

## 'Thunder Learns to Read:' Education students use new tools to teach reading

Reading is a skill known as a building block of life and fundamental to society.

Teachers work hard to help children read early in their education, but many students face obstacles in their learning. It helps when they receive extra guidance and understand that anyone can face similar challenges with reading—even a famous furry friend.

Georgia College junior education majors spent several sessions during their spring semester working on-site at Lakeview Academy in Baldwin County giving students additional guidance and encouragement as they honed their reading skills.

"We are actually putting it into practice the different tips and skills that we've learned through our classes," said early childhood education major Erin Malone. "I think it helped that we were with the students only in the spring because we had a toolbox of all the things that we needed to know be a lot more impactful."

As part of their college course Literacy Assessment and Instruction: Dyslexia and Diverse Reading Profiles, teaching candidates tutored Kindergarten through second-grade students (K-2).

"This is the first time we've been one-on-one or in pairs with students to see where they are with their reading and use the assessments that we've been learning in class," said early childhood education major Katherine Funke.

The course is part of pilot program in the John H. Lounsbury College of Education, which aims to better prepare teacher candidates for reading education.

"In the state in general, there was a bit of a concern that new teachers were coming out not really ready to teach all of the



Dr. Linda Bradley prepares her students for tutoring sessions.

fundamental components of reading," said Dr. Linda Bradley, professor of literacy education. "There's been a state push to pay attention to those fundamentals."

Historically known as a leader in teacher education in Georgia, the College of Education joined an effort to assess and rework their literacy courses. The university is one of 14 University System of Georgia (USG)

Educator Preparation Programs participating in a pilot project to plan and implement projects to improve teacher candidate impact upon K-12 student learning in literacy and mathematics.

"We revised our literacy coursework for early childhood and special education as a part of a pilot in the state," said Bradley. "We developed a three-course restructured plan that emphasizes hands-on implementation with students in schools. Spring 2021 is the first offering of this course linking assessment and interventions on-site with groups of K-2 students."

That course brought college students this semester to Lakeview for eight sessions of hands-on tutoring. Overcoming the challenges of the pandemic and working with school and county leadership, Bradley connected her students with 106 younger children to work on the fundamentals of reading.

In honor of their hard work and the end of the school year, the children received a special celebration during their last scheduled

tutoring session. A book of their very own to take home written by Bradley and featuring Georgia College's mascot Thunder the Bobcat.

"It's a treat for every child who's come to tutoring this spring," said Bradley. "On their last day of tutoring, we celebrated each K-2 student, gave them a copy of the book and then read it together as a group."

The idea for the children's book "Thunder Learns to Read" came to Bradley several years ago. She teamed up with a professional illustrator Min McLaughn for the project. In the book, the bobcat decides he wants to learn to read but faces a few challenges along the way.

McLaughn jumped at the opportunity to work on the project because she believed in its goal. Diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age, McLaughn knew first-hand the struggles and frustrations many kids face. She hopes the book will encourage children that they too can tackle reading like Thunder.

In writing the book, Bradley tied in key concepts and tools she teaches her college students to help young children gain confidence in their reading abilities.

"We are thrilled to give copies of 'Thunder Learns to Read' to children and teacher candidates," said Bradley. "This book recognizes the complexity and significant challenge that learning to read can be. We want students who find reading tough to know how intelligent they are, and to know that teachers have tools that can help them grow stronger in their reading."

Capping off the end of the school year, the special reading and the gift of a book to take home helped celebrate a job well done.



## International student earns dual degrees in physics, engineering

As a youth from Lahore, Pakistan, senior Nash Sultan originally looked at universities in the Atlanta area where his uncle lived. Then, he saw photos of Georgia College's "beautiful" campus and learned of its "great scholarships" for international students.

Sultan applied for the dual-degree program that provides a 3-year physics degree from Georgia College, which he'll receive in May, and an engineering degree from the Georgia Institute of Technology that he's on track to also get in Spring 2021.

"Initially, I wanted to study engineering, because I wanted to understand the phenomena behind different everyday objects and processes. However, when I started the physics program at GC," he said, "I learned it was just what I was looking for."

Sophomore year, Sultan got involved with Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge's "sputtering system" research to create thin film depositions of nano meters thickness. Once there, Sultan became further interested in solid state physics and Mahabaduge's renewable energy projects.

