COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

NEWSLETTER

GEORGIA COLLEGE

GEORGIA'S PUBLIC LIBERAL ARTS UNIVERSITY

FALL 2021

Editor's Note

Welcome back returning faculty, staff and students. We also eagerly welcome our new faculty, students and staff to Georgia College. We are hopeful for a healthy, safe and fulfilling academic year.

The fall 2021 newsletter is a testament to the human ability for growth and innovation even when faced with adversity. We are facing our second fall semester during a global pandemic; yet we see reflected in these pages a commitment to our craft and a resolve to adapt on our academic journeys. The stories contained here highlight the phenomenal faculty, students and staff that make Georgia College the cornerstone of liberal arts education in the state.

This edition of the newsletter features the College of Arts and Sciences Excellence Scholars Program and the young scholars it serves. The program, which began in 2017, illustrates our college's dedication to providing pathways to college for all students and communities. This edition includes phenomenal stories of creation, honoring the legacies of veterans and paying tribute to the Black Lives Matter movement. Student creativity is also highlighted with stories of how they aim to improve industry and transportation, tackle biomedical research and participate in international art exchanges. Faculty innovation also abounds in these pages—in new species discoveries and COVID-19 research. None of this effort is possible without the fruitful combination of inquisitive students, faculty dedicated to empiricism and discovery and an institution that aims to foster and develop the faculty-student mentor model. I want to thank the faculty and chairs for their inspiring newsletter submissions. The newsletter is truly a product of their work and resolve. The contents here are only the tip of the iceberg. Enjoy the contents of this edition. More importantly, stay safe and well this semester.

DR. CARRIE COOK
Interim Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Dean's Message

Despite the hopes we had when the vaccinations became available across Georgia and the southeast, fall 2021 has started much like fall 2020. The delta variant has ruined the plans of a return to normal on campus this semester. For some of our students, COVID-19 will now have affected three academic years of four, which is significant in the relatively short time that students come to Georgia College. In many ways, the social distancing of the classrooms and the required masks in fall 2020 provided a sense of protection in the classroom that seems to be lacking this fall. Still, the College of Arts and Sciences soldiers on.

Although the challenges of teaching in this environment are very real, I have reminded the college that even in the midst of the pandemic we need to continue engaging with our future. As a result, the dedicated faculty members of this college have not stopped designing and teaching great classes with extraordinary high-impact practices embedded within. They have not stopped doing research in their areas of expertise. And they have not stopped inspiring students with their love of their disciplines.

Two exciting initiatives that we are starting this year are the Aquatic Sciences Center and the Digital Humanities Collaborative. The first, housed in the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, will leverage existing faculty expertise in water-related research to create a place for water quality analysis and provide students with related experiential learning opportunities. The second is a venture between several departments in the College of Arts and Sciences, including Art, English, Geography, History, Philosophy, Religion, World Languages and the Ina Dillard Russell Library to provide opportunities for faculty and students to employ digital technology in appropriate coursework. This initiative will increase the availability of high-impact learning practices within the college and build a platform upon which to work with community partners. Local and regional museums, historic districts and arts centers are examples of potential external partners in this initiative.

With luck the devastation of the pandemic will be waning, and we are looking ahead to the future of higher education with our excellent students front and center in our imaginations.

DR. ERIC TENBUS
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

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CONFIDENCE TO SUCCEED:

Underrepresented students share experience with Excellence Scholarship


Terrell Hall

Artistic artifacts on a screen are fascinating, but standing in front of an artifact at an Italian museum is breathtaking. Mya McCoy, '20, was able to enjoy an experience like that after being awarded the Excellence Scholarship her freshmen year.

"I felt encouraged," she said. "I felt like the college really believed that I could succeed."

Not only did receiving the reward boost her self-confidence, but it also lifted some of the financial burden of attending college.

The program's first awards were distributed in 2017, after the College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) Advisory Board prioritized representation of underrepresented students at the university. The Excellence Scholarship program was created from that mission and supports first-year students with exceptional portfolios but who also require financial assistance.

Each year, the board of 18 donors endeavors to raise $15,000 to support the program. Eligible incoming students are identified, and scholarships are awarded based on the guidance of a College Diversity Leadership team subcommittee. McCoy and five other students were the first cohort to receive assistance.

"It's instilled confidence in me and the other students that we were capable of furthering our education and succeeding after college," McCoy said. "It showed they cared, and I really appreciate that."

The scholarship currently consists of $2,000 for freshmen, the cost of a full meal plan. The initiative also reflects a wider initiative at Georgia College to increase diversity among the student body.

"Diversity means not only ethnic diversity, but also economic diversity," said Bob Preston, senior donor engagement officer, COAS. "If you're going to a college with people who only look like you, you're buffered from other opinions."

"It's good to have people who come from other backgrounds to share those backgrounds with you," he said. "That way you have a good representation of what the real world is about, a main reason diversity is important."

McCoy and Adriana Gimeno Felizola, '20, were in the first cohort in 2017. While their degrees are different, the scholarship affected them in much the same way.

Felizola graduated with a bachelor's in psychological science. By the end of her college career, she had a support group of peers and could recognize everyone in her class.

"I don't know what I would've done my freshmen year, because it was so much more expensive to live in the dorms for me," she said. "The scholarship lightened the load, and I didn't have to work that first year. I could actually move on and learn how to be on my own financially."

Now, she's a shift lead at her local Chik-fil-A, where's she's worked since the age of 17. But her aspirations don't stop there.

> "IT'S INSTILLED CONFIDENCE IN ME AND THE OTHER STUDENTS THAT WE WERE CAPABLE OF FURTHERING OUR EDUCATION AND SUCCEEDING AFTER COLLEGE."

Since getting married in April, she's working on making solid ground for her career goals, which include marriage and family counseling.

"I'm focusing on getting stabilized so that my husband and I can both do our next steps," Felizola said. "That's my goal."

McCoy is equally focused. During her time at Georgia College, she was a student ambassador, director of diversity initiatives on campus, in leadership for a campus ministry and joined the leadership board for the college's women's conference in 2019.

After graduating with a bachelor's in liberal studies and philosophy, she took a gap year to rest through the pandemic.

Now, she's working to complete her Master of Library Science at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

"I would love to work at a public library," she said. "For my undergraduate capstone, I helped build many citizen academies for teaching Baldwin County citizens about participating in local government."

"I'd love something in the realm of working with the public through libraries to facilitate that kind of discussion," she said. "I'm open to anything. I'm just here for the ride."

Both alumnae gush with gratitude for the scholarship they received early in their academic careers.

"I'd like to thank the donors for investing in my future and my potential," McCoy said.

With five new scholarships awarded in 2021 and three students of the program returning from 2020, the program is continuously vibrant.

Arleni Arvizu-Garcia was a recipient of an award in 2020, and is currently a sophomore majoring in biology and minoring in Spanish.

The financial freedom she gained through the award has allowed Arvizu-Garcia to pursue her passions in both science and theatrical heritage.

"Without this help, I would be struggling to pay off all the tuition that is needed," she said. "I want to thank the donors for giving to people who are in need, but also for inspiring me to assist students like me in the future. I'm very thankful."

With the intention to become a physician assistant, Arvizu-Garcia's goals include taking part in undergraduate research, studying abroad and, of course, graduating.

"People lending a hand to students who are minorities boosts their confidence and give them a sense of importance," she said. "They're being motivated by people helping them, because they want them to succeed."

Like Arvizu-Garcia, Maria Justo is a recent recruit to the program.

The freshmen psychology major also minors in Spanish and sought opportunities at Georgia College that were not available in her small hometown of Eastman, Georgia.

"I'm a first-generation college student, so if I wouldn't have received this scholarship it would've been hard for me to go to a bigger university like Georgia College," she said. "Having it really did help me pursue my dream, because I've wanted to come here ever since I came to campus."

Still early in her college career, Justo knows one thing for sure: She wants to make mental health more accessible and less stigmatized in Hispanic and minority cultures.

"In some cultures, mental healthcare is looked down on or looked at as a weakness," she said. "It's much more than that, and I want to help different cultures understand the value of it."

With students and graduates like these, the future is looking bright for the Excellence Scholarship program. The university will continue to champion diversity.

"We are hopeful to expand in the future," said COAS Dean Dr. Eric Tenbus. "We're hoping to support the group this year for four years. That's our goal."

