

Medical masks sewn and donated by Georgia College costume supervisor

Doing her part by staying at home didn't seem like enough. Cathleen O'Neal wanted to do more to help her neighbors and the world get through the COVID-19 crisis.

As Georgia College's Costume Supervisor—charged with making costumes for productions performed by the department of theatre—O'Neal put her sewing skills to good use.

In two weeks, O'Neal has constructed 140 masks—donating 110 surgical and N-95 face covers for Atlanta area hospitals and, just recently, 30 N-95 face masks to meet a critical need at Eatonton Health & Rehabilitation nursing home.

She found out about the nursing home shortage from Shannon Blair, a 2018 graduate of Georgia College, who'll receive her master's in criminal justice in May. Blair is the home's social service director, charged with the "mental wellness" of 78 residents.

Since COVID-19, the nursing home is experiencing a shortage of protective masks for its nurses and staff. Blair had worn the same mask all week, so she reached out to O'Neal for help after seeing stories of her work.

"The struggle for protection is everywhere, but this has given our facility one less worry in the middle of the crisis," Blair said. "Many people think about hospitals, but they forget the nursing homes are struggling too."

"With this donation, we're able to put full focus on the residents and not have to think about how to conserve masks," she said.

On March 25, O'Neal joined a rapidly growing Facebook group called, "Sewing Masks for Area Hospitals COVID-19-Atlanta." It began with three women, who wanted to do more.

It takes about 10 minutes for O'Neal to make one pleated, surgical mask. About 50 surgical masks can be sewn in a day without breaks. The N-95s are more involved with wired pockets around the nose that hold filters.

The Atlanta Facebook group has four basic styles people can choose, along with more technical patterns. Only cotton material can be used, since cotton is a natural filter. O'Neal is using fabric left-over from past student projects—colorful, polka dotted, striped and even featuring baby elephants.



noticed the nonprofit, "Dress a Girl Around the World," allows for easier T-shirt dresses to be constructed by hand.

She sent students packets with all the materials they need for the dress, which attaches a rectangle of fabric as a skirt to a child's T-shirt. O'Neal's making a video tutorial for students to follow, so they don't feel "overwhelmed."

Students, who are done early and have sewing machines at home, will be given extra credit for making surgical masks. They'll send completed masks to O'Neal for delivery.

"I've gotten such a good response from the class. They're glad I didn't have to flat-out cancel the project," she said. "I thought this might be something fun for the students to do in the midst of having to switch online for all of their core classes."



Cathleen O'Neal sewing masks from her home.

Helping Hands provides relief to students affected by COVID-19



The coronavirus has created hardship for some Georgia College students, making it extremely difficult for them to fund basic necessities.

Georgia College has received more than 260 requests from students needing financial assistance.

For many, losing a job means they won't be able to pay for food, medicine, rent or utilities. Others can't go home because the risk is too great to their families who have compromised immune systems.

The Helping Hands Hardship Fund was originally conceived by the Student Government Association (SGA) to help students with unusual situations who need a helping hand. With the COVID-19 crisis, University Advancement, Student Life and the Office of Financial Aid, came together and made a decision to utilize the fund to aid students, who face significant financial hardships now and in the coming months.

"The biggest need we saw was for money to buy food," said Dr. Shawn Brooks, vice president for Student Life. "We had students report they were only eating once a day, because they didn't have money to buy food. One student wrote about being down to her last box of cereal."

More than \$28,000 has been raised for the Helping Hands Hardship fund, but the need is greater.

"The amount of need is immeasurable," said Brooks. "Most students are asking for only a portion of their overall need, as they know funds are limited."

To date, students' needs have significantly exceeded the amount of money raised to help address the distress.

"The Division of Student Life is working to identify and immediately take action to resolve the most pressing issues, and to find aid for all of our students," said Monica Delisa, vice

president, University Advancement.

The idea of Helping Hands stemmed from the COVID-19 pandemic and the related move to online education for GC students.

"Dr. Shawn Brooks and Student Life recognized that some GC students may be facing extreme hardships, because they were no longer employed in local businesses, did not have access to technology needed in an online environment or couldn't afford the costs associated with moving from campus housing to other housing," said Delisa. "Student Life reached out to Advancement and the Office of Financial Aid, and we identified this fund as being setup for exactly this type of crisis."

