

The Graduate School at Georgia College sees record enrollment

While colleges and universities across the nation struggle to meet enrollment goals, Georgia College's Graduate School has broken records across the board.

For the fall 2020 semester, 1,282 students enrolled in graduate programs at the university—the largest number in history. That number has been steadily rising since fall 2016 when 868 students were enrolled.

Interim Associate Provost and Director of the Graduate School Dr. Holley Roberts attributes the growth to Georgia College's reputation as an institution of higher education and the innovation to offer programs that meet the needs of professionals in our state.

U.S. News & World Report ranked several Georgia College master's degrees in the "Best Online Graduate Programs" for 2020. The graduate nursing programs were recognized as 28th in the country and first in Georgia. Online Master's in Business degrees (excluding the MBA) were listed as 17th in the nation and also first in Georgia, while the online MBA was also the highest ranked in the state.

During this time of economic uncertainty, many people are looking to develop more in their current professions, increase their knowledge in a specific area or change careers, according to Roberts.

"Growth is happening in many of our graduate programs with the largest being in the College of Education—specifically in our

Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program," said Roberts.

The MAT program provides initial educator preparation at the master's degree level for people who already have a bachelor's degree with a major in specific content fields. It's primarily for those people looking to change careers to become a teacher.

"Part of it is, as people are losing their jobs, they decide to go into teaching. If they already have a bachelor's degree, they can be in the classroom, start teaching and get certified with the MAT," said Dr. Joe Peters, dean of the College of Education.

Since 2015, graduate programs in the College of Education have "grown 412 percent," said Peters. He attributes that primarily to the move to offer programs online. MAT programs began to move online in 2016 and have seen steady growth since then.

"With the MAT program, students can focus in middle grades, secondary or special education," Peters said.

"In the College of Education, we also have a teacher leadership specialist degree and a curriculum and instruction master's degree. We just started both a few years ago, and they also have record enrollment," Peters said.

Most graduate programs at the university are online, making for easier access to students across the state. With many already in a working profession, online learning brings more flexibility and options as people look to pursue an advanced degree. That's why the College of Education plans to continue to offer more programs online to meet the need.

"Next summer we're going to do early childhood and middle grades master's degrees 100 percent online for the first time, as well as special education master's and specialist degrees," Peters said.

The university also offers certificates



online in education and other fields. It's one more way to help professionals hone existing skills or develop new ones.

The Graduate School is looking to expand offerings across the university to address the needs of professional learners with increasing the offerings in graduate certificates.

"Certificates are non-degree seeking," Roberts said. "They are a series of classes that build on each other to enhance knowledge and skills in a specific area."

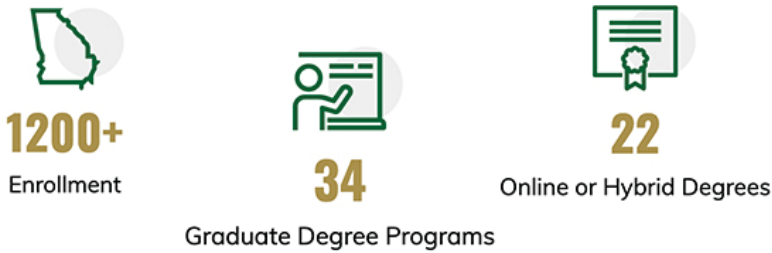
"We are planning to offer several new certificates coming out of health sciences and business," said Roberts. "Although they're in the early stages, options could include information systems, data analytics, IT auditing, web development, nutrition, nurse simulation educator and more."

Meeting the current workforce needs is key to the growth and development of The Graduate School.

"Our goals looking forward are to foster student success, cultivate an engaged graduate community and focus our recruitment efforts," said Roberts.

Whether in education, business, health sciences or humanities, Georgia College will continue to provide an education for graduate learners that's both accessible and preeminent.

For more information, visit gcsu.edu/graduate.



Congratulations to our December 2020 graduates



Amanda Brennen is a music therapy major. She primarily plays the piano and sings, but also enjoys the guitar, ukulele, accordion, recorder and the keytar.