"Underrepresented students coming in may not have the ability to study abroad. They may not have thought about it as an option," he said. "We would love for them to have the same opportunities for the GC Journeys experiences that all students have."

With those goals in mind, Emily Beth Thompson, '73, retired Gwinnett County Public School librarian and media specialist, plans to continue her support of the program.

"We're seeing some really brilliant students. They have a lot of ambition," she said. "They really are interested in their fields, and I'd just like to see them go on and be as successful as they possibly can be."

Lizzie Durham and Sally Sir at a collection site near Bocas del Toro, Panama.

Amphipod research: undergraduate students join professor in Panama

Overtime spent in Herty Hall this summer has paid off for one team of Georgia College researchers.

During that time, Assistant Professor Kris White, along with environmental science major Sally Sir and biology major Elizabeth "Lizzie" Durham have been working to identify and image amphipod crustaceans from Bocas del Toro, Panama.

After her scheduled expedition to Panama was canceled due to the pandemic, White has borrowed amphipod material from a colleague collected in 2005. This was to ensure progress on her National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, Understanding Tropical Invertebrate Diversity Through Integrative Revisionary Systematics and Training.

The purpose of the grant is to train students in taxonomy and systematics, while documenting the biodiversity of amphipod crustaceans at Bocas del Toro, Panama. Having access to material, even 16-year-old material, allowed the team to identify and image about 75 species collected from Panama in 2005.

In July, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute began to reopen and invited White to complete her collecting trip. Sir and Durham earned the opportunity to travel to Panama with White in August, after their hard work and dedication was evident from exhaustive hours spent in the lab.

The team spent 10 days in Panama, collecting, identifying and imaging amphipods. The students were able to see where the amphipods came from, learn about their ecology and to appreciate the importance of working with fresh material. Sir had "an amazing experience," and enjoyed meeting all of the scientists at the research station.

"It's surprising how much easier it is to take pictures of fresh amphipods," Sir said.

Over the 10-day period, the team collected, sorted and imaged about 85 amphipod species, an impressive feat for a team of three individuals.

The specimens will be transported to Herty Hall, where the team will continue to identify all of the species collected. They hope to create identification keys that will allow other people to identify the species they find.

In the interest of educating others, White has also created publicly available "how-to" videos for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute channel. The videos describe the techniques needed for amphipod research, enabling other researchers to identify amphipods as bioindicators of changes to their environment.

This opportunity is just one example of a transformative experience students can have at Georgia College.

"Going to Panama and observing the diversity, environment and scientific process that enables us to study amphipods here at Georgia College made learning so much more meaningful," Durham said. "I gained perspective and a depth of understanding that I didn't know that I needed. Field work is an aspect of research that is very minimally discussed, so gaining that experience as an undergraduate felt like a privilege. I left Panama with more information than I ever expected to have."

Sally Sir and Lizzie Durham sort samples in the lab at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

First-ever BBQ competition held by Comfort Farms to support veterans

Member of competing team, Georgia Boys BBQ, seasoning their entry.

To support returning veterans, Comfort Farms hosted its first annual barbeque competition, Q For the Few, on September 4.

Comfort Farms is an agricultural outreach program created by the nonprofit STAG VETS INC. Their mission is to help veterans build their quality of life after war-time service.

After six tours of duty as a Ranger in Iraq and Afghanistan, Jon Jackson is a veteran and the owner of Comfort Farms. Jackson's Comfort Farms Program is known globally, and gained renown by being featured on Chef Andrew Zimmerman's "Bizarre Foods," Paramount Picture's "Wife Swap" and Chef Roger Mooking's "Man, Fire, Food." Jackson has also appeared in John Deere's 2021 advertising campaign.

Students from Dr. Craig Pascoe's Southern Foodways and Traditions class and Dr. James "Trae" Welborn's Introduction to Global Foodways Studies volunteered to assist Comfort Farms with the event. The 28 students worked over Labor Day weekend to complete a number of tasks: clean-up, cooking, set-up and break-down of the event. They assisted in running the judging portion of the contest as well — working at the check-in table, tabulating scores and judging the BBQ entries.

Students (left-to-right) Joel White and Brooks Snow prep Friday for the event with Jon Jackson.

Student Lundy Lader assisting in Friday prep.

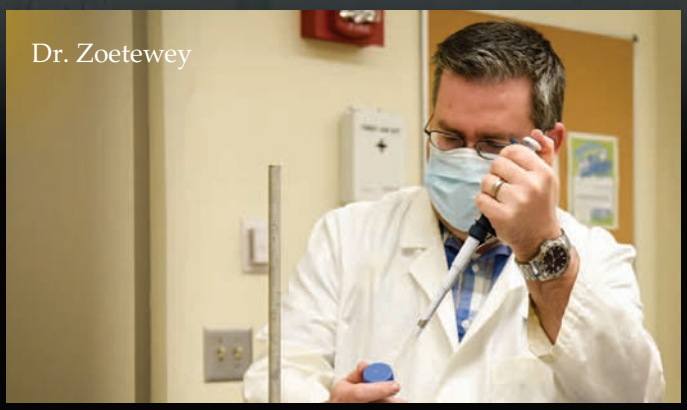
Comfort Farms' BBQ competition sponsorship banner.

Claire Remley and Grand Van Den Berg (left) and Tara Carter (right) judging submissions.

Students (left-to-right) Lori Pope and Madison Cambell checking in with Dr. Craig Pascoe.

Keandre Ambles (left) and Will Lewis (right) enjoying samples.

Taking the spike out of COVID-19: Original coronavirus research conducted at Georgia College


Dr. Zoetewey

Its triangular spikes are what make coronavirus such a formidable foe.

But they could also be its Achilles' heel.

Georgia College Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. David Zoetewey and three students are working to expose this weakness and prevent the virus' spear-like mechanism from harpooning into human cells.

This research could someday result in a medicine that prevents coronavirus from attaching.

"Spike proteins are very important for the virus and its ability to cause infection," Zoetewey said. "Without the spike protein, there is no viral infection. If we can do something that disrupts how the spike protein works, then we can prevent the virus from becoming infectious."

Scientists all over the world are working on COVID-19 — and the spike protein is just one small piece. Every little bit contributes to our understanding of how the virus works, however, and every step is a step in the right direction.

It's important to not only eradicate coronavirus — but also be ready for the next pandemic.

"What made COVID-19 so bad was how fast it spreads, and that's really made it the perfect storm," Zoetewey said.

"It may not be a coronavirus next time. It may be a strain of the flu. It may be something else that we don't even know of yet," he said, "The fact we had SARS and then MERS and now COVID-19 — and they're all coronaviruses from the same family — that tells us coronaviruses have high potential to do this again."

All viruses hijack cells. But the coronavirus known as COVID-19 is particularly cunning, because its pegs act as spears connecting it to other cells. These spikes are proteins, and proteins are built with a sequence of amino acids that dictate their particular shape and movement.

The coronavirus spikes remain folded, until a "a target is recognized," Zoetewey said. Then, one pops out "like a jackknife" to harpoon into a victim cell — effectively taking command. The harpoon is what enables the two cell membranes to fuse together.

"Obviously, this is a really big complicated protein," Zoetewey said. "The function of the spike protein is to attach to the cell it's going to be infecting. The contents of the virus get dumped inside. And, so now you have this RNA that goes inside the cell, and the RNA contains the instructions to make new viruses and cause infection. That's its only purpose."

Scientists know what the spike protein looks like before and after the harpoon effect. But they can only speculate on what occurs in between.

Proteins are so small that even the wavelength of invisible light is much bigger, Zoetewey said. A researcher in China was able to determine the structure of a small piece of the spike protein — called a "coiled-coil"— in 2020 by using X-ray crystallography. From that, Zoetewey noticed he'd seen this kind of coiled-coil before as a doctorate student at the University of Colorado in the early 2000s.

At that time, another outbreak had occurred: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). It had a higher fatality rate than COVID-19 but was quickly contained and died out. Zoetewey's lab collaborated with an expert in coronaviruses, who identified the coils as a "critical piece" of the spike protein.

When COVID-19 spread globally in early 2020, Zoetewey recalled the coiled-coil as "the linchpin to the coronavirus' infectious mechanism." He realized his students could work on this small piece of the puzzle and discover how spikes unfold and thrust into cells.

