

## Politics faculty dominate local media coverage during election

From Oslo, Norway, to Chattanooga, Tennessee; from Atlanta to Columbus, Georgia; from Macon to Milledgeville—Georgia College's government faculty seemed to be everywhere this electoral season.

They helped the media and public navigate a quagmire of political jargon, rumored illegality and possible voter fraud.

On election night, faculty gave live commentary at multiple locations. As results trickled in, they guided viewers through messy partisan confusion and helped a perplexed nation come to grips with polarizing political divide.

Along the way, faculty also provided a historical fact or two and a bit of calming wisdom.

"It always feels like the nation is on the verge of coming apart at the seams, but times of cultural and political upheaval are often followed by seasons of relative cultural and political stability," said Lecturer Dr. Benjamin Clark, who provided coverage at WGXA News, an affiliate of Fox24/ABC16 in Macon.

"Even if it's not always clear what's driving these cycles or how long they'll last," he said, "the fact that this is a recurring pattern can itself be reassuring."

Presidential elections always stimulate great interest, attracting more attention and higher voter turnout. This year, however, it was "record breaking," according to Senior Political Lecturer Claire Sanders. In Georgia alone, half of registered voters cast early ballots and large numbers voted on election day, as well.

Prior to the election, Sanders appeared in a national video in The Telegraph by McClatchy news group about Georgia becoming a purple state. Professor Dr. Hank Edmonson, spoke with WGXA News about families on the campaign trail. And Professor Dr. Scott E. Buchanan, chair of the Department of Government and Sociology, spoke to WGXA News about the Electoral College.

On election night, faculty helped the media sort through results. Sanders provided legal context for viewers at WGXA News. Buchanan was on Zoom, giving political commentary for WRBL News Channel 3, a CBS affiliate in Columbus. And Assistant



Claire Sanders interview with a Norwegian reporter.

Professor W. Clif Wilkinson Jr. answered questions via Zoom for 13WMAZ, a CBS affiliate in Macon. Wilkinson has been a guest expert at that station for years.

In the election aftermath—Sanders gave numerous interviews to media outlets. This included two articles in Norway's largest newspaper, VG (Verdens Gang). Norwegian reporter Nora Thorp Bjørnstad came

to campus to interview Sanders about the Georgia recount and how partisanship in Congress could affect President-Elect Joe Biden's ability to enact his legislative agenda.

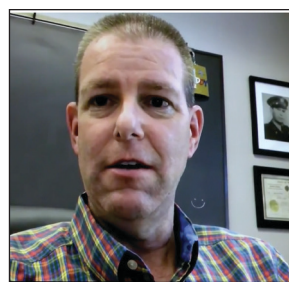
Sanders also spoke to 13WMAZ about legal challenges and what a recount would look like in Georgia. She was interviewed at WGXA News on poll workers, the state's political leanings and what's next in the election.

"This was my first time conducting a live interview on television, which was an exciting yet nerve-racking experience," Sanders said. "The frequency of the interviews definitely contributed to my professional growth. These interviews allowed me to take my experience in election law and administration and share it outside of the comfort zone of my classroom."

Students got involved, as well. Senior Michael Haug, co-founder and president of the newly-formed GC Political Society, was interviewed by two news organizations: 13WMAZ and WABE 90.1 radio in Atlanta about modeling polite political discourse.

Most recently, Buchanan was interviewed by WGXA24 about election fatigue. That story re-aired on Channel 9 ABC News in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Another media request rolled in 2 1/2 weeks after the election from WGXA News asking for clarification on the title 'president-elect.'

Buchanan also noticed "how almost all national media outlets gave up any pretense of objectivity" this year. Locally, he said, media outlets showed more impartiality, but their reporters are usually new "and lack broad historical knowledge in terms of the questions they ask."



Dr. Scott Buchanan on election night for WRBL3 in Columbus.

Faculty were able to provide these invaluable lessons from history.

