

Georgia College students win numerous awards at Model of African Union conference

Georgia College students won awards in practically every category earlier this month when the university hosted the 24th Annual SEMAU (Southeast Model of the African Union) conference.

SEMAU is like a mock trial or Model UN (United Nations), where students act as real delegates and heads-of-state to debate issues that affect African nations. The exercise demands lots of preliminary research, quick thinking on their feet, a readiness to compromise and work with others but, also, the drive to take the lead and solve conflicts.

The event is a real-world simulation based on the national Model of the African Union, held every year in Washington D.C. Student delegates sit on committees for social matters; peace and security; democracy, governance and human rights; Pan Africanism and continental unity; and economic matters. They discuss matters of finance, food security, disease, immigration and war.

Each school comes to SEMAU with resolutions that are pulled apart and remade through two days of debates. On the final day, student heads-of-state vote to adopt or reject final resolutions.

Dr. Charles Ubah, professor of criminal justice and SEMAU advisor, co-directed this year's conference with retired English Professor Dr. Eustace Palmer, who chaired the university system's African Council for four years. He played a big role in starting SEMAU in 1997 and continues to support students at conferences.

Five university system schools participated with Georgia College: University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Albany State University, Savannah State University and Middle Georgia State University. Advisors from Kennesaw State University and Fort Valley State University were in attendance, as well.

The three-day simulation began with Milledgeville city officials and university faculty and staff welcoming two African diplomats: Ambassador of the Republic of Togo Frederic Edem Hegbe and Ambassador of the Republic of Mozambique Carlos dos Santos.



Senior Carson Shuler.

Duties of state were interspersed with social and cultural activities, like African Night with a performance by the Atilogwu Dancers from the Atlanta Igbo School.

Georgia College students have participated in the conference every year since its inception. In the past, they

represented the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Somalia, Liberia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, the Sudan and South Africa.

This year, students represented Nigeria and Ethiopia. Nigeria is Africa's biggest economy and one of the world's largest oil producers. It's the most populated nation in Africa, but little of its abundance trickles down to the people. Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, has the second largest population but is fairly undeveloped and one of the poorest nations on the continent.

SEMAU isn't done for class credit. Students don't get a break from coursework to study African affairs. Everything's done during free time. Students get only weeks to prepare—researching countries, studying issues of importance, learning what delegates do and how they act—before they're dropped into a realistic arena and expected to perform professionally with students from other universities.

It is an exercise in international diplomacy. Students quickly adapt to rules and protocols of a real government committee. When addressing a board chairman, they say, "Your Excellency" or "Honorable Chair." They dress in business attire and stand when speaking. No one speaks, unless they first call out, "Point of Inquiry." No one leaves until meetings are "adjourned."

Senior criminal justice major Carson Shuler of Savannah won an award for his role as Nigerian president on the executive council. He also won honorable mention for chairing the committee on peace and security. Other students won delegate awards for Ethiopia and Nigeria in economic matters; Pan Africanism; and democracy, governance and human rights. They took honorable mentions for leadership in committees.

Shuler joined SEMAU to learn about Africa and meet new people. As a member of the executive committee, he researched the on-going civil war in Ethiopia. Other committees sent in resolutions on how to deal with this crisis. The committee on economic matters, for example, found ways to fund the end of the war and protect and provide for refugees.

In the process, Shuler said he became more self-assured. "I noticed everybody here in the executive council—we're all first time doing this. We were very nervous at the beginning, and we didn't know the proper procedures or anything. We definitely got the hang of it. It was a learning curve. But we've got it now."

Sophomore criminal justice major Rachel Locke noted an upswing in her confidence too. She joined SEMAU to practice her speaking skills. She came in a little nervous but left



Dr. Charles Ubah (right) stands by as a student delegate from Georgia State University speaks at the SEMAU conference at Georgia College.

knowing more about Africa and the economic resources that can make a difference in Ethiopia.

As she offered solutions for shelter, medical supplies, food and water, Locke said it felt like she was presenting to a real board. People took her seriously and listened to what she had to say. SEMAU helped Locke build leadership skills she says she'll someday use as a paralegal.

"These are big issues that could really affect someone's life," Locke said, "and we're supposed to find a solution for it when we're just college kids. There's a lot of research involved, learning what's out there and what can be done. It's very exciting."

Copies of final resolutions are sent to African Union headquarters in Washington D.C. From there, they'll go to the yearly heads-of-state meeting in Addis Ababa, the capitol in Ethiopia, where some student decisions may be adopted and put into action. In the past, African leaders have referred to work done in Georgia by SEMAU students, Ubah said.

Potentially impacting the lives of real Africans is exhilarating. This real-world setting helps students acquire skills they'll need in the workforce. Shuler wants to work for the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. In the past, Georgia College participants have been inspired to work in Africa and build careers in international affairs.

"This has been a very rewarding experience because we've been able to meet new people, gain new connections. It feels really important, the work that we're doing," Shuler said.