Freshman chemistry major Gabe Allred of Eatonton, Georgia, said he was amazed to be doing undergraduate research his first year in college. Even more remarkable, he's doing research on a virus that's currently challenging the entire world population.

"I always knew it was a dangerous virus," Allred said, "but it wasn't until I joined Dr. Zoetewey's group that I learned what makes it dangerous, and how exactly it spreads from cell to cell and replicates. This was a very fascinating insight to learn about a very prominent problem."

As a first-year student, it's Allred's job to learn the fundamentals of research and procedures of the coronavirus project. In future years, he'll be stepping into a leading role. But, for now, he shadows two upperclassmen in the lab to learn all he can.

One is sophomore chemistry major Caylee Durden of Statesboro, Georgia. She chose Georgia College for its research opportunities. Her role is to grow and separate the spike protein.

"Although I knew research was available to undergraduates," Durden said, "I didn't know it'd be something this exciting and relevant to today's world, which I think makes it even more interesting and meaningful to me."

Students are not working with the actual coronavirus — just little pieces of the spike protein created from a sequence of amino acids. Spike proteins are made from a chain of 1,300 amino acids. Zoetewey's team is looking at about 100 of these, which make up two separate coiled-coil regions from the spike's stem.

These amino acids are an instructional code given to bacterium, where the proteins can be grown in the lab.

Once Zoetewey's team is able to grow these spike protein fragments in large batches, students will separate them from the bacterium. This is Durden's job. She mixes a "nickel solution" inside test tubes that look aqua in color. Their specific protein attaches to nickel. When another chemical is added, everything washes away except the protein.

The group has worked all semester to set up this isolation protocol and catalogue the steps. The next phase would involve a Nuclear Magnetic Resonance machine (NMR), which Zoetewey hopes to purchase with a collaborative grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The machine will take pictures of the spike protein in its native state and provide "a living picture" of its movement and function.

Each NMR picture looks like a "spectrum of dots"— basically individual atoms that tell researchers how proteins interact with one another and create movement.

It's "a long game of connect-the-dots," Zoetewey said. With help from a colleague at the University of Oklahoma, who has a stronger NMR, he hopes to learn how the spike unfolds and harpoons.

"The ultimate outcome is way down the line," Zoetewey said. "By looking at the way all these atoms interact with each other, we can potentially design a molecule that would prevent the harpoon interaction from taking place."

"If we keep it from attaching, the coronavirus would just sit there and eventually come back off," he said. "It wouldn't be able to do anything. The RNA would never get inside the human cell. It'd probably circulate for a while until it's recognized by your defenses as a foreign invader and your body would just clear it out."

Summer Internship:

Geography student uses 'geospatial' skills to make transportation safe

It may sound like an intergalactic maneuver in space, but geospatial science is about collecting, incorporating and managing geographic data. It's used for a variety of purposes like mapping roads, improving transportation safety or evaluating population growth.

Geospatial scientists explore connections between the community and the environment, helping to predict patterns and trends.

With such a widespread span of uses, then, it's helpful for students to get experience in the field before delving into geospatial careers.

Regan Kitchens of Marietta, Georgia, is doing just that. The recent graduate earned a degree in environmental science with a minor in Geology. Her internship with Middle Georgia Regional Commission (MGRC) in Macon, Georgia, is the final requirement for getting her Geographic Information Science certificate (GISc). Her internship has already helped improve local transportation and pedestrian safety, according to Dr. Doug Oetter, professor of geography and coordinator of Georgia College's GISc certificate program.

"We recognize that our students are well-prepared for careers in geospatial science," Oetter said. "But having an internship with a local agency, business or organization sets them apart from other students, because it allows them to learn more about how to apply their skills in actual work situations."

"I'm very excited for Regan," he added. "Her work is very methodical and complicated, but she'll learn how to be efficient in data collection, analysis and presentation. These are the essential techniques of most geospatial projects, and Regan will accomplish a lot through her efforts. Just as important, she'll also be contributing a great service to the citizens of Middle Georgia."

Georgia College students often get important and meaningful internships, where they complete essential tasks that support public agencies like MGRC. Their liberal arts education bolsters their confidence and skills, readying them for such positions.

Last fall, Regan took Oetter's Geospatial Data Management class and mapped air quality in seven Southeastern states. Her work was "truly insightful," Oetter said, "as it revealed geographic patterns of carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and ozone pollution."

"Regan exemplifies the strengths of applying a mapping perspective to understanding complex environmental data," he said. "She is a delight to work with in every regard, but it has been a special pleasure to guide her through advanced spatial analysis investigations. She has combined her passion for helping protect the environment with some very powerful geospatial skills to perform detailed investigations across large areas."

Oetter helped Kitchens find the internship at MGRC, which covers 12 counties including Baldwin, Jones and Wilkinson. It's a paid full-time position. Kitchens was nervous about applying and competed against other candidates for the job. But she received the offer and now works on project REVAMP (Roadway Element Validation and Mapping Program) with the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT).

Her job is to improve existing data and identify changes in the roadway system. Kitchens analyzes data from each county, scrutinizing roads for crosswalks, pedestrian signals, street parking, turning lanes, sidewalks and school zones. She uses ArcGIS Pro and Google Street View to

Regan Kitchens, right, helps examine a map at Middle Georgia Regional Commission in Macon, Georgia.

find these features. It's a time-consuming task. Each attribute is marked for location. Then, the information's added to the database.

Many local counties are small and don't have funding to do this kind of geographic mapping on their own. This makes the job even more fulfilling.

"Roads are constantly being updated and this new information strengthens our knowledge of Georgia's road network," Kitchens said. "Having this comprehensive, road characteristic information will make it easier to create maps in the future, and it'll allow for local funding of roads to be correctly distributed."

"Before college, I had no idea what GIS was or how it worked," she said. "I am very proud of how far I've come and how much I have achieved. I see myself using GIS in my future jobs, because it has so many different aspects it can be used for."

Theatre wins prestigious awards for social justice production

Georgia College's Theatre and Dance Department has won highly-esteemed awards for last fall's production of "Giving Voice: A Black Lives Matter Musical."

The awards were for "Best Social Justice Film" from Silk Road Film Awards Cannes — a monthly worldwide competition for independent filmmakers and writers — and "Best Feature Film" from the Canadian Diversity Film Festival.

At the Cannes World Film Festival, the film won "Best Human Rights Film," "Best Social Justice Feature Film" and "Best Cause-Driven Film." It was featured in the September 12th Silk Road Film Awards Cannes at the Palais des Festivals and Congresses, which required a brochure synopsis of the film. This brochure was translated into French by the Department Chair of World Languages and Cultures, Dr. Libby Murphy.

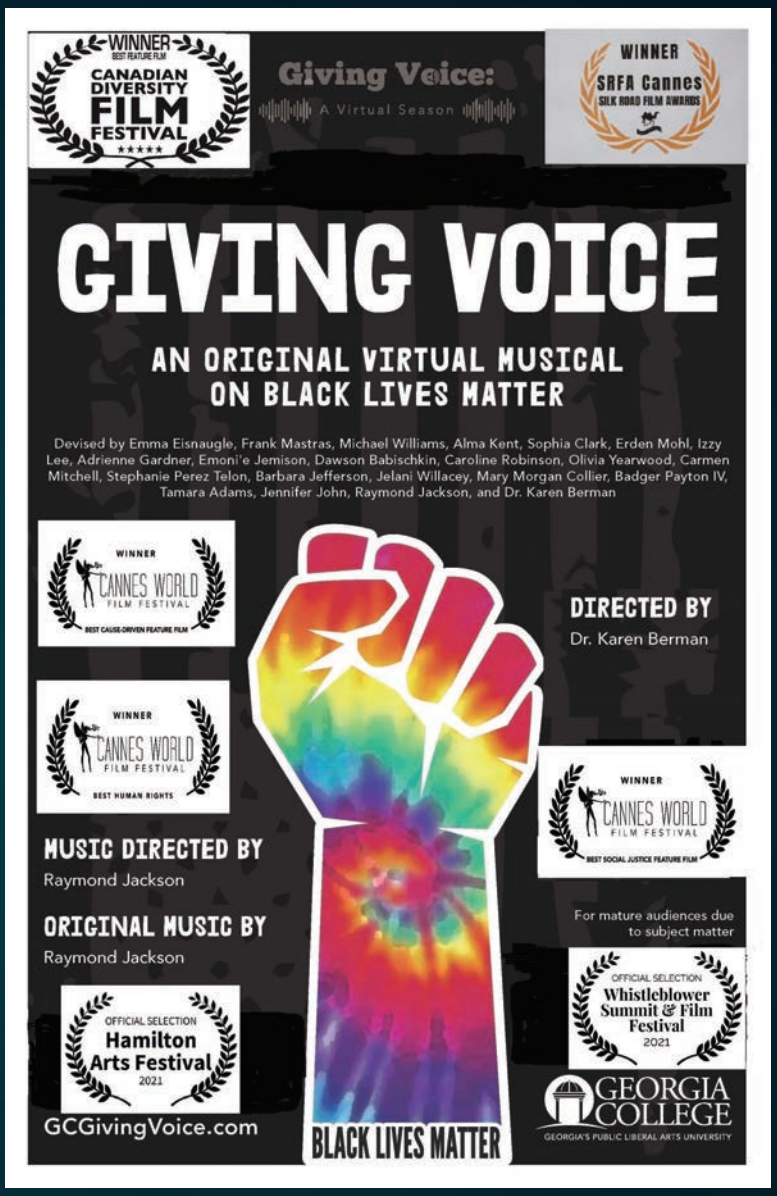
It was also a featured film at the Hamilton Film Festival in Paterson, New Jersey, with a showing this past Juneteenth. In addition, it was a Selected Film at the Whistleblower's Summit and Film Festival in Washington, D.C., with keynote speaker Daniel Ellsberg — who disclosed the Pentagon Papers.