History proves the rancor and ruckus of this year's election is not unusual. Buchanan pointed to 1824 as one of the most controversial elections in history. At first, Andrew Jackson won more electoral votes and the popular majority. But the House of Representatives ultimately made John Quincy Adams president by awarding him more electoral votes. Like President Donald Trump, he said, Jackson was an outsider "who frightened the Washington

powerbrokers."

Clark raised parallels between 2020 and 1968, a "tumultuous election year with unusually high levels of cultural conflict." That year witnessed riots and a shift in support among voter groups too, he said. Sanders noted similar themes between this election and the year 2000, when Democratic candidate Al Gore challenged voting results.

This year, "the American electorate seemed to dig deeper into their partisan trenches," Sanders said. Georgia witnessed increasing party competition, as well, causing it to become a new battleground state. To alleviate political tension, Sanders called for continued belief in the "democratic consensus" which is a "willingness to proceed democratically, even if one's party or candidate did not win."

Buchanan agreed, saying "people are prone to exaggerate the historical significance of our own moment." The U.S. Constitution has withstood tests and survived, since its ratification in 1789. So, he hopes everyone will "have faith in the process."

Being available for media appearances is one way faculty can help secure that faith and a peaceful future—while also emphasizing the importance Georgia College places on public service and critical thinking.

"I hope the analysis we provided helped others understand the election process," Sanders said, "and I hope students will become interested in politics by seeing the passion our department has for political discourse."

## The Nutcracker: Sparkle of holiday cheer undimmed by pandemic



Junior David Connel plays Clara's Prince.

Like the Grinch who stole Christmas—COVID-19 produced particularly dreary headlines in early 2020. The Washington Post declared "The Nutcracker" nationwide had become the "latest casualty" of the coronavirus. By October, it reported numerous cancellations of the ballet were hitting "dance companies hard."

Dance instructors at Georgia College—like their partners in music and theatre—determined 'the show must go on.' They were given the greenlight by administration after months of planning, numerous rewriting of reports and the setting of strict guidelines.

"Students are so thankful that we're doing 'The Nutcracker' this year, and I've told them over and over again—I said 'y'all just don't know how fortunate we are to be doing this,'" said Amelia Pelton, director of dance and head of the university's popular GC Community Dance Program.

Senior Abbey Reber of Eatonton is a public health major with a minor in dance. She's been in the dance program since age three and has performed in "The Nutcracker" every year since, playing everything from a mouse and reindeer to Clara. This year, Reber plays the Sugar Plum Fairy, whose solo dance is the most difficult. She also plays Big Mouse, Dream Fairy, Snowflake and Arabian Princess.

Perhaps more than ever, she said, it's important for "The Nutcracker" to continue.

"Because I've been dancing in 'The Nutcracker' my whole life, I can't imagine a Christmas season without it," Reber said. "I think what I love the most about 'The Nutcracker' is the sheer innocence of it. Life can be overwhelming, scary and dark—especially in the season we're living in right now."

COVID-19 has complicated dance, Reber admitted. Masks and strenuous movement make it difficult for her to catch her breath, and she loses energy more quickly. But Reber feels "incredibly blessed" to be in "The Nutcracker" this year, when so many performances were canceled.

The pandemic forced Georgia College's dance program online in March. But dancing alone in front of a computer screen isn't much fun, Pelton said. Families and students were happy when in-person classes resumed in September. They were even more relieved to hear "The Nutcracker" was still on schedule. To allow this: All ballet barres, doorknobs and frequently-touched areas are

sanitized between every class. Class sizes are limited. Everyone wears a mask and stands six feet apart.

Georgia College's "Nutcracker" will be performed with these restrictions as well. It'll still be on stage at Russell Hall Auditorium but without an audience. The 1892 Russian ballet will be prerecorded in sections and then available for purchase on DVD by Dec. 10. Small groups, one at a time, will be filmed in segments that are edited together for a fluid performance.

