeville; they were Rev. Emory, of the Methodist church, Rev. Watts, of the Presbyterian church, Rev. Harding, of the Episcopal church, and Rev. Warnock, of the Baptist church.

Dr. Ott, a well known Chautauqua lecturer inspired us with his splendid lecture. He pointed out the fact that we leave the thought of the individual out of education, and merely aim to educate the group as a whole.

Mr. McCluney, Baldwin county's representative, assured us through his talk in chapel, of his loyalty to the College. We are convinced that Mr. McCluney will help us in any way possible, while in the legislature.

Reverend Mr. Harding, President of the Milledgeville Chamber of

(Continued on page Two)

JULY FOURTH IS CELEBRATED

Summer School Students Enjoy Barbecue and Half Holiday

"When in the course of human events, —". What pictures do those words call to your mind? To some it may be the Second Continental Congress. To others it may recall the great Democrat, Thomas Jefferson, who drafted that most interesting document, the Declaration of Independence. Surely, every one is reminded that it is for the great truths which follow the above statement that we have a cause for celebration on July the Fourth.

Since the summer school at the Georgia State College for Women is composed of serious-minded and thoughtful students, all the above thoughts were theirs, on the fourth that has just passed. In addition to these thoughts there were others, among which none was more paramount than that relating to the barbecue to be held on the evening of the fourth. Even if those inviting, room-for-everybody tables under the trees could not be used, because of the storm, no one minded when there

(Continued on page Two)

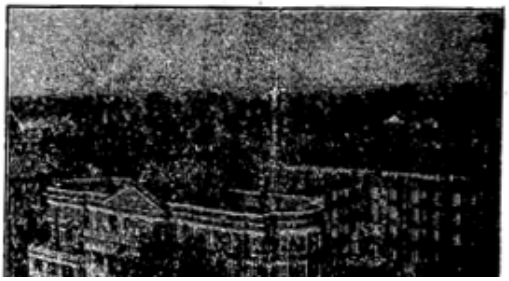
FACULTY FORCE INCREASED

Eleven New Members This Summer

The 1925 session of the summer school of the Georgia State College for Women welcomes as members of its faculty several teachers who were not here during the winter session. They are: Dr. Bohm, Professor of French and Spanish, who taught at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, this past year, and graduated from Ohio State University with an A.B. Degree in 1914, an A.M. Degree in 1915, and Ph.D., in 1917; Prof. Copeland, Assistant in Education, who is Principal of Houghton School, Augusta, Ga. He graduated from Mercer University, and is now working on a degree at the Universky of Chicago.

Prof. Dendy, Assistant in English, Superintendent of Public Schools, Cartersville, Ga., formerly taught seven years in the Tech High School Atlanta, Ga.; Miss Vogan, of West Virginia, teacher of Penmanship; Miss Franklin, of Jacksonville, Fla., teacher of Geography; Mrs. Bowden, of Milledgeville, Ga., teacher of

(Continued on Page Four)



AWAIT ACTION OF LEGISLATURE

$195,000.00 Appropriation Bill Introduced

The entire state of Georgia is interested in the Legislature now in session at Atlanta. The educational program proposed and the far-reaching influence of this legislation put in the hands of the present General Assembly the greatest opportunity in years for putting Georgia "on the map" educationally. The Governor and the leaders of of both houses are strongly in favor of the enlargement of the educational facilities of the state institutions and especially the betterment of the rural schools so as to more nearly equalize the opportunities of all the boys and girls of the state.

Among the bills introduced for the furtherance of this program is one by Representative McCluney, of Baldwin county, appropriating $195,000.00 for the erection of a new auditorium and class room building in the place of the Main Building of the Georgia State College for Women, which was totally destroyed by fire last December. The destruction of this building which was used for the General Offices of the College, class rooms, music rooms, and auditorium has greatly handicapped the authorities in carrying on the work of the school. A large number of teachers desiring to attend the present Summer School to better prepare themselves for work with the youth of Georgia, were denied admission because of the loss of this building and the lack of funds to provide a larger faculty. It is hoped that the exigency now on the school will be relieved by the immediate passage of this bill and others looking to the help of this institution.

No institution has done more for the common schools of the state and furnished more teachres than the G. S. C. W., and anything that hinders and hurts this school will indirectly hurt the schools of every county in Georgia. Thousands of teachers who have received benefit of the high ideals and modern educational methods and training at Milledgeville, have gone into every county of the state. To further extend these benefits to other teachers and thereby aid hundreds of thousands of boys and girls of Georgia, it is necessary that increased facilities and funds be provided for the Georgia State College for Women at Milledgeville.

LAVINIA TYLER READS ADDRESS

Represents G. S. C. W., at The University of Georgia

During the recent commencement at the University of Georgia, at Athens; as is their custom one program was turned over to the branches of the University, which sent to Athens readers for this program. Inclusive in this group is the Georgia State College for Women, which was represented by Lavinia Tyler, of Augusta. The friends of both Lavinia, and the College at large will be in-

Typewriters to Turntables: GCSU Student Media Celebrates Milestone Anniversaries

Communication, Department of : Tuesday May 20, 2025

By Kylie Rowe and Ansley Kate Allen

Georgia College & State University is celebrating two major milestones this year – the 100th anniversary of its student newspaper, The Colonnade, and the 50th anniversary of its student radio station, 95.3 WGUR-FM. Both platforms have played pivotal roles in amplifying student voices and documenting campus life for generations.



THE COLONNADE

VOL. I — GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE FOR WOMEN, MILLEDGEVILLE, GA., JULY 20, 1925 — NO. 1

MANY ALUMNAE ATTEND SCHOOL

Summer School Has Wide County Representation

THE COLONNADE, FIRST COLLEGE PAPER AT G. S. C., MAKES DEBUT

ONE THOUSAND COPIES OF FIRST EDITION.

AWAIT ACTION OF LEGISLATURE

$195,000.00 Appropriation Bill Introduced

Dr. Parks Commends Summer School Spirit.

EXPRESSES THANKS TO OFFICERS, FACULTY AND STUDENTS

VARIETY ADDS TO EXERCISES

Speakers During Summer School Chapel Add Interest

JULY FOURTH IS CELEBRATED

Summer School Students Enjoy Barbecue and Half Holiday

FACULTY FORCE INCREASED

Eleven New Members This Summer

SUMMER SCHOOL Y. W. ORGANIZED

Work of Year Continued by Organization that Served Regular Term

LAVINIA TYLER READS ADDRESS

Represents G. S. C. W., at The University of Georgia

BOOST THE BUILDING FUND

The first issue of The Colonnade, July 1925 (Photo: University Archives)

Today, The Colonnade continues publishing weekly online editions for students, staff and alumni. WGUR remains a vibrant outlet for student expression, allowing students to host daily segments and play their favorite music for the Milledgeville community.

THE COLONNADE

The Colonnade debuted July 20, 1925, when GCSU was Georgia State College for Women. Led by Editor-in-Chief Anna Elizabeth Branch, its first edition was a print run of 1,000 copies.

Why call it The Colonnade?

“Because of the number and beauty of the columns which are so characteristic of campus,” the first issue explains.

Even literary legend and famed alumna Flannery O’Connor contributed to The Colonnade during her time at GSCW, creating linocut cartoons featured in early editions of the paper.

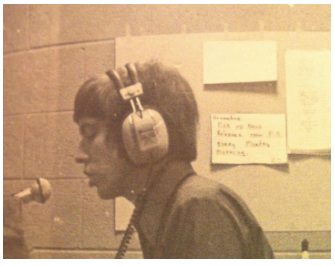
Since its inception, the student newspaper has earned a reputation as the university’s watchdog, maintaining a commitment to investigative journalism in service to the student population. The newspaper’s staff is divided into four sections: news, arts & life, sports and opinion. Each section editor is responsible for pitching stories to their staff of writers weekly.