"The Department of Theatre and Dance is honored to have 'Giving Voice' recognized with these two awards," said Eric Griffis, interim chair for the department. "'Giving Voice' was devised by students under the guidance of Dr. Karen Berman, whose commitment to theatre for social change helped shape our program over the last 13 years. Our goal is to continue producing theatre that explores themes of social justice and equity."

Berman retired in January 2021. Her production was among many honors given recently at Cannes, including other category wins by films from France, Argentina, Switzerland, Singapore and Romania. Georgia College's "Giving Voice" was one of many plays that were filmed, not staged, on campus last year for safety during COVID-19. The university's theatre was one of few nationwide still operating during the pandemic.

Dozens of undergraduate students helped research, write, compose dialogue and choreograph the musical. They filmed "under the most trying of circumstances" Berman said, using equipment purchased in the fall with the help of Dr. Costas Spirou, provost and vice president of Academic Affairs, and Dr. Eric Tenbus, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Spirou noted "It is wonderful to see the student contributions and artistic achievements resulting in these international awards. They recognize the high level of talent and commitment to student success of our Georgia College faculty."



The 25 singers were filmed individually in a small sound booth for safety and distance precautions. First, they were filmed to capture audio, then to capture "visual lip sync" for each song, Berman remarked. Next, Haley Fusia, a Georgia College theatre graduate who has a master's in film, synced the singers visually and vocally together into the film. Some scenes looked like music videos.

The theme song was "Unity" by guest artist musical director Raymond Darius Jackson. Griffis designed the costumes; associate professor Isaac Ramsey was scenic designer; and professor Bea Czogalla was production manager.

"We did all of the writing, memorizing and rehearsing on Zoom, before going into filming live one person at a time for safety," Berman said. "Keith Bergeron and Clay Garland were our directors of photography, and neither had done anything like this before. So, we're all pretty proud of the ingenuity shown during the pandemic, especially when many theatres schools shut down productions altogether."

"I am so proud of our GC Theatre faculty, staff and students who produced this original film with their creativity, hard work and perseverance in a difficult year," she said.

In addition, Berman said it was "very gratifying" to receive these awards just after a conviction was reached in the George Floyd case.

On November 25, "Giving Voice: A Black Lives Matter Musical" will be screened at the Canadian Diversity Film Festival in Toronto. The public can view the film at https://gcgivingvoice.com/.

Newell Scholar brings racial justice expertise to Georgia College

In spring 2021, the College of Arts and Sciences welcomed its ninth Martha Daniel Newell Visiting Scholar, Dr. Andrew Jewett. Dr. Jewett holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of California at Berkeley and was hosted by the Department of History and Geography.

His course, Identity and Inequality, explored the concept of race from biological, anthropological, economic and religious histories while incorporating the contexts of colonialism, immigration, oppression and activism. The course drew interest from students in disciplines across Georgia College.

Dr. Jewett has taught at several leading universities, including a decade at Harvard, three years at Boston College and shorter positions at Yale, New York City and Vanderbilt.

Dr. Jewett's research focuses on historical studies of cultural authority, specifically regarding race, science, technology and politics. His publications in these areas are extensive, including books "Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War" (Cambridge, 2012) and "Science Under Fire: Challenges to Scientific Authority in Modern America" (Harvard, 2020). He is also the author of more than a dozen peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and has given numerous presentations and invited talks.

He has held fellowships from the American Academy for the Arts & Sciences, the Cornell Society for the Humanities, the National Academy of Education and the National Humanities Center. While at Georgia College, his talks and programmatic events centered around social movements, science skepticism, race in U.S. politics and environmental justice. His current book project is "The Discovery of Environmental Justice."

Native Sons Lost exhibit honors Milledgeville's Vietnam veterans

Top Row (left-to-right): James F. Ray, Marion E. Johnson, James R. Etheridge, Jimmy Bedgood, Willie Lee Freeman
Bottom Row (left-to-right): Ben W. Howell, Charles A. Fraley, Earl E. Shannon, Donald C. Cordle

Students of Dr. Jim Schiffman's spring 2021 Vietnam War in the Media course helped create an online exhibit honoring the nine servicemen from Milledgeville, Georgia, killed in the Vietnam War.

"This moving exhibition pays tribute to those lost so long ago and so far from home in southeast Asia," said Dr. Eric Tenbus, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and professor of history. "It is a wonderful example of a digital humanities project involving students in primary research and using digital technology in a way that serves and honors the local community."

The students were tasked with researching the nine servicemen as a final project in the course. They dug up newspaper articles, found other archival material and interviewed relatives and servicemen who served alongside the Milledgeville heroes.

The students worked closely with Evan Leavitt, manager of facilities operations and planning at the Ina Dillard Russell Library, and Holly Croft, associate professor of library science and digital archivist. Over the summer, Leavitt combined the narratives written by students with his own research to create the online exhibit called Native Sons Lost.

For those who wish to experience the exhibit, it can be found online by visiting:

https://specialcollectionsgalleries.gcsu.edu/killed-in-action/

Dr. Mills, right, in chemistry lab with student.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION GRANT FOR LOW INCOME STUDENTS

A highly competitive grant — the largest ever received by Georgia College from the National Science Foundation (NSF) — will help students who want to pursue chemistry or physics but lack the financial resources.

The NSF recently awarded Georgia College's Department of Chemistry, Physics and Astronomy a $650,000 S-STEM grant, covering a five-year period. It provides eligible incoming students up to $8,000 per year, a total of $32,000 over four years, as part of a multi-pronged approach designed to attract and retain chemistry and physics majors.

"More than 65 percent of funds will directly benefit students by offsetting their education costs," said Dr. Chavonda Mills, former chair of chemistry, physics and astronomy.

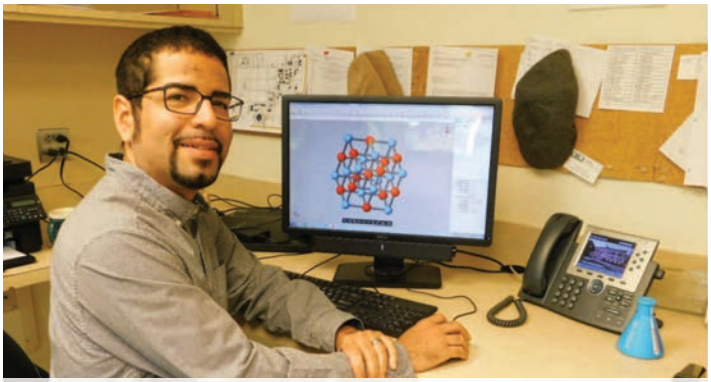
"That's what excites me," she said. "We are able to make higher education accessible to academically talented and low-income students with demonstrated financial need, who want to pursue degrees in chemistry and physics."

