

Students start nonpartisan political group during contentious election

Throughout the 2020 ruckus of pandemic and political mayhem, a new student organization was born at Georgia College. It effectively proved that political discourse can be diverse—even polar opposite—and still remain civil and polite.

What is a public liberal arts education, after all, if not the open discussion of ideas?

That's what senior Michael Haug was looking for last winter, as the presidential election earnestly got underway. On campus, he found groups for the Young Democrats, College Republicans and Young Democratic Socialists of America. There was Bobcat Votes, the American Democracy Project and Turning Point USA. Everyone seemed to have a safe space for like-minded friendliness and a sense of belonging.

But Haug, a political skeptic, didn't seem to fit anywhere. He wanted a place where the undetermined, doubters and "political oddballs" would feel comfortable speaking alongside people with sure convictions.

So, Haug started a nonpartisan group, the GC Political Society, with junior Andrew Fierbaugh. The two business management majors wanted to provide a platform where both sides of the political spectrum could talk regularly and be exposed to opinions and ideas that directly clash with their own.

The importance of dialogue is more apparent than ever. The rancor in this year's presidential election troubled the two friends. Currently in-between parties and political ideals himself, Haug said he wanted to create a forum where all sides come together, argue and listen without vindictiveness or bitter resentment. A place where everyone—young and old, right, left or in the middle—could join discussions and debates without fear of ridicule and insult.

"It's a rough time to be interested in politics," Haug said. "What our organization's trying to do is provide that model, that example of how adults disagree. We want more than anything to be a model for our fellow students and, frankly, for our parents, our older siblings and society in general."

"Essentially, what our organization's trying to do is bring about a situation," he said, "where we can disagree civilly like adults."

To get people talking, the friends developed a constitution last spring and registered their group on campus. The GC Political Society airs debates and discussions on their Facebook page, which has about 200 followers so far.

They hosted debates on criminal justice reform and the Electoral College, as well as discussions about the future of the 'left and right' in America. They also partnered with Dr. Brandy Kennedy's Public Opinion class. Her students research Gallop polls on things like the Electoral College and various voting systems. Haug provides that information to group members before, during and after debates and discussions. He wants to partner with the political science department more in the future, so the club is educational and spurs more young adults to vote. People always say, "This is the year. It's going to happen. The young will go out and vote. But, each time," he said, "we keep dropping the ball."

Part of the problem is youth don't feel they're allowed to openly discuss or question politics.

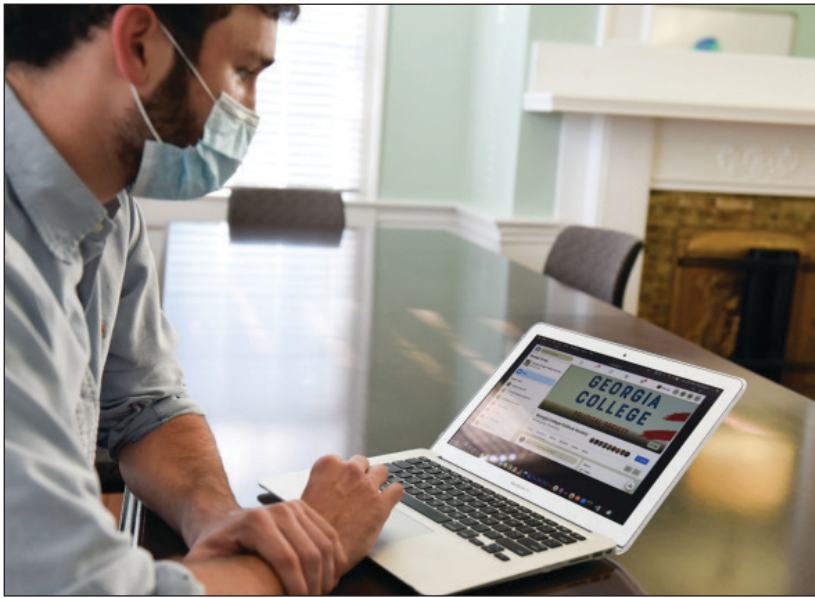
"As a young person, it's really frustrating, especially with the kind of deterioration we've seen in American politics. It's really frustrating for young people just tuning in," said Haug. "But if we don't like the way political discourse is; if we don't like the way the presidential debates went; if we don't like the options that are in front of us—it's our responsibility to get engaged and fix that."

People told Haug a nonpartisan political club wouldn't work. They said discussions would become hostile, much like the 2020 political atmosphere. Haug thought they might be right. Politics has become a "join or die kind of thing. Either be on my side or you're the enemy," he said.