"It feels like we're making a real difference," he added, "because we're making our suggestions, we've done our research, and they can decide whether or not to heed those resolutions."

Native Sons Lost Milledgeville's Vietnam War Dead exhibit



A digital exhibit, based off original student research in Dr. James Schiffman's communication class, highlights the stories of local Vietnam War veterans.

The exhibit recalls nine vets from Milledgeville, who died during the war. To the best of their ability, 25 students worked to uncover the lives of these lost individuals. Stories

include facts recalled by friends and family, newspaper clippings and excerpts of letters and postcards. There are many personal photographs.

"This project is illustrative of what Georgia College strives to accomplish," said Evan Leavitt, manager of Facilities Operations and Planning at Ina Dillard Russell Library.

"Not only were students gaining research skills," he said, "but it engaged them with their adopted community, fostering a deeper sense of place during their time at Georgia College. The result honors our lost veterans from the Vietnam War and hopefully will touch all who view the exhibit."

One serviceman, Marion Edward Johnson, is described as "a fun loving, but quiet kid" who "would spend his early childhood living by the railroad tracks on North Columbia Street." Johnson enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1966. After basic training, he was sent to Vietnam in September of that year.

Johnson was close to his brothers and sisters, always writing home for news. In one letter, he wrote his mother: "This is a nasty place over here. It reminds me of Georgia but it's a lot nastier than Georgia ever was."

The exhibit weaves personal stories together with a brief history of the Vietnam War and an outline of military practices. This includes handling of American war dead and notification of next of kin.

Georgia College's Ina Dillard Russell Library and Special Collections assisted students in this task by providing supplemental research and creating the digital exhibit. "Native Sons Lost" is housed on the university's Special Collections Galleries website, along with exhibits on "Central State Hospital," "Peace and War" and "Soul of Georgia."

The exhibit can be found at specialcollectionslibraries.gcsu.edu/killed-in-action/.

Did you know?

Cognia, the international accreditation organization for PK-12 schools and organizations, presented the 2021 Georgia Excellence in Education Award posthumously to Dr. John H. Lounsbury, dean emeritus of the College of Education, for his significant impact on student learning in Georgia.

Dr. Cheryl Reynolds, professor of educational leadership and a member of the Cognia Advisory Board for Georgia, nominated Lounsbury.

The award was presented at the 2021 Cognia Conference held at the InterContinental Buckhead Nov. 18 and accepted by Liz Lounsbury Thomas, his daughter. Thomas (center) is pictured with her son (left) and Reynolds (right).



Graduate award recipients take studies overseas



Amara Tennessee

In 2020, Georgia College graduates Amara Tennessee and Cain Gantt each received awards for post-graduate study that would take them out of the country during a time of tightening travel regulations in the midst of the global pandemic. Both have continued their work although COVID still creates obstacles to overcome and new opportunities to learn.

"Obviously, the pandemic put a pause on the program and has thrust Fulbright into a new format of teaching, but I wouldn't trade this opportunity for anything," Tennessee said.

Tennessee received a Fulbright to teach English in Columbia at la Universidad de Boyacá through May 2022.

"Many of the courses at my university are still online due to the pandemic," she said, "The situation is teaching me to be adaptable and patient as we navigate this online learning platform together."

Gantt is in a similar situation at the Universität Hamburg in Germany, having been awarded a Study Scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) award (Germany's equivalent to the Fulbright) last year.

"It has been a unique set of challenges to adapt from in-person undergraduate studies at relatively small GC to online graduate-level courses at the very large Universität Hamburg," Gantt said.

He's currently working on getting his Master's in Mathematical Physics and will be in Germany throughout the duration of his graduate work.

He was notified of his acceptance in August of 2020, before he'd even finished the application process to the university.

"All of the time in between was nerve-racking, not the least due to the uncertainty the pandemic introduced," he said.

However, despite the disruption that the pandemic has caused to overseas learning, it has done little to dissuade his enthusiasm for learning the culture.

"I have no experience with the German education system outside of the pandemic," he said. "My classes over the winter '20/'21 and summer '21 semesters were taught entirely online, which has been a challenge to adapt. However, this winter semester (mid-October through end of January) will have in-person and hybrid classes for the first time, and I am excited to meet my colleagues."

Tennessee and Gantt both say that studying abroad continues to be a tremendous and worthwhile investment in their future despite the impediments of COVID-19.

"I cannot overstate how influential my time abroad has been on helping me expand my perspective on the world," Gantt said.

"Traveling provides the opportunity to see and enjoy so many other places," Tennessee said. "Feel the fear and do it anyway."

In addition to how much both have learned of their respective countries of study, they both credit the National Scholarships Office with its help in finding and processing their applications.

Despite the challenges that the pandemic, many students are still finding ways to travel and learn abroad. The National Scholarship Office is the best place to start for students interested in expanding their reach beyond the states after graduating and overcoming any obstacle that might stand in their way, no matter the size.



Cain Gantt