Remaining funds will provide enrichment activities to support the S-STEM Scholars and build on proven successful practices that increase retention and graduation rates.
The grant — titled "Increasing Graduation Rates of Undergraduate Chemistry and Physics Majors by Connecting College to Careers"— is a collaborative effort involving faculty in chemistry, physics and the College of Education. To implement the grant, a cohort-based model will be used that includes activities like monthly "Lunch-N-Learn" events, early access to research, a mentorship program, internships and qualitative assessment.

Georgia College received the grant, in part, because of its proven successful model that offers a quality education experience for all students, especially those from historically marginalized groups. Underrepresented students perform at a high rate at Georgia College. They remain in college and graduate at higher rates. Undergraduate students at Georgia College have higher retention and graduation rates than their peers, as well — a success partly due to an elevated level of engagement the university offers all students.

Students engage in research early on, and GC Journeys prompts them to undergo five transformative experiences in college such as study abroad, service learning, community service or internships.

Mills finalized the NSF application during COVID lockdowns last spring, while also leading her department to online instruction. She was "elated" when the award was announced.



Dr. Peter Rosado Flores

"A lot of time and effort went into submitting this grant," she said. "But, knowing it will be life changing for these students, that time and effort was more than worthwhile."

Admissions will advertise the S-STEM Scholarship and recruit students with financial need who have strong academic backgrounds. Scholarship recipients will be grouped into cohorts, like nursing and education majors. Using a cohort model is known to improve student retention and build comradery, removing feelings of isolation.

This fall, there'll be one cohort of about nine students for chemistry and physics. The cohort will take part in a half-day enrichment program with a concluding ceremony, where scholars will be given embroidered lab coats. They'll be encouraged to form study groups, volunteer for service learning activities and take part in monthly Lunch-N-Learn events. These activities will build a "sense of community" among scholars and "hopefully lead to increased retention," Mills said.

S-STEM Scholars will also have opportunities to participate in undergraduate research early on and be assigned mentors.

Dr. Peter Rosado Flores, assistant professor of chemistry, and Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge, assistant professor of physics, will design and teach research method courses that cover scientific communication skills. They'll find and assign mentors for S-STEM Scholars and encourage students to take advantage of other support services on campus.

"One reason I'm excited about receiving this grant is it validates the work we have already done in several aspects of this program, including recruitment, undergraduate research and career placement which built a trust with NSF that we are well-prepared to manage the program," Mahabaduge said.

"This sure will be a great opportunity, not only for our incoming students," he said, "but also for the university to attract and retain academically talented students."

Rosado Flores echoed those sentiments, saying "I'm excited about this endeavor from a recruitment and retention standpoint. We will be able to offer unique experiences, as well as support, to students who show financial need and recruit them. This will enhance the diversity of our chemistry and physics programs and the university in general."

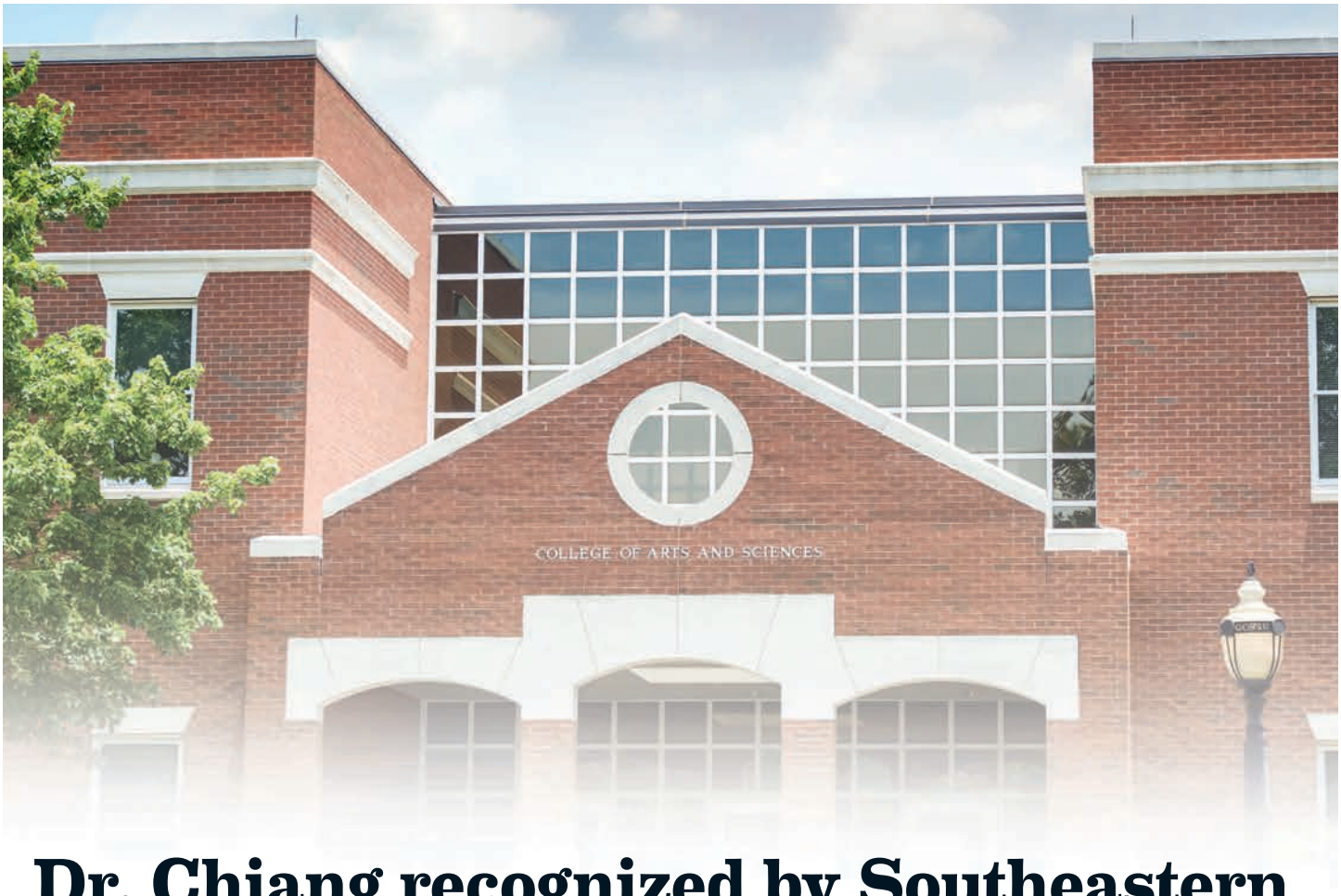
Summer internships are built into the program. S-STEM Scholars will have the opportunity to participate in internships together as a group after their sophomore or junior years. These will be with existing partnerships like the Center for Disease Control or Georgia Bureau of Investigation in Atlanta and others, as well as new opportunities that will be established through the Career Center to meet student interest. Part of the NSF grant can be used for internship housing allowance, which is a new feature for Georgia College students.

Throughout, the success of the S-STEM program will be evaluated by Dr. Rui Kang, associate professor of secondary education. Kang will use focus groups and pre- and post-surveys, as well as track student performance and meet with professors to access their perspective on the program's effectiveness.
Every component is proven to work with students who have financial need, Mills said. NSF reviewers looked for proposals that were based on successful models.

Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge, right, in the physics lab with students.

"We're not by any means reinventing the wheel," Mills said. "We relied on the Georgia College infrastructure, building upon effective practices known to help increase retention and degree completion."

"Ultimately, we're looking to address the need for a high-quality STEM workforce by increasing the success of academically talented low-income students pursuing degrees in chemistry and physics," she said. "At the core of this goal is creating an environment that is welcoming, supportive and inclusive of all students."



Dr. Chiang recognized by Southeastern Psychological Association as the winner of the 2020 Mentor Award

The Southeastern Psychological Association (SEPA) is the Southeastern region's premier organization for professional and academic Psychologists. SEPA is a regional psychological association affiliated with the American Psychological Association (APA). Each year, the SEPA conducts a call for nominations for the SEPA Mentor Award as part of its annual meeting activities. In 2020, there was a record number (30) of very strong nominations for this award. The association was pleased to announce that the 2020 winner of the Mentor Award was Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang. Dr. Chiang's exceptional mentoring activities and her involvement with the SEPA make her an outstanding choice for this honor.

Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang presenting her Mentor Award during a virtual meeting.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How one double-major went from The Gardening Club to Newman Civic Fellow

For Savannah Taylor, a junior double-major in Economics and World Languages and Cultures, gardening was more about the mud than about sustainability. She grew up in the suburbs outside of Atlanta, Georgia, where she and her parents would spend afternoons cultivating vegetables and greens. It was this natural affinity she brought with her to Georgia College where she quickly joined the Gardening Club. She didn't expect that her personal hobby could lead to her to being named one of Campus Compact's 290 students who make up the 2021-2022 cohort of Newman Civic Fellows.

"A lot of people are kind of surprised by that! I meet a lot of people who think, 'Oh, she must be an environmental science major,' but none of the career paths I'm looking at are, I would say, inherently environmentally related," Taylor says. For her, the Newman Civic Fellowship is about learning how sustainability filters throughout every facet of our lives. Gardening is just the fun part.

The Newman Civic Fellowship selects leaders from Campus Compact member institutions, like Georgia College, who demonstrate creative ways of solving challenges facing communities locally, nationally, and internationally. Taylor has been the president of the Gardening Club for a couple of years now, running an active group of around 20 people and a rotating interest group of about 40.

Since the pandemic, she's seen a rapid spike in interest from students in sustainability."COVID has shed some light on this, as you know; people come to college, especially their freshman year, and they're going through all these changes. I think so many people come out to my work days and discover how relaxing gardening can be."

In addition to the meditative effects of gardening, the pandemic has led to more students understanding the need for environmental accountability and awareness.

"We're a very lucky organization for the pandemic because most of the work we do is outside," Taylor says, "so in terms of continuing our normal workdays, we've limited capacity and people wear masks, but other than that it hasn't been a huge roadblock."

Through gardening, Taylor was introduced to the Georgia College Office of Sustainability where she now works part-time while pursuing majors vastly divergent from that kind of work. "I think we all get in these bubble of like, 'this is what I'm doing and this is my concentration.' We get focused on the work that we do, but it's really cool to step outside of that and say, 'oh, what I'm doing is really important, but what they're doing is also really cool and important!'"

Through pursuing these creative connections between academic disciplines, Taylor reached out to professors Marianna Stoyanova and Aurora Castillo-Scott for guidance on a paper about the impact of

> The experience of the last year has driven home to all of us that we need open-minded, innovative, public-spirited thinkers and doers.
>
> Campus Compact President Andrew Seligsohn

drug operations on the Columbian lexicon, which she was later invited to present at the 24th annual Conference on the Americas and was awarded a certificate of recognition. This divergence of ideas is exactly what the Newman Civic Fellowship looks to promote.

"The experience of the last year has driven home to all of us that we need open-minded, innovative, public-spirited thinkers and doers. That is what Campus Compact is about, and the stories of our Newman Civic Fellows demonstrate it's who they are," said Campus Compact President Andrew Seligsohn.

Although much of the current fellowship is virtual, Taylor expects that there will be opportunities for in-person events later this year. For the time being, she's happy about the exchange of ideas she's been getting from other fellows within the cohort.

"There was one woman on there who was saying that she used to be in the military and afterward went to college so she's now doing work that's a kind of bridge between the two. That was really interesting, just all kinds of branches of civic work and a lot of issues that you wouldn't normally see."

More than the accolades and accomplishments, Taylor enjoys filling her life with endeavors that leave her feeling complete at the end of the day. Beyond the Newman Civic Fellowship, she won't be surprised to find herself doing international or domestic work, nonprofit or concentrated organizations. Savannah Taylor proves that there really are no limits when you think outside of the gardening planter.

Music therapy students present at third annual Posters at the Capitol event

Music therapy students Avery Garrett, Renata Kuswanto, Abigail Hearn and Sidney Johnson were four of the six Georgia College students selected to present scholarly work at the third annual Posters at the Capitol event.

This is the second year in a row that music therapy students have represented Georgia College during this prestigious statewide event, which is organized by the PaC Steering Committee of the Georgia Undergraduate Research Collective (GURC).

This year the event was held virtually through Gather, a spatial video conferencing app. The app allowed students to "gather" in the Capitol and virtually descend the rotunda steps to their poster presentation location. Despite the limitations of virtual spaces, students who attended were still able to share their work meaningfully with others.

Although music therapy was established as a profession in 1950, many people are still unaware of the therapeutic benefits of music. Thus, music therapy training includes advocating for the profession. The Capitol event became a platform for students to practice that skill.

"I felt proud knowing that I was advocating for our profession," said Hearn, junior music therapy major. "My favorite moment was when a state legislator came to my poster and started asking me a bunch of insightful questions. That encounter made me realize I was making a difference by educating people about the profession."

Music therapy faculty Susan Craig and Katie Whipple mentored these students through a junior level music therapy practicum course. There, students collected observational data using a single case study design and helped clients with music-based interventions to improve specific skill areas, including expressive communication and self-esteem. The students evaluated the data and several saw improvements in their clients.

"The students are able to have a meaningful conversation with the representatives and explain the importance of music therapy to the community," Craig said.

It is this type of engaged learning that draws students to Georgia College.

"Part of what drew me to Georgia College was the opportunity for undergraduate research," said Garrett, senior music therapy major. "With involved faculty members, I have had the opportunity to develop and conduct my own research study beginning my first year."

But even beyond the classroom, experiences like this contribute to personal discovery and fulfillment.

"Posters at the Capitol will no doubt help me to achieve future research goals," said Johnson, junior music therapy major. "The experience has continued to shape my academic ambitions and love for undergraduate research."

The event was made possible through work by the PaC Committee and the Georgia Undergraduate Research Collective, including by Dr. Doreen Sams, Dr. Jordan Cofer and Dr. Robin Lewis.

"The event built my self-esteem to be courageous, and believe in my potential," said Kuswanto, junior music therapy major and international student.

Music Therapy Students and faculty mentor (left-to-right), Susan Craig, Abigail Hearn, Renata Kuswanto, Sidney Johnson, Katie Whipple and Avery Garrett (not pictured) were selected to present their observational research at the third annual Posters at the Capitol Event.

Part of what drew me to Georgia College was the opportunity for undergraduate research with involved faculty members. I have had the opportunity to develop and conduct my own research study beginning my first year.

— Avery Garrett

Music Therapy Students (left-to-right), Abigail Hearn, Renata Kuswanto, Sidney Johnson and Avery Garrett (not pictured) were selected to present their observational research at the third annual Posters at the Capitol Event.

Georgia College art students create watercolor prints for kids in Cameroon

You can learn a lot from a simple sketch. And, sometimes a small effort can make a big difference.

Georgia College art students are making that kind of impact on a classroom in Cameroon, where students share one box of crayons.

Georgia College was one of 30 schools and universities nationwide to participate in the Cameroon effort through the international nonprofit, "The Memory Project." Fourteen students in Matt Forrest's advanced printmaking class received photos of artwork from ninth graders in the Central African country. Through interpretation and research, they reimagined the art into something new. Water-colored ink prints will soon be shipped back to Cameroon for students there to keep.

Once the package arrives, young artists in Cameroon will send their original work for Georgia College students to keep. Junior studio art major Maya Whipple of Gordon, Georgia, already knows where she's going to keep hers on a wall in her bedroom. "Things you create have a longer-lasting impact than you think," Whipple said, "It's been a very rewarding experience to have an impact on these children, who we've never even seen before. It's just amazing to think about bringing somebody else joy and happiness through a simple picture."

The project was a little like detective work — trying to find clues in a drawing to discover the artist's intention. All Whipple received was a drawing of a man, woman and two children standing near what looked like a shield. She also got a photo of the boy who drew the picture. He wasn't smiling.

To understand why, Whipple researched and discovered Cameroon was recently involved in war. She thought the boy might've experienced hardships. His shield may have been his way of showing strength. Aside from yellow boots people were wearing, Whipple said the boy's drawing wasn't colorful.

To show him she'd noticed his workmanship, Whipple incorporated the yellow boots into her watercolor print. To help him find hope and peace, she drew four adorable children holding up the world against the flag colors of his country.

Through this, Whipple learned art has meaning — not only for


BLUE HAWK

the artist but also their viewers. From now on, she intends to put more thought into what's happening in her life and how that's conveyed in her work. She also plans to apply for a Fulbright scholarship and someday teach English in Cameroon.

