

# Georgia College Music Therapy enriches lives of adults with disabilities

As executive director of the Life Enrichment Center (LEC) in Milledgeville, Barbara Coleman has a simple—yet far-reaching—goal. To change the world one student at a time. To do this, she created a partnership with Georgia College called Creative Expressions. Every week, this program brings adults with disabilities together with music therapy students. Bringing adults with disabilities together with students accentuates the center’s motto that “we are more alike than different.” It gives LEC participants a chance to engage musically with the community, share their unique talents and enhance skills. On campus they become artists, guitarists, singers, dancers. They get to be like college students. In return, students learn to work with others, accept differences and lead groups in therapy. It’s a relationship like few others, according to LEC Activity Director and Music Therapist Jay Warren, who earned a master’s in music therapy at Georgia College in 2020. “It’s rare to find a community that’s willing to engage with adults who have disabilities. We all know, having grown up in the United States in the last 60 years,” Warren said, “there’s stigma attached to people based on their looks, speech patterns, things like that.” “I’ve lived in a lot of places, and I’ve never seen this anywhere,” he added. “It’s astounding. As a student, it changed my life. I wasn’t planning on working here. I wasn’t planning on staying in this town. It completely changed the direction of where I was going.” Georgia College is one of two state universities with a music therapy major. It’s the only Georgia school offering a master’s in music therapy. The program started in 1977 and services Baldwin County Schools, in addition to LEC. About 78 students with disabilities are served K-12th grade at the music therapy clinic on campus. Music helps with social skills, sharing, impulse control and attention span. Georgia College’s Creative Expressions program with LEC began

more than 20 years ago. About 55 undergraduates majoring in music therapy get their clinical hours through eight Creative Expressions groups that meet each week on campus. These include Men’s Vocal Percussion, Jungle Royales, Bell Tones, Harmonettes Vocal Choir, Good Vibrations and Music in Motion. On any given day, vans of adults with disabilities are coming and going—and the bottom floor of the Health and Sciences building is engulfed with the sound of music. Visitors see happy faces, moving bodies. They hear singing, clapping, drumbeating, bellringing, guitar strumming. “People respond to music at pretty much any point in their lives, so we’re able to tap into that and help them have a better quality of life,” said Katie Whipple, lecturer of music therapy, undergraduate coordinator and clinic coordinator for the music therapy program. LEC clients have a range of disabilities like Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, Williams syndrome and autism. Music therapy is also used with stroke survivors and elderly patients with Alzheimer’s disease or dementia. Some clients have trouble remembering and expressing their thoughts. They might have an awkward gait or trouble managing muscle movement. But in Creative Expressions these characteristics fade. Other traits appear. There’s a willingness to try new things. Bonds are formed. Confidence grows. Senior music therapy major Abigail Hearn has been part of the women’s vocal choir, Harmonettes, for seven semesters and now leads the group. She proudly notes how several clients—too shy to participate in earlier years—are clamoring for solo roles in the Creative Expressions concert scheduled for Nov. 22. Hearn helps clients memorize song lyrics, learn proper pronunciation and choreograph dance steps. She never tires of watching them interact with students. “The concert—seeing the atmosphere of acceptance and joy of



LEC participants enjoy drumming recently at Georgia College.

them being on stage and getting that spotlight on them, having the solos and audience there cheering them on—it’s just an experience like no other,” Hearn said. “I get out of it the learning experience, and then the joy of seeing them grow over time and knowing I’ve had an impact on their life. I did that,” she said. “I’ve changed them in some way.” Some participants are so affected by Creative Expressions, it’s the highlight of their life. After moving away, one couple drives two hours to Georgia College every week, so their daughter can continue attending music therapy groups “like a university student.” Impacts on his clients “have been astounding,” Warren said. The partnership between the university and LEC broadens their experiences and widens their world, giving them a place where they play music among students as equals. “When you bring people together around music, magic happens. It lifts your spirits when you work in a helping field and see the people you serve succeed,” Warren said.

## Jazz Band Concert Thursday and Friday

Georgia College’s Jazz Band presents its annual concert “What is Hip?” Thursday and Friday, Nov. 4-5 at 7:30 p.m. in Russell Auditorium. Performing what’s often called “Mini Big Band,” the group—directed by Dr. Cliff Towner—will rock the house with classic repertoire from great jazz performers like Bill Holman, Freddie Hubbard and Frank Foster, along with some more contemporary offerings by Greg Yasinitsky. Mini Big Band provides the harmonies and orchestration of Big Band sound, while leaving plenty of room for improvisation. The great chart song “What is Hip?” from the band Tower of Power will be performed. A \$5 donation is encouraged. All proceeds benefit music scholarships or the GC Department of Music through GCSU Foundation, Inc. For more information, please email [music@gcsu.edu](mailto:music@gcsu.edu) or call 478-445-8289.

## Did you know?

The Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council recently awarded to Dr. Sandra Godwin, and her co-author Helen Matthew Lewis, the Award for Excellence in Documenting Georgia’s History. The award came as a result of the authors’ new book “A White Liberal College President in the Jim Crow South: Guy Herbert Wells and the YWCA at Georgia State College for Women, 1934-1953.” The volume was published by Mercer University Press in 2021. In addition, the same book has been nominated for two other awards by the Southern Historical Association and Georgia Historical Society.

## BOUNDLESS art exhibit opens on campus

EXHIBITORS

JENNA BRYSON

BROOKLYN BUSMAN

JACOB CAIN

MAGGIE CHEATHAM

LANEY COWAN

LAURIE GENTRY

EMMA LAMMERS

MARY FRANCES LUDINGTON

ABBEY SMITH

BROOKE YOST

The Department of Art at Georgia College celebrate the opening of the Capstone exhibition, BOUNDLESS Nov. 2. The exhibit, which runs through Nov. 28, showcases students’ outstanding research over the past year and includes work in a variety of media. This year, the exhibition will be displayed in two venues: Leland Gallery in Ennis Hall and at the Museum of Fine Arts in the Underwood House. Congratulations to student artists Jenna Bryson, Brooklyn Busman, Jacob Cain, Maggie Cheatham, Laney Cowan, Laurie Gentry, Emma Lammers, Mary Frances Ludington, Abbey Smith and Brooke Yost. The Fall 2021 Capstone II students have done an outstanding job during extremely challenging times, and they are pleased to present and discuss their innovative artworks with the public, according to Matthew Forrest, associate professor of art. A reception will take place Thursday, Nov. 18 from 4:45 – 7:30 p.m. Introductions and a gallery talk will be held outdoors on the front patio of the Museum of Fine Arts/Underwood House at 5:45 p.m. The exhibit will also be available online Nov. 4 at [gcsu-art.com](http://gcsu-art.com).

# What’s going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit [frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar](http://frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar)

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2	3	4 7:30 p.m.- Georgia College’s Jazz Band presents its annual concert “What is Hip?” in Russell Auditorium.	5 7:30 p.m.- Georgia College’s Jazz Band presents its annual concert “What is Hip?” in Russell Auditorium.	6 2 p.m.- Join us for GC’s annual fall dance concert, Bountiful, on Front Campus. This performance is entirely student run and free to the public. Donations are accepted. In case of rain, concert will take place in Russell Auditorium.