Normally, four performances in two weekends sellout at Russell—985 seats each time. Although there won't be a live audience on campus this year, the Nutcracker cast of 85 children and students will perform in front of a live, drive-by audience at Lockerly Arboretum's inaugural Christmas lights display in Milledgeville. Georgia College's Nutcracker will be staged outside with all the props, lights, ballet and holiday magic audiences have come to expect.

In Lockerly's dazzling nighttime wonderland—"The Nutcracker" will first be seen in the distance. As cars slowly round bends and hills, people will hear Christmas music and see dancers in tutus through a myriad of Christmas lights and trees—adding to the ballet's already dreamlike mystic.

Lockerly's light show is five weekend nights from 6 to 9 p.m. and costs \$10 per car. Georgia College's dance troupe will appear on two nights. Act one—the party scene with mice, soldiers, tap dancers and snowflakes—will be 6 to 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 5. Act two—the land of sweets and dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy—will be 6 to 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 12.

"It's all very magical. We have lots of special effects. It's a labor of love, and it's my favorite time of year," said Pelton. She enjoys teaching dance with her assistant director and senior dance lecturer Natalie King, who's instrumental in getting "The Nutcracker" onstage each year.

"This year's been a huge challenge," Pelton, "but we're so grateful for the opportunity to present 'The Nutcracker' in some form."

Junior David Connel of Grayson, Georgia, is also thankful for the chance to continue dancing. The theatre major and dance minor plays Clara's Nutcracker Prince. Even though the performance won't be live at Russell Auditorium, he said, this year's Nutcracker is historic.



Senior Abbey Reber is the Sugar Plum Fairy.

## Georgia College earns highest rating on educator preparation measures

Georgia College's John H. Lounsbury College of Education earned a Level 4 rating on the 2020 Teacher Preparation Program Effectiveness Measures (PPEMs) published by Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC).

The highest-ranking available, Level 4 is labeled "exemplary" and is above the desired level of performance for effectively preparing future teachers. This marks the second year of the statewide rankings and the second year Georgia College has received the highest rank.

"Georgia College's College of Education faculty are exemplary, and we are pleased to see the quality of their work recognized in this way. They have demonstrated over and over that they are committed to analyzing data for continuous improvement in their training of teacher candidates," said Nicole DeClouette, interim associate dean.

The PPEMs evaluate educator preparation programs using measures collected during candidates' time in the program—such as certification assessments required by the state—and measures collected following completion once candidates are in the classroom, including classroom observations by supervisors and surveys of employers as well as newly employed teachers. The primary purpose of the PPEMs is to give educator preparation programs information that they can use to improve.

"At GaPSC, we believe effective teacher

preparation is critical to giving all Georgia students the quality education they deserve," said Matt Arthur, GaPSC executive secretary. "We're proud to see our institutions and GaTAPP providers using PPEM data strategically to meet this challenge."

Additionally, the PPEMs are meant to provide the public with valuable information on educator preparation programs, particularly individuals considering entering a program themselves.

"A Level 4 is reserved for those program providers whose performance was exemplary, and we will ask these providers to share their best practices with other Georgia program providers," said Penney McRoy, educator preparation division director at GaPSC.

While PPEMs do reflect important data about program effectiveness, they cannot capture all aspects of a program. For instance, the John H. Lounsbury College of Education's mentor-led, field-based, cohort programs have earned numerous state and national recognitions.



## Did you know?

Joel Robinson has been selected as the Senior Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management at Georgia College following a national search.

Robinson comes to Georgia College from Ruffalo Noel Levitz where he has served as an enrollment consultant since 2017. Robinson has an extensive history in enrollment management and student success. Prior to his work with Ruffalo Noel Levitz, Robinson has served as Assistant Provost in Academic Affairs for Northern Kentucky University, Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management at Northern Kentucky University and Senior Associate Director of Admissions for Marketing/Recruitment at the University of Cincinnati.

Robinson will begin his role as Senior Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management on Jan. 1, 2021.

