

Congrats to the December 2021 graduates of Georgia College

Georgia College awarded undergraduate and graduate degrees to 345 students on Saturday, Dec. 11, at Centennial Center.

Nursing major Margaret Rose Lowenstein of Atlanta was the only valedictorian with a perfect 4.0 GPA.

About 245 students were awarded their bachelor's in a variety of majors and 80 received their master's. Degrees were presented, pending final grades for the semester.

The speaker was Dr. Brooke Conaway, associate professor of economics in the J. Whitney Bunting College of Business. Conaway is the 2021 recipient of the Georgia College Excellence in Teaching Award. She talked about her own experiences making decisions about which college to attend, whether to go to graduate school or get a first job. She also advised graduates to start early saving for retirement.

"Live like a poor college student for a few more years and invest as much as you can while you're young," Conaway said. "Go after the things you really want and, if you end up being wrong, don't be afraid to change direction."



Photographer gives snapshot of life at Georgia College

In the darkroom, you start out with a blank sheet of paper. You have no idea how the picture's going to turn out. Add a few chemicals here and there and, voila! An image slowly appears.

That's how senior studio art major Laurie Gentry of Trion, Georgia, recalls her time at Georgia College—the slow appearance of who she is today.

"I had struggles, of course, throughout my time here," Gentry said, "but I know I wouldn't feel as proud of myself or like I had come this far, if I hadn't started where I did and been able to grow to where I am now."

"It's really bittersweet to graduate," she said. "Obviously, I have such an affinity for this place and these people. But it's also great to move on to a new season in my life and take with me all the knowledge I've gained."

Gentry's been interested in art since age 4, when she "learned to grip a pencil." She minored in psychology while earning two art concentrations in printmaking and photography. Both art and psychology will be useful since she plans to get a master's in