Her classmate, Laurie Gentry of Trion, Georgia, was profoundly moved by this project. As a studio art major with a minor in psychology, Gentry wants to help others through art therapy. She believes art is a powerful tool for community service.

She was struck by the photo of her Cameroon student, an unsmiling girl. She thought about the one box of crayons the girl shared and how few colors were used in the flower drawing. Gentry wanted to make the girl smile. She decided to use more colors and flowers in her variation of the picture.

"People say you can never get back the creativity and optimism you once had as a child," Gentry said. "Doing this allowed me to capture that back for myself and make something whimsical enough for a child to enjoy."

"This was an opportunity to reach out to someone I'd never be able to connect with by myself," she said. "It's really great to help people in any way you can, especially children. They deserve the most, and they need to be encouraged. It's great we were put in touch with an obscure place and got the chance to help be a part of that community."

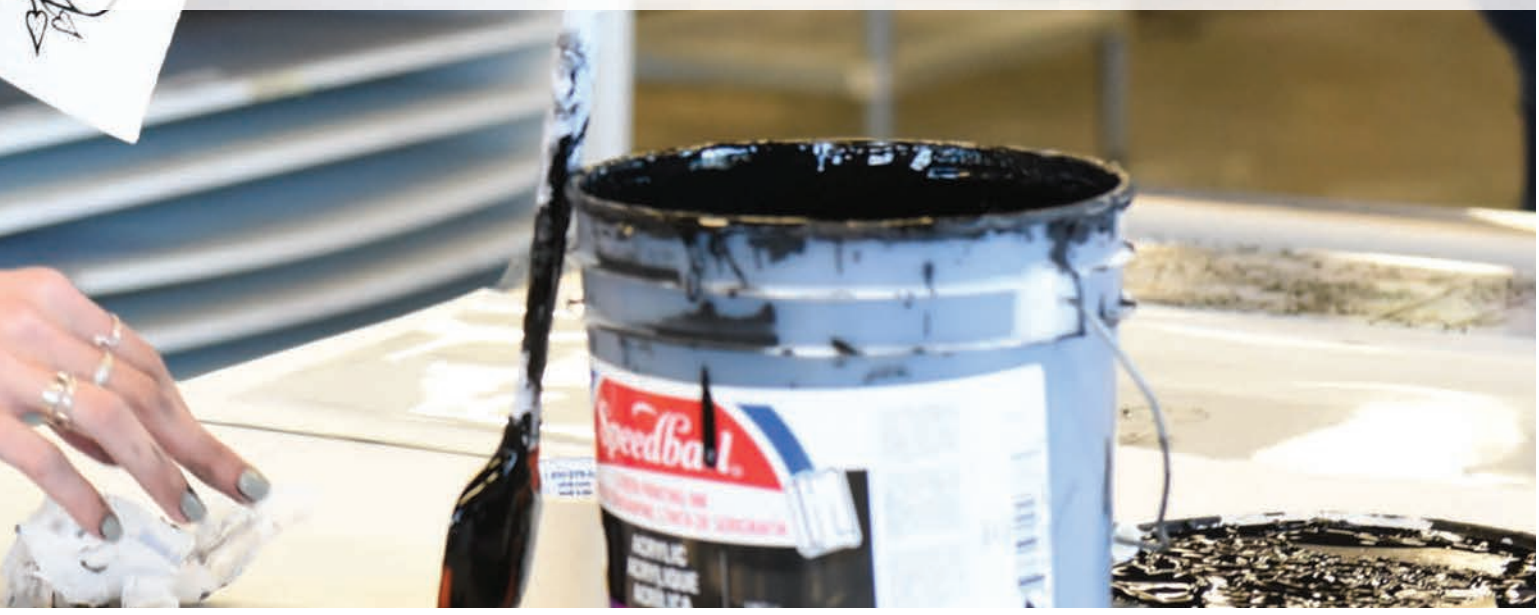
Forrest said he's proud of his students' work. They had only three class sessions to work on their pieces for the art exchange. He chose prints and watercolors, because The Memory Project only ships lightweight paper — no canvas, wood or clay. Due to time constraints, printmaking is relatively quick and nontoxic too.

No contact information was given for students in Cameroon. To make the project more personal, Forrest had his students trace their hand on the back and sign their names. The children will feel respected and valued, he said, knowing people in the United States saw their art and were inspired to produce their own.

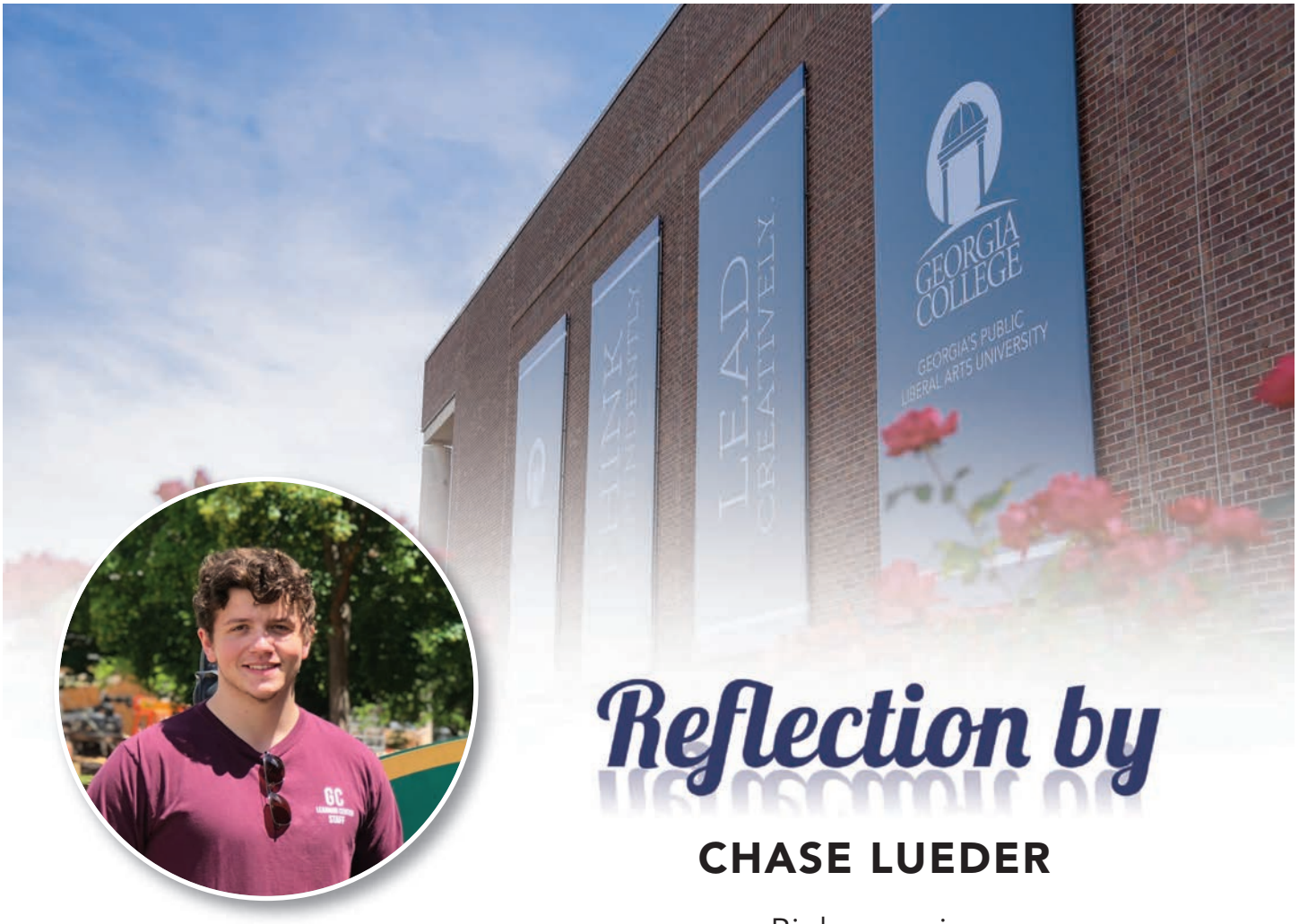
"The idea that art can impact an international community through something they've done here in Milledgeville is incredibly vital," he said. "What my students in the advanced screen-printing class did will basically impact the lives of others for the rest of their lives. It's a huge project that requires a very small effort. It doesn't take a lot — but it's something that will last forever."