But, it turns out, Georgia College students can discuss opposite political views without insulting or attacking one another. Club debates have been "courteous and kind," Haug said. The recent discussion on criminal justice reform had "tons of consensus too."

"We don't condone any personal attacks under any circumstances. That's a huge rule, and we're really serious about it."

"You can call somebody's idea any name under the sun—we're free speech in that way. If you need to use some colorful language to do it, that's ok as long as it isn't aimed at any person,"



Michael Haug hopes GC Political Society can act as a healing catalyst in months to come.

Haug said. "But never ever will it be allowed in the GC Political Society to try and paint the other side as evil or in some way fundamentally bad as people, because they're not. They're our fellow Bobcats. And, if you find their ideas reprehensible, then you can explain to them why they're wrong in a civil manner."

Now that the election's over, club officers intend to host weekly political discussions online, in an attempt to act as a healing catalyst and "broadly foster camaraderie and community" on campus.

When he graduates in May, Haug plans to get a master's in public policy and pass the club presidency to Fierbaugh. He hopes other students will step forward to carry on their work, as well, so the liberal arts education at Georgia College continues to provide a place where all political views are politely discussed and tolerated.

"I'm a guy that likes it all. I'm interested in all political parties. I'm somewhere lost, figuring out which way to go," he said. "And it's a messy time to figure it all out. That's why it's so much fun doing this GC Political Society, because I'm talking to everyone."

New Andalusia Institute has robust opening

It was a bizarre time to begin a new job—let alone launch an organization from scratch.

COVID-19 quickly turned Dr. Irene Burgess' new position as inaugural executive director of Georgia College's new Andalusia Institute into a quagmire of possible pitfalls. But the opening was 'virtually' flawless.

"It's gratifying that we've been able to develop the start of an Andalusia Institute culture, despite the challenges of the time," Burgess said. "Actually, COVID was one of the better things that happened to us. It gave me time to work on our virtual presence, create a Facebook page and establish ourselves in a way that's really unique."

Putting events online turned out to be a smart move—amplifying the works of famed author and alumna Flannery O'Connor, while introducing the institute to a wider audience. People worldwide tune in for lively discussions about O'Connor's novels, short stories and essays.

Before the pandemic, Burgess planned to begin slowly, building up the institute with author visits and readings. COVID changed that direction, and Burgess couldn't be happier with the results. More than 200 people are registered to participate in virtual events—the most popular given by English Professor Dr. Bruce Gentry.

For years, Gentry led a monthly discussion on O'Connor with residents in Eatonton. Online, his sessions have blossomed into a bimonthly international affair. Viewers from all over the United States—as well as Italy, Spain, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Argentina and Turkey—link into his Zoom programs. People who can't otherwise travel to Andalusia find a sense of community, connection and common interest with like-minded readers via computer.

Andalusia Institute's online programs also sparked global interest in Milledgeville, Georgia history, Southern studies and mid-20th century literature.

"This little thing in Eatonton once a month is now worldwide because of coronavirus," Burgess said. "Only half the audience are scholars. Some are just happy to have someone to talk to because of COVID. Others are fanatic about her books. They love her and they love her books, but they never had anyone to talk to about it. Now they have an outlet."

Burgess understands the magnetism of O'Connor's peculiar, charming and sometimes gruesome stories. She grew up in rural Maine and sees many of her townsfolk in the quirky mannerism of O'Connor's characters. In high school, Burgess read O'Connor and marveled at a world much like her own. Her father was a chicken farmer, before working at a local factory and eventually moving the family to New Hampshire.

She left to get an undergraduate degree in agricultural economics at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Burgess worked as a line supervisor at food production plants, before deciding she'd rather read and discuss books for a living. She got her master's in English at the University of New Hampshire, then a Ph.D. in women writers and English literature of the 16th century at SUNY Binghamton University in New York. From there, Burgess did a number of things. She taught at Wheeling Jesuit University, where she became chair of the

English department. She was associate dean for academic affairs at Wilmington College in Ohio, then provost at Eureka College in Illinois; vice president of academic programming at the Appalachian College Association; and head of a scholastic consortium in Pennsylvania.

But she was looking for something different.

Becoming head of a new institute based on O'Connor was a rare chance to build something from the ground up. Burgess was intrigued and jumped at the opportunity—bringing along skills uniquely suited to the job like her experience starting organizations and raising funds, as well as her interest in literature and O'Connor.

She's planning a future writing residency on 487 acres of land behind the Andalusia property. She hopes to build individual houses and a writing center with advanced accessibility and supports for the disabled. She feels this would best honor O'Connor, who wore leg braces and walked with crutches due to her illness. The author developed Lupus in her mid 20s and died at age 39, while living at Andalusia with her mother. Nearly all of her short stories, novels, essays and letters were written during those years.

