

# Celebrating the Class of 2020: Georgia College holds virtual commencement

During these trying times, we pause to celebrate the achievements and resolve of the Class of 2020.

Social distancing mandates led to the cancellation of the traditional graduation ceremony scheduled for last weekend, and Georgia College decided to moved it to an online platform.

The virtual ceremony for graduate degree candidates took place Friday, May 1 and for undergraduates, Saturday, May 2. They were broadcast as YouTube Premiere events, so students as well as their friends and family could view the ceremonies. The recording is still available at [georgia-college.stagedclip.com](http://georgia-college.stagedclip.com).

Students could upload photos and videos, which were featured as their names were read announcing the completion of their courses.

Georgia College is also committed to providing a traditional ceremony as soon as federal and state authorities indicate that it is safe to have large-group events.

It has also always been our policy to allow graduating students who are unable to march at their own ceremony to attend a commencement ceremony at a later time. We will continue to honor that option for all graduating students.



Kathryn Keegan is a chemistry major. She plans to apply to do another Disney College program or a professional internship through Disney in a chemistry lab.



Bethany Dyals is an exercise science major. She chose exercise science to prepare for a future career in Occupational Therapy (OT).



Jennifer Harris recognized during the virtual commencement ceremony.



Raasha Gutierrez is an art major and psychology minor. She had an internship with the Smithsonian’s National Museum of Asian Art in Washington D.C. and calls it the best experience of her life.



Morgan ‘Raine’ Foulkes is a premed and biology major with a minor in chemistry. She currently has a job working as a medical scribe for a nurse practitioner at North Macon Family Healthcare.

## Jazz Band records songs virtually after canceling concerts



Jacob Hammock on drums at a previous concert.

It’s difficult to play band music without a band. But, apparently, not impossible.

As COVID-19 made the world less busy and more solitary—abruptly silencing many things, like two live Jazz Band concerts and the university’s spring musical bonanza, Music at the Mansion—Band Director Clifford Towner quickly decided his students would record their instruments solo on cell phones, laptops or tablets.

Each slice of music would then be digitally blended for full-sounding compositions.

“The part that we really miss is playing together in an ensemble a couple of times a week. I was hoping the virtual recordings would at least assimilate that,” said Cliff Towner, director of bands.

“It’s not unusual for professional musicians, particularly with commercial music, to record to a click track or hearing only part of the ensemble playing,” he said. “So, I thought this was an opportunity to give students a different taste of performing, which would better help their education.”

Since mid-March—when the pandemic emptied campus—Towner’s students have recorded five songs virtually. These include “Launching Pad” by Duke Ellington and Clark Terry, as well as “Rockabye” and “Oculpaca” by Duke Ellington.

First-year music education major Jacob Hammock started the virtual recordings alone, using a metronome in his ear to play out a drum set of each song. This was something he’d never done before, and it was challenging. Drumming is hard without other instruments and a melody. His drums were so loud in a small room at home, Hammock had to wrap his laptop in a shirt and put it behind a knapsack to muffle the sound and make it less overpowering.

“This was obviously a big change,” Hammock said. “It has its ups and downs, but it’s not the

end of the world. Of course, I would much rather be performing with the band live and having my concert.”

“At least I get to play music,” he said. “That’s the whole point of this. The whole point of doing these recordings is to continue to be able to make music.”

Hammock sent his drum tracks to Towner, who put them on Georgia View. Then, each band member played their instruments at home to the drumbeat. Their tracks were sent to trumpet player and senior music major Mary Price, who has a minor in creative music medium.

Price took courses in music tech and electro acoustic music production. Luckily, she also has the computer program, Logic Pro, on her laptop and could do the digital editing required. She sent drafts of blended piano, bass and wind sounds back to Towner, who then got soloists to record their improvised pieces. Finally, Price edited solos in for a complete song.

On average, each song used 17 different soundtracks that had to perfectly align. Adjustments were made for players, who performed too fast or too slow, since they couldn’t hear each other and regulate their speed. Another challenge was acoustics—some players were outside or in small or empty rooms, creating different sound qualities.

“I was able to make it sound a least a little bit like we were all in the same location,” Price said. “It’s the ensemble quality that we lose, which one could say is the most important aspect of the music.”