Mary Ciucevich, who began as assistant arts & life editor, will lead the publication as editor-in-chief starting this fall.

“Through working at The Colonnade, I have met so many great people and refined my writing,” said Ciucevich. “It has also really challenged me to stay informed about campus events and introduced me to so many student organizations.”

WGUR-FM

Fifty years after The Colonnade debuted, students Frank Howell and Gregg Duckworth founded WGUR-FM. Originally launched with the call letters WXGC, the station began broadcasting at 10 watts, from Mayfair Hall.





Station co-founder Gregg Duckworth, 1975 (Photo: WGUR archives)

“I was sitting in Terrell [Hall] having dinner with another student, Keith Jones, and we began talking about college radio,” said Howell. “I had been tuned into broadcast stations from Georgia Tech, Valdosta State University and Georgia State University. … Seeing their success, we decided Georgia College needed to get on board with a campus radio station.”

Howell recruited his friend and roommate Duckworth, and together they pioneered 88.9 WXGC-FM. Duckworth took the lead as the station’s first operational general manager.

The goal for WXGC was simple: Get on the air and represent the student body. The duo modeled their format after 96 Rock WKLS-FM in Atlanta. At the time, what is now considered classic rock was emerging; WXGC became the only rock-format station in the Middle Georgia region. Most surrounding stations focused on gospel or country music.

WXGC went on air after receiving its licensing in the late summer of 1975. Upon returning to school, students would soon have a new form of communication that was representative of who they were as a student body.

“The first song we played was by the British band The Who,” said Duckworth. “We played the track ‘Baba O’Riley.’”

As the station continues today as WGUR, Howell shared advice for current students.



“In 50 years, I want you to go back,” said Howell. “In college, there’s a lot you can do. Pledge a fraternity or sorority, join a student group … play



Current WGUR-FM student staff enjoy looking though the station archives (Photo: WGUR-FM)

sports. Those groups were there before you, and they will be there after you."

Today, WGUR is operated by over 50 students. The station is known not only for playing music, but also for organizing events like Sounds of the Spring and Couch Concerts, where students gather to enjoy performances by local and student musicians. These events both give artists a platform and provide WGUR staff with hands-on experience in event planning and production.

The authors of this piece, Kylie Rowe and Ansley Kate Allen, both graduated from the Department of Communication this year. Rowe started as a contributing writer at The Colonnade, moving up to assistant editor and then head editor of arts & life for the paper. Allen was a WGUR DJ for three years, becoming the PR manager and ultimately general manager of the station.

Header Images: Student media then and now including vintage and current issues of The Colonnade, the first radio station executive board and the Fall 2024 executive board, WXGC co-founder Frank Howell and 2024-2025 Colonnade Editor-in-Chief Delaney Derry.

News Stories Posted Thursday May 29, 2025


CKPT DOOR CONT
RESET
OXYGEN
ESCAPE ROPE
DELTA
Jasmine Smith
LIFE VEST

Across Georgia in Five Days: Business Tour Takes Students from Flight Simulators to Fortune 500s

College of Business & Technology : Thursday May 29, 2025

By Nancy Finney



Junior computer science major Jasmine Smith at Delta Air Lines (Photo: Nancy Finney)

As soon as spring semester ended, ten business Bobcats from the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business & Technology packed their bags and toured the state of Georgia. Selected through a rigorous application and interview process, these students represented nearly all majors within the college.

Led by Dr. Mohammad Jizi, associate professor of accounting, and Ms. Nancy Finney, business outreach coordinator, the students embarked on a whirlwind tour seated in a 15-passenger van as they became Georgia business tourists. They toured 15 businesses in six cities across five days: Savannah, Atlanta, Dublin, Gainesville, Milledgeville and Augusta.

Students had the opportunity to network, ask questions about Georgia's economy, explore new career pathways and make

important connections as they prepare to advance their careers.