Senior art studio major Emily Sabonis-Chafee of Rowell, Georgia, said the project made her realize how art can be used to improve lives. She noticed her Cameroon student loved colors. She incorporated his use of a scroll and flowers into her print, turning his hearts into heart-shaped leaves.

"I love just being able to interpret this my own way and imagine his reaction," Sabonis-Chafee said. "I think he'll really enjoy that an artist is replicating his drawing. I like to think he'll be excited to have that piece, because it's from something he drew."



Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) in students' own words



Reflection by

CHASE LUEDER

Biology major

This summer I had the honor of participating in a biomedical research REU at Augusta University called the 'STAR' program. I engaged with cutting-edge biomedical research in cardiology led by Dr. Ryan Harris, in which we studied the vasoactive properties of insulin at the Georgia Prevention Institute for eight weeks.

My research focused on how fasting insulin concentration can predict endothelial function among different demographics. At the end of the program, I gave a final presentation on my research to faculty of the Augusta University Graduate School and the Medical College of Georgia. I was awarded the M. Ebad Hasan Memorial Award for outstanding character and industriousness displayed during the program. The experience allowed me a great exposure to clinical research in cardiology, which aligns well with my aspiration to attend medical school. This opportunity was made possible by mentorship of the wonderful biology faculty at Georgia College. Dr. Ellen France, who helped me present myself as a competitive candidate for the STAR program, led to my acceptance into the program as one of only seven students. After which I succeeded with distinguished honors.

Reflection by

SHERREE CLARK-METCALF

Psychology major

This summer, myself and nine other students were selected from 200 applicants to participate in an eight-week virtual Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU), funded by the National Science Foundation.

The REU was hosted by The Ohio State University (OSU) and called The Language of Science and the Science of Language. This program had two components: a research experience and an educational outreach element.

For the research experience, I worked on an existing research project with another undergraduate student and our mentor, an OSU faculty member and graduate student. The project focused on cross-dialect accommodation of Dress vowels and exploring how convergence and divergence plays a role during a conversation.

For the research project, my partner and I created a poster of our findings, which we then presented at the end of the eight weeks to OSU faculty, students, guests and friends.

The outreach component consisted of myself and my partner making an engaging video on the myths and facts of second language learning to best educate the public. The outreach component gave me hands-on experience with science communication.

Throughout the REU, I attended interactive workshops that focused on learning more about the language sciences, as well as listening to guest speakers share their life and career experiences.

Overall, the experience was beneficial and informative. I gained professional skills through mentorship, research skills through working in a collaborative environment and professional development advice about jobs and graduate school. I highly encourage all students to apply to for an REU.

Reflection by

EVAN DUNNAM

Physics major

Over the summer, I worked with Dr. Hasitha Mahabaduge in partnership with the University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL) in materials research. I was lucky enough to be able to work alongside a research professor from UNL, Professor Xiaoshan Xu, during the experience, even though I was working remotely from Georgia College.

Through weekly meetings on Zoom, Dr. Mahabaduge and I were able to talk through the next steps of the research with Professor Xu. Our research comprised data analysis of an iron-based material that researchers at UNL have been examining for a few years. The material, if found to be suitable, could be used in next-generation hard drives, giving computers faster and more energy efficient storage capabilities. It was my responsibility to look through the data provided from previous research on this particular compound and create graphs that demonstrate the efficiency of this material.

The experience I had with UNL's summer research program was amazing, and it was eye-opening to see what being involved in such research meant. Through the 10 weeks of research, I feel as though I gained many new skills and became a much better researcher.

It was also great to see that much of the equipment used at UNL to collect data is also accessible at Georgia College. I would absolutely recommend such an experience to anyone looking to get involved in research, and I hope to be doing similar work again this coming summer!

Multimedia journalist creates awareness through works

Parks with then President of Kurdistan Masoud Bargain (center) and Mayor Kak Krmanj of Soran at Soran University's soccer stadium eight days before Iraqi Kurdistan's vote to negotiate independence from Iraq.

As a young child, Jessie Parks, '08, knew she wanted to be an artist. Since that time, she never looked back or questioned her decision to major in that field.

"I loved my time at Georgia College," she said. "The work I did for my senior capstone was my favorite project, which was a blend of photography and drawing."

At the time, Parks' mother was sick with a brain tumor.

"The downward spiral that led to my mom's permanent paralysis from the waist down began the same year I took my first photography class," she said, admitting she had no interest in photography. "We were just required to take a class outside our discipline. But, I became immediately intrigued with how the camera could document my mother's life and the story of what my family was going through."

She continued photographing through college and took all the digital photography classes offered. Her mother's story became her final project at Georgia College.

Parks' favorite teacher was the late Dr. Tina Yarborough, professor of art history. Yarborough informed Parks how powerful she felt her pictures were depicting the struggles she and her family endured as her mother's health deteriorated.

Yarborough was familiar with Parks' senior capstone project while she worked on it.

"After the gallery opening, I remember Dr. Yarborough telling me how much it meant to her," she said. "That affected me because I looked up to her."

Parks was living in Iraq in 2016 and 2017 when she received a text about Yarborough passing away.

"I was really sad to have not seen her before her passing," Parks

said. "I think the biggest thing was that she always made me feel like my work and opinion made a valuable contribution to discussions in and out of class."

Parks loved going by Yarborough's office to talk, because she was always so lively and welcoming.

"Her affirmation played a role in my work, even after graduation," Parks said.

"Dr. Yarborough always made me think deeply about things, even if we disagreed," she said. "She asked a lot of questions. You take memories of people like her with you through the years."

She recalled other professors from Georgia College she'll likewise not forget, like photography Professor Emily Gomez and Patrick Holbrook.

Since Georgia College, Parks was worked as a freelance multimedia journalist, adding video and audio to her skillset.

"Having different tools to tell stories enables you to reach the widest audience and cross various platforms," she said. "Some people are more willing to engage a story told in a quick photo caption while others prefer a long-form film."

Parks is drawn to social issues. Much of her work in recent years has focused on immigration, migration and refugees in America and the Middle East.

"Decrying injustices will always play a role in my work," she said. "Chronicling the forcibly displaced matters, because mass migrations unjustly impact the world's poorest and the uprooted. The wealthiest nations, particularly America, are confronted with over 200 years of systemic racism and over-prosecution compounded by politically motivated aggression against not only their safety but value as human beings."

Parks' "American Journey's" project took her and journalist Katy Long through 21 states, photographing and telling stories of more than 100 migrants, locals, academics and historians. Their work has been featured in The Guardian and the Overseas Development Institute in London.

Parks photographs men gathered inside a home at the Azadi Syrian Refugee Camp in the Rawanduz region of Northern Iraq. (June 28, 2017)

Parks' work captures her subjects' lives and provides a window into their situation in a way that makes them relatable. She sees them as fellow human beings.

"The power of the camera is it can usher viewers into the lives of people in a way that is not possible through text," she said. "In my early days at Georgia College, I learned the camera could give a voice to the suffering or unheard."

She's been doing that ever since.

"Which is why I moved to northern Iraq in the middle of the Syrian crisis," Parks said. "I went there to help the west understand what's going on there and help bring aid to those in need."

Currently, Parks lives in Washington, D.C. Her time is spent on multimedia journalism, pursuing a Master of Arts in new media photojournalism from the Cochran School of the Arts & Design at George Washington University. Her projected graduation is May 2022.

"I'm tapping the brakes on the freelance world to put my work under scrutiny and push myself with collaborative projects," she said. "There's a creative buzz that happens in environments like these, especially in D.C."

Parks' time at Georgia College and as a freelance multimedia journalist has shown her the power of storytelling with the camera.

"I'm not interested in frontline war stories alone, but the daily grind — the very human aspect of life that spans all cultures, even in a war zone," she said. "Everyone wants their children to get a good education. Everyone in the world wakes up ready for a morning coffee or tea. We just aren't all that different at the core."

She feels that sometimes the stories needed out of difficult places answer questions of how people get on with life.

"Often, I am asked, 'Do those people still have hope?'"

She feels it's a joy to share how much they really do.

Offering hope amid trying circumstances has always intrigued Parks.

"I want the people in front of my camera to be heard," she said. "I think that's valuable, because even though I am the storyteller, none of it is actually about me at all."

Visit Parks' website at www.jessieparks.com or Instagram account (@missjessiparks) to learn more about her creative works.

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