The subtleties of performing live cannot be duplicated, Towner said. How music lines up, the intonation, that “swing feeling” of being together with other instrumentalists is imperative to a band setting. The interaction with a live audience is also lost.

“It’s hard to join the ensemble, when you have no ensemble to join, because everyone is hundreds of miles apart,” Price said. “So, it did create a way for us to play together and hear the music we could make.”

Towner’s proud of the diligence his jazz students have shown. Disappointment over concert cancellations quickly turned into an opportunity to learn something new.

“Sometimes it takes a of loss of one thing to think outside the box, and that’s what we’ve done here. We lost our normal way of making music, and so we’ve had to come up with a different way,” he said.

## Social distancing brings unique experience for education majors

In an effort to protect students, faculty and staff, Georgia College, along the with entire University System of Georgia, moved to an online format for all classes in the middle of the spring semester.

Many courses never taught in an online format were restructured and reimagined to fit the online model. But the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on education were felt beyond the college classroom.

Prekindergarten through 12th grade schools across the state also began teaching online, presenting a new challenge for student teachers.

“I was student teaching fourth grade at Lakeview Academy in Milledgeville with Mrs. Crane,” said senior early childhood education major Grace Lynch. “The immediate reaction from my partner teacher and I was to begin brainstorming how we could allow our class to flow just like it did in class online.”

Although their courses taught them how to use technology in the classroom, this unique situation wasn’t taught in textbooks and required new ways of thinking. Student teachers like Lynch say their preparation from the College of Education (COE) helped them to quickly shift their perspective and allowed them to get creative with how they taught.

“One of the most interesting things I have been able to do was a book report choice board,” said Lynch. “Students were able to choose from multiple books where links were provided, then they did a book report of their choice in a creative way, such as a comic strip, a book review or a commercial,” she said. “This allowed for the students to have a lot of choice while also hitting a lot of the comprehension and writing standards.”

That’s just the beginning. Lynch’s students created an amusement park based off their knowledge of area and perimeter units. She also integrated two “brain breaks” into every digital learning day—something incorporated a lot in the physical classroom—“so bringing it to the

digital learning platform kept things somewhat normal for my students.”

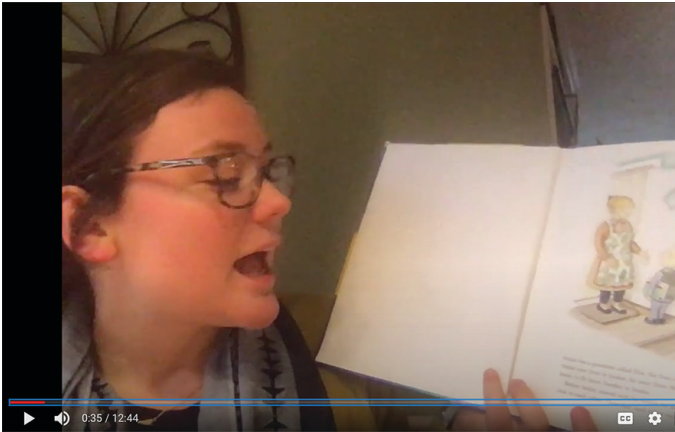
She’s not alone. Dozens of future educators went digital to continue to engage their students.

“All of our students have been expected to continue their student teaching throughout the transition to online learning,” said Dr. Holley Roberts, interim associate dean of the College of Education. “Our teacher candidates have been in their student teaching placements the entire school year, so they are an integral part of the classroom. Therefore, they were expected to provide support to their partner teachers and their students just as they would in the classroom.”

They’ve done that in a variety of ways using many different tools available. Students created videos of themselves reading books or other instructional videos by using Loom, iMovie or other video methods. They used apps like See Saw and Class Dojo to have conversations with students and families. They monitor student progress through apps like Splash Math, Epic and Freckle, as well as host Zoom meetings with classes and setting up experiences in Google Classroom.

“The College of Education has always provided instruction to teacher candidates in utilizing technology to enhance instruction, however, this experience has forced the candidates to be creative and innovative in how to teach at a distance,” said Roberts

“The future is uncertain, but the students who are graduating this semester and who have transitioned to distance instruction with their school systems and partner teachers have learned valuable lessons regarding pedagogy,” she said. “They have also been challenged in new ways to address the emotional and physical well-being of students and families.”



Lynch reads to students.