“What I found particularly enjoyable and valuable overall was the opportunity to discover and learn about businesses that were completely new to me, broadening my understanding of the diverse corporate landscape.” explained Jasmine Smith, a junior computer science major from Milledgeville.

Smith took her networking skills to the next level, making connections on the tour and exploring a potential internship with one of the IT departments she visited.

“The absolute highlight for me was getting a behind-the-scenes tour and witnessing firsthand how these corporations operate on a practical level. This peek into their inner workings explained the processes and gave me a much clearer understanding of their day-to-day activities and overall structure,” Smith added.



Leslie Thomas of the Georgia Ports Authority

(Photo: Nancy Finney)

The week of travel included panels at accounting firms, networking events with financial services companies, tours of factories, seeing the largest jet engine model made in the world, and piloting flight simulators.

Lauren Decker, a senior economics major from Suwanee, Georgia, appreciated the diversity of sites and businesses the students got to visit.

“The tour led me to realize that I need to enter the job market with an open mind,”

Decker said.

“My most important takeaway from this journey was that I shouldn’t be nervous about entering the professional world,” said Charles Pero, a senior management major from Sandy Springs, Georgia. “I got to see how inviting every

company was as they gave us great hospitality."

The annual Georgia business tour is more than sightseeing and networking. Experiential learning is a hallmark of the liberal arts education experience at GCSU – 93% of last year's graduating class participated in high impact practices to foster professional development, engagement with practice and global experience. Examples include capstone projects, mentored undergraduate research, internships, career milestones and study away programs.

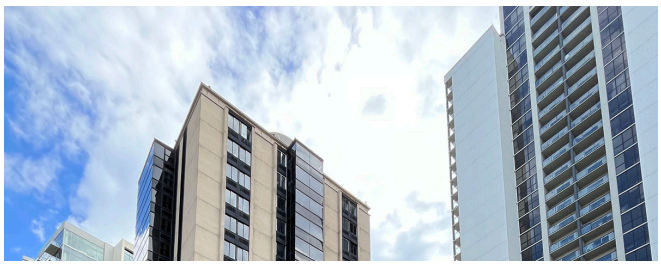
"Our students are learning about businesses outside of the classroom," said Dr. Tanya Goette, interim dean of the College of Business & Technology. "I think most importantly, the students see firsthand the role businesses play within the communities where they are located. Our students start to understand the impact a business actually has on its employees, locality and environment."

Dr. Jizi said, "A leadership tour visiting 15 diverse businesses with collective revenues exceeding $184 billion is more than mere business visits; it's an immersive curriculum in real-world strategy, problem-solving, and the dynamic interplay of leadership. Students gain unparalleled practical understanding of complex business operations that neither textbooks nor typical class activities can provide or replicate."

The Peach State companies included in this year's Georgia business tour:

- Delta Air Lines TechOps
- Aprio, LLP
- Interface, Inc.
- Ernest & Young Global Limited (EY)

- Mansfield Energy Corp.
- Kubota Corporation
- FPL Food, LLC
- Morgan Advanced Materials PLC



- Club Car LLC
- Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation
- American Prohibition Museum
- Georgia Ports Authority
- YKK AP Inc.
- Nichols, Cauley & Associates LLC
- Exchange Bank



Business tour students tour Interface Inc. in downtown Atlanta. (Photo: Nancy Finney)

Header Images: Georgia Business Tour destinations including Aprio, LLP, a Braves game, Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation, Interface, Inc., Kubota Corporation, Mansfield Energy Corp., Morgan Advanced Materials PLC and YKK AP Inc.

Amanda Respess contributed to the reporting for this story.

News Stories Posted Friday May 30, 2025



$1.2 Million NSF grant supports industry partnerships to give GCSU students more hands-on experience

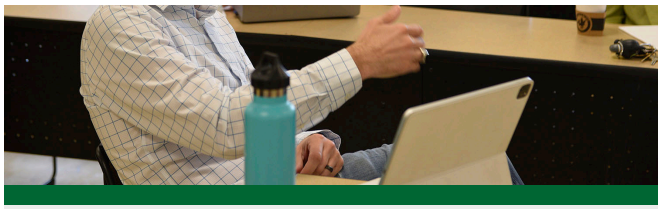
Grants & Sponsored Projects, Office of : Friday May 30, 2025

By Margaret Schell



Georgia College & State University is one of three colleges awarded nearly $1.2 million for a joint National Science Foundation grant. Athens

State University in Alabama and Southern Utah State University are collaborators with GCSU for an NSF Enabling Partnerships to Increase Innovation Capacity (EPIIC) grant to develop industry partnerships that allow students to put interdisciplinary skills to work with hands-on learning.



Dr. Nicholas Creel speaks to the other NSF EPIIC grant participants during their recent meeting at GCSU. (Photo: Kylie Rowe)

Earlier this month, Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge, associate professor of physics, and Dr. Nicholas Creel, associate professor of business law, led an annual grant meeting with collaborating universities at Georgia College. Mahabaduge is the principal investigator for the EPIIC grant and Creel is co-investigator.

“All three institutes are of similar scope and working toward a similar goal,” said Mahabaduge. “One common thing we all have are innovative fellows.”

The goal of the EPIIC grant is getting the institutions connected with industry. The main measurement is the number of faculty who’ll participate while reaching as many students as possible.

“We have the opportunity for our students to work with industry to solve real-world problems while giving them hands-on experience,” Mahabaduge said. “We must ensure we’re preparing students for the types of jobs they will get when they graduate.”

Georgia College’s three faculty fellows who will foster relationships with local industries and train additional GCSU faculty are: Dr. Ania Rynarzewska, assistant professor of marketing; Dr. Whitney Ginder, associate professor of marketing; and Dr. Peter Rosado Flores, associate professor of chemistry.





Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge is the principal investigator for the NSF EPIIC grant. (Photo: Anna Gay Leavitt)

The grant fellows will divide their time teaching faculty and engaging with local industry partners who will be potential employers for students.

Georgia College will begin integrating the program this summer with a focus on faculty training. The fellows will work with other faculty on redesigning their curriculum to reflect what their students can learn through applied experience with local industry partners. Community-based engaged learning is a cornerstone of the liberal arts education experience at GCSU, and one of several high-impact practices incorporated in the award-winning GC Journeys Program.

The NSF encourages partnering with industry to help students continue to develop communication skills like teamwork and leadership. The EPIIC grant faculty are targeting all four GCSU academic colleges for potential participation in the grant.

> **We have the opportunity for our students to work with industry to solve real-world problems while giving them hands-on experience. We must ensure we're preparing students for the types of jobs they will get when they graduate.**
>
> **- Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge**

"This initial stage allows fellows to focus on the university's commitment to supporting this expanded role," Creel said. "We want our faculty to have relationships with industry that translate into real-world projects and engagement, so our students have hands-on learning opportunities."

The grant is geared toward how all three universities can serve their students better while increasing innovation capacity.

There's a learning community among the three universities to share resources and ideas.

"We've seen a real shift in our system of higher education," said Jacob Bishop, associate professor of mechanical engineering at Southern Utah State University. "The emphasis is on our institutions meeting the needs of our most developing industries in our state, and the university realigning with meeting those industries' needs. It's important that we're listening."

"We are a net importer of jobs in the Hunstville area," said Rachel O'Sullivan, assistant vice president for external support and alumni affairs for Athens State University. "We are growing so fast that the local workforce cannot keep up with industry demands. So, we must incorporate those industry needs and skills to help our students get to those jobs."

Header Image: NSF EPIIC grant faculty fellows and investigators from GCSU, Southern Utah State University and Athens State University met at GCSU on May 15. (Photo: Kylie Rowe)