"Music is known as a universal language that brings people together and builds communities," she said. "When it comes to being a music therapy student at Georgia College, we are with the same people all four years. The music therapy department has such a strong community full of encouragement, positivity, helpful resources and support."

She is studying for the music therapy board certification exam and is thinking of getting a masters in special education, music therapy or occupational therapy.

This graduating class of December 2020 had 9,740 volunteer hours and had an economic impact of \$264,928.

Four students earned the National President's Volunteer Service Award.

- Julia Simpkins with 2,386 hours received the Gold Level.
- Amanda Brennen with 399 hours and received the Silver Level.
- Emily Halpin with 297 hours and received the Bronze Level.
- Elizabeth Griffin with 232 hours and received the Bronze Level.

Simpkins was our top service graduate with 2,386 hours, which is \$64,899 in economic impact. She was the director for GC Miracle and most of her volunteer work was for the Beverly Knight Olson Children's Hospital in Macon.



Jerrick McIntosh is an exercise science major. A member of the U.S. Army National Guard, McIntosh has served for 10 years. He is an artillery mechanic in the army, and currently is an instructor at a school house at Fort Stewart teaching the artillery mechanic military occupational specialty.

"I plan on becoming either a science teacher or a physical education teacher at a school," he said. "I really love science. I have interests in anatomy, physiology, astronomy and biology."

He says his family and fiancé inspire him to push his boundaries.

"They motivate me to be better than I was yesterday."

Did you know?

The final Christmas Candlelight tour takes place at the Old Governor's Mansion this weekend. Saturday, Dec. 19, tours are available at 6 p.m., 7 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Tickets are \$10+tax for adults, \$7+tax for seniors and \$2+tax for students.

Out of caution and for the safety of our guests and staff, tour sizes will be limited and reservations are required.

To reserve your tickets for this 19th-century Christmas tour, please call 478-445-4545 or email halley.stodart@gcsu.edu



Georgia College ranked third in state system for four-year graduation rate

Georgia College is well ahead of the national average for institutions that graduate students in four years. A recent 3 point increase places Georgia College third in the state's university system, as well—a sign of innovative programming and commitment to student success.

"This is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the education, support provided on campus and experiences that students receive during their time at GC," said Dr. Steve Dorman, university president. "It shows we're providing a life-transforming and highly-engaged experience that helps prepare students for a lifetime of success."

Georgia College's four-year graduation rate rose three points over last year. It's 32 percent higher than the national average for public universities—which is 38.8 percent. The new rate is 17 percent higher than the national average of 43.7 percent, which also includes private institutions.

This achievement shows the university's working efficiently to give students what they need—saving the "precious resource of their time" and lowering the financial burden on families, according to Suzanne Pittman, associate vice president of Enrollment Management.

Georgia College has an extremely low student loan default rate—just under three percent—one of the lowest in the state. Graduating on time puts students in the job market sooner.

Getting a bachelor's degree in four years also makes students more competitive for graduate school and professions like law or medicine.

"Any time you can show a proven track record of success, it demonstrates you're focused," Pittman said. "It shows other

schools and potential employers you're a serious contender, and you can handle academically-challenging material."

The university raised its four-year graduation rate by more than 12 points in the past 10 years. At 51.2 percent, however, there's still room for improvement. Numbers nationwide remain low on average, officials said, because students change majors, decide to include more courses for a minor, take time off from studies for personal reasons or tackle fewer credits to maintain their HOPE scholarships.

"Our priority is to provide students a well-rounded education and for them to graduate in four years," said Dr. Costas Spirou, provost and vice president of Academic Affairs.

"Much of the credit for the increase in our four-year graduation rate goes to our highly-committed faculty and staff," he said, "who are dedicated to teaching and work closely with our students both inside and outside the classroom to achieve their goals."

The university did several things in recent years that impacted the four-year graduation rate, Pittman noted. A professional advising model was established, giving advisors the ability to focus on individual plans for student progress. In freshman seminar, students use a computer program to academically map out their college years. This forces students to think about their future, finish mandated courses early and put forethought into career management.

Georgia College also invested more funds into the Learning Center, providing tutors and supplemental instruction for those who are struggling. A teaching model, Math Emporium, helps students better understand college algebra.