

Georgia College welcomes Cathy Cox as the 12th President

Cathy Cox officially assumed her role as the 12th president of Georgia College Friday, Oct. 1. Please join us in welcoming her to campus.



President Cathy Cox spent time meeting colleagues on campus.



She also met with Student Government Association President James Robertson.



With her Bobcat Card in hand, President Cathy Cox is officially a Bobcat.

Students use behavioral economics to 'nudge' change

Nudges come in many forms. From using smaller plates to control portion size to adding basketball hoops over recycling cans encouraging participation, nudges seek to alter people's behaviors with minimal effort.

Research shows these small suggestions can have a big impact on behavior. Nudges can help people get more exercise, eat healthier, recycle or just simply think positively.

Georgia College economics and psychology students have come together to combine their knowledge and use the nudge theory to help improve local businesses and campus departments.

It's called the GC Nudge Unit. Students can be involved in the club and work on projects for course credit.

"It's specifically based off of the nudge theory of behavioral economics, which is the idea that you can do a small thing—like implement a nudge—and it can impact people's decision-making or help them make the desired decision," said Kaitlyn Black, senior economics major.

This semester, Black and her fellow students are working on two projects for campus partners.

"We are currently working with University Housing. They've had a problem for the past few years, but especially since COVID, with people not staying on the weekends—specifically freshmen," she said

The Nudge Unit is looking at data, talking with the client about concerns, assessing the problem and working to create solutions, or nudges, they can propose to University Housing to allow them to better foster a sense of community for the residents.

The second project focuses on the Learning Center and the effectiveness of the services offered. The Learning Center provides academic support for core classes like math and sciences.

"The coordinators of the Learning Center have a theory that the earlier in the semester students start utilizing their services bigger the impact is for them," said Dr. Chris Clark, professor of economics. "What we're partially doing is trying to find out if it's effective, and then if we can, we'd like to find out if they're right



Kaitlyn Black (right) works with Dr. Diana Young.

about that."

Clark and Dr. Diana Young, professor of psychology, serve as faculty advisors for the group. They answer questions, offer guidance or advice and are there to bounce ideas around, but all decisions and ultimately the nudges offered to clients come from the students.

"This is very much a student-run thing," said Black. "Sometimes Dr. Clark and Dr. Young aren't there when we're meeting with potential clients. It's really one of the only opportunities we get for it to totally be us working with clients and using the knowledge we've gained in our classes."

The group was founded in 2018 by students who had heard about other Nudge organizations. They've been set up on university campuses, in governmental agencies, in businesses and more. Among others, the British government has a Nudge Unit, now called the Behavioral Insights Team.

So far, the Georgia College team has only worked with campus departments, primarily due to challenges presented from the pandemic. Their services include a full diagnosis of the issues with a tailored solution based on behavioral economic principles and empirical research, or hands-on implementation of a behavioral economic nudge with a statistical assessment of its impact.

"The data analysis is not a priority. It's just part of what we do to help understand the problem," said Clark. "The big part of what we do is basically costless or very low-cost actions that these organizations can take to try to get closer to their goal."

It can get messy at times. Challenges can come from variations in data provided or even the complete lack of good data. Young says that's what makes work like this even more beneficial for students.

"The research process isn't always perfectly clean. It's not like you're always in a controlled laboratory environment," said Young. "There's some utility that as a group we have to build our skills in ambiguity tolerance. We have to learn how to deal with the punches as they're thrown our way and come up with alternative solutions to problems that we didn't know were going to be problems to begin with."

The group has completed projects with Sodexo, the campus Retention Committee and the Office of Sustainability.

For their work with Sodexo, the dining partner of Georgia College, they helped address a problem with employee tardiness and absenteeism. Using a technique called loss aversion—which says the negative impact of losing something is worse than the benefit of getting something—the group developed a plan to give every employee a T-shirt, and if they were late or absent, they had to return it. The goal was to see if and how it affected the problem of employees being tardy or not showing up to work.

Although the data on how much it affected changes in tardiness and absenteeism was skewed, there were signs of improvement.

To address sustainability's problem of people throwing contaminants into recycling bins, the students prosed



Rawley Smith (left) and Neely Thompson explain concepts to the class.

installing shadow boxes above the bins showing inappropriate items to place in with recyclables. Those can be seen in the Arts & Science Building, and Clark says they "have some data showing we are moving the right direction."

"It's nice to be in an environment that you can work with people using what you've learned in theory classes and actually implement it in more of a work setting" said Rawley Smith, senior economics major. "Econ can sometimes get to be more of lecture-based work, so it's nice to be able to actually have our little version of a research group."

Many students are involved for several years with the Nudge Unit, preparing them for work or graduate school after they finish their degree. It not only brings in-class learning to life but gives them a perspective on how organizations function.

"That's kind of cool being on the opposite side, like for housing. I haven't lived in the dorms since freshman year," said Smith, "but now I'm on the other side helping the administration solve their problems."

As for the current projects, students are meeting with the clients, looking at data and working up nudges to propose to them. It's a process that sometimes can go quickly, and other times they need more time to come up with the best possible solutions.

Did you know?

The Rural Studies Institute (RSI) at Georgia College will participate in a session about the challenges and opportunities in rural agriculture during the Georgia Chamber's fifth annual American Rural Prosperity Summit.

"Typically, these conversations are Georgia-focused," said RSI Executive Director Dr. Veronica Womack. "This year topics are more national in scope. This includes a look at 21st-century agriculture across the nation and what we can do to improve it."

The Oct. 4 through 6 event in Athens, Georgia, is RSI's debut. The summit gathers hundreds of elected officials, policy leaders, business influencers and economic development practitioners to weigh strategies that could help create more "vibrant, robust rural communities throughout the nation."

What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar

Tuesday

5

7 p.m.- In celebration of National Coming Out Week, the Pride Alliance is once again hosting its annual Come-Out Cookout. This public event at Central City Park is an opportunity for students and community members alike to come together, celebrate their identities and enjoy some free food.

Wednesday

6

Thursday

7

7:30 p.m.- Please join us virtually for Christine Flanagan's "The Master Class: Flannery O'Connor and Caroline Gordon." Flanagan will discuss what O'Connor learned as a writer and thinker from Caroline Gordon's extensive editorial comments on her short stories. Registration is required. Contact (478)-445-2645.

Friday

8

Through Wednesday, Dec. 22 An exhibit showcasing the future Andalusia Interpretive Center will be at museum home of Flannery O'Connor. "What is to Come: Andalusia's New Interpretive Center" will give community residents a perspective on how Georgia College tells the story of Flannery O'Connor, her family and the history of the house and family farm. The exhibit will be shown in a series of panels placed in the front stairs/hall of Andalusia for the public's inspection. For more information, please call 478-445-4545.

Saturday

9

8:30 a.m.- GC Cross Country hosts Georgia College Invitational.