One project was outfitting various campus golf carts with solar panels. Fascinating ventures like this is why Sultan lists Mahabaduge as his favorite professor—even though he never had a class with him.

"I just really appreciate how he wants to enable his students to follow their passion, even outside class, and succeed," he said.

Sultan was one of two students who wrote the proposal to continue solar-powered golf cart research, and he helped add two more to the fleet. After getting money from MURACE's summer program fund, he helped Mahabaduge's research group purchase necessary parts and install them on golf carts. An honors student at Georgia College, Sultan was also part of a faculty/student REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) in 2017 with Mahabaduge at the Materials Research Science and Engineering Center at the University of Nebraska. This opportunity was fully funded by the National Science Foundation. Soon after this unique experience conducting research side-by-side with his research mentor, Nash obtained \$15,400 from Georgia College's Student Technology Fee Grant for instruments to set up a



Nash Sultan, second from left, with Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge and fellow students at one of Georgia College's solar powered golf carts.

Magneto Optical Kerr Effect measurement system on campus.

Sultan misses the Georgia College campus and small-town experience. He always enjoyed events like Midnight Breakfast, getting free Chick-fil-A and the annual International Dinner. It was great meeting students and making new friends from all over the world.

His advice to incoming first-year students is to "explore all the opportunities at your disposal" at Georgia College. There are various research groups and other campus organizations that help students make friends, gain experience and broaden perspectives. It's important "to have a good balance of academics and social life in college," he said.

In his spare time, Sultan does photography. He ran a professional photography business in Pakistan. It's more of a hobby now, but he still does weddings or graduation photos for friends. It was difficult to adjust, when COVID-19 first occurred. Although Sultan missed interacting with faculty and students last spring, he said safety measures like online classes, masks and social distancing have become the "new norm."

Like it did in so many areas of life, coronavirus disrupted the job market for physics and engineering majors, Sultan said. He spoke with one recruiter who said he wasn't sure how many new hires they'd need in the coming year due to the pandemic. But Sultan hopes things will soon return to normal.

Currently, he's working part time with a solar energy company in Atlanta. He hopes to go full time there after graduating from Georgia Tech and stay in the renewable energy industry long term.

## Congrats to the Class of 2021



Due to ongoing safety concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia College amended their traditional commencement ceremony.

The university will hold multiple ceremonies for May and August 2021 graduates May 6-7 and May 13-14.

More on the spring commencement ceremonies and our graduates is available at [gcsu.edu/graduation](http://gcsu.edu/graduation).



## Education faculty member receives national COPLAC award

Dr. Rob Sumowski, associate professor in the Lounsbury College of Education, recently was named the winner of the Charles Dunn Award for Faculty from the Council of Public Liberal Arts College's (COPLAC).

The award recognizes a faculty member whose commitment to student success goes "above and beyond the classroom and office," according to the organization. The winner must demonstrate extraordinary attention to students and understand they sometimes face unique challenges, both on and off campus, that may compromise their academic performance.

"Dr. Sumowski is most deserving of this recognition," said Dr. Costas Spirou, provost and vice president of academic affairs. "He is dedicated to his students and consistently encourages them in their academic pursuits. He is a great representation of our institution."

A member of the faculty at Georgia College since 2011, Sumowski is an associate professor of Special Education and Program Coordinator for the Master of Education and Education Specialist programs. Prior to entering higher education, Sumowski spent 21 years as a P-12 teacher, assistant principal, behavior specialist and district-level director of student safety.

"In my life I have encountered a handful of special people who offered me mentorship, guidance and grace," he said. "They helped me understand that nobody has all of the answers, and that all of us are

just trying to figure out this crazy, tragic, beautiful circus we call life."

"In the final analysis, our relationships with others are all that matter. We are all in this together. That's the ground upon which I approach my teaching. I am deeply humbled

to be able to repay the giants in my own life by sharing some of these lessons with the next generation," said Sumowski. A proponent of the Field-Based Cohort Model, Sumowski serves as a mentor leader in the undergraduate and M.Ed. programs. A state leader in Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), he has served on various visioning and planning committees with the Georgia Department of Education and has been called upon by the Georgia Attorney General's Office to testify as an expert witness in hearings involving classroom management issues.

He holds Bachelor of Arts degrees in Psychology and Music from Mercer University, Master of Education and Education Specialist degrees from Georgia College, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Georgia.