Burgess envisions a writing residency for all people, but one especially equipped to assist people with all types of disabilities. There are other writing residencies in the country. Out of 5,000 higher education schools, however, maybe 50 are tied to alumni writers. None are built to uniquely support the disabled.

"There's this whole group of artists, who have disabilities. About one-in-five people in the U.S. has a disability," Burgess said. "One of the problems with writing residencies—many are in old houses converted to be accessible. We're building something from scratch. Why not build something that's highly accessible? Build it so everyone can use it. Make it easier for all people."

"It will be a challenge," she said. "But it could also be very appealing and distinctive."

Georgia College was an intellectual hub for O'Connor, and Burgess wants the Andalusia Institute to continue this tradition. Along with the Andalusia museum, the institute will keep the memory of O'Connor and her work alive and vibrant.

"It's kind of a thrill," Burgess said. "I've taken this deep dive into reading and understanding Flannery."

"Working here, I've become aware of her as an individual," she said. "People tell stories about her. I go to the Andalusia museum so often, and I talk to scholars and people who met her. She's become real to me."



Irene Burgess

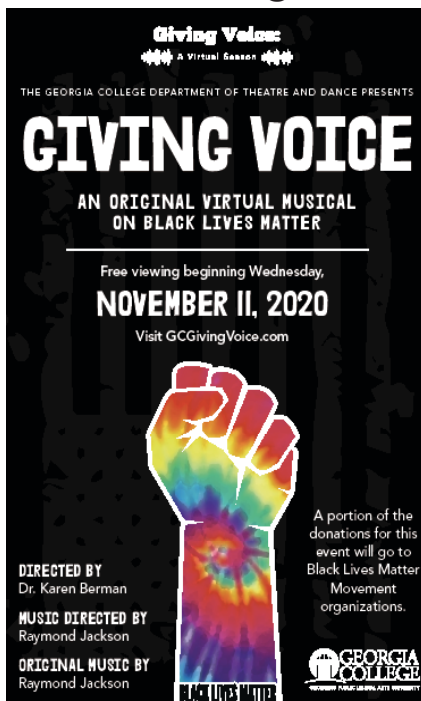
GC Theatre presents 'Giving Voice'

The Georgia College theatre and dance department presents the world premiere of their original musical. Created by the cast and production team on the topic of Black Lives Matter, "Giving Voice" production will be shown on a large movie screen on Front Campus at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020. Admission is free of charge.

The film lasts approximately an hour. All guests are encouraged to bring a blanket or chairs, maintain social distancing and wear masks.

The play was directed by Dr. Karen Berman and music director Raymond Jackson from Beulaland Church in Macon. The students wrote and performed the production.

The film will be available Thursday, Nov. 12, 2020 on gcgivingvoice.com.



Did you know?

The Holly Jolly Shoppe is Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital Navicent Health's program for patients and their families who must spend the holidays in the hospital. This in-hospital toy store allows inpatient families to "shop" - free of charge - for gifts for their hospitalized child (and siblings). Through the support of our generous community, the Holly Jolly Shoppe spreads joy to pediatric patients while alleviating the stress of holiday shopping, so the family can focus their attention on their sick or injured child. The women of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. and the Sorority Living Community would love your help to make a difference in a child's life. The bins for collection will be located in the Fraternity and Sorority Office in the Student Activity Center and at the GIVE Center in the Maxwell Student Union. Ordering from an Amazon wish list is also available, and it will be mailed directly to the hospital.

 <p>Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. Illustrious Eta Xi Chapter & Women of the Sorority Living Community</p> <h3>GC Holly Jolly Shoppe</h3> <p>Donation Drive for the Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital Macon, GA</p>  <p>Donated items must be in new condition and unwrapped.</p> <p>Amazon Wish List</p>	<p>Infant & Toddler</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">PacifiersRattlesTeethersBibsBoard BooksLoveysWooden PuzzlesShape SortersMusical/Light Up ToysActivity MatsBlanketsPajama Sets 	<p>Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">MarkersColored PencilsColoring BooksPlay DoughPlay Dough ToolsSmall Stuffed AnimalsPaint SetsCraft KitsLegosHot WheelsRemote Control CarsBarbie'sBaby DollsAction FiguresPajama Sets 
	<p>Pre-teen & Teenagers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">HeadphonesNew Release MoviesXbox One GamesPlayStation 4 GamesJournalsAdult Coloring BooksMake-Up/Bath SetsNail KitsSporting GoodsFleece BlanketsGift CardsPajama Sets 	
	 <p>zphib.gcsu@gmail.com</p>	