Student Life distributed a form to all GC students to self-identify if they need aid. The Office of Financial Aid works with Student Life to identify and qualify students who need assistance and award financial help.

"In these uncertain times, having a sense of financial security will enable students to engage fully in the online learning process and to succeed," said Delisa. "It is always our goal in University Advancement to ensure that our students do not have to worry about finances, that they can concentrate on being the best students and future community leaders they can be."

Donors have until May 1 to make their Helping Hands gift. Any size donation is appreciated.

"My biggest hope is that we have been able to make a difference in students' lives with the Helping Hands fund," said Brooks. "Like everyone else, I hope and pray for a quick end to the COVID-19 pandemic."

"Giving to the Helping Hands initiative is purposeful giving," said Pam Booker, '97, president-elect of the Alumni Board of Directors and leader-in-residence of Leadership programs.

"Supporting GC students during this time displays unity. It shows students they are not alone and promotes perseverance by motivating them to continue striving in the midst of unforeseeable challenges. It also demonstrates leadership, setting an example for students to emulate when the situation is reversed. Lastly, it reinforces the Georgia College culture by strengthening a 'sense of community' and providing physical and emotional relief for students and administrators."

To join the effort to help Georgia College students suffering financial hardships, visit: crowdthunder.gcsu.edu.

GC's undergraduate research conference moved online

As COVID-19 was changing the way we work and live, more than 60 Georgia College students lost the chance to orally present undergraduate research at prestigious peer gatherings nationwide.

Georgia College moved quickly to ensure students did not also lose the opportunity to present their findings at its spring conference, as well.

Just in time for National Undergraduate Research Week—Georgia College is hosting its 23rd Annual Undergraduate Research Conference. Normally held on campus—it was reorganized to stream online starting at noon April 20, and run through 5:30 p.m. Thursday, April 24.

Interested viewers can access the conference at this website kb.gcsu.edu/src/2020. There they can see digital posters and video presentations, divided by academic disciplines.

Faculty, students, staff and community members can interact with researchers via comment boxes. After Thursday, research abstracts will be archived online for viewing, but comments will end.

"When we reached out to students and told them we weren't cancelling our research conference, they were pretty excited," said Dr. Jordan Cofer, associate provost for transformative learning experiences.

Safety was first on everyone's minds, when social distancing became the norm. But never once did Dr. Doreen Sams think of canceling Georgia College's undergraduate research conference. A marketing professor and coordinator for Mentored Undergraduate Research and Creative Endeavors (MURACE), Sams once presented online research in Spain. Her first reaction to the coronavirus shutdown was: "Okay, we can deal with this."

Sams and Kelly Massey, conference co-chairs, and Cofer worked with Holly Croft, digital archivist at Ina Dillard Russell Library, to put the undergraduate research conference online. In the short time they had to regroup, they decided to use KnowledgeBox for an online venue.

"There are always unforeseeable challenges," Cofer said, "but Georgia College has such good people that we've been able to keep moving with this conference, despite the hiccups."

"This is an exciting opportunity to see what works online," he added. "It might open up some new avenues for us going into the future."

The review process to be accepted to Georgia College's conference was waived this year for students who had other conferences canceled. Sams hopes this will result in more students presenting this year. They expect to have about 84 participants.

Celebrating the Class of 2020: Meet some of our May 2020 graduates as we highlight their many accomplishments



Breeanna McBee is a marketing major. Her favorite class was "definitely Social Media Marketing because it is so relevant in today's world." Her favorite professor was Dr. Sams "because she and I connected, and I felt like she genuinely cared about my success."



Amara Tennessee is a double major in public health and world languages and culture. She studied abroad in Santiago, Chile in May of 2018 and in Honduras with the School of Nursing in October of 2019. "I would say my study abroad in Chile was one of my favorite moments. I loved living in Santiago, Chile, and the group I traveled with absolutely made the trip."



Aurora Perez is a double major in English and Spanish language and literature. One of her favorite memories at Georgia College was the annual international dinner. She has been accepted into Georgia Tech for the Master of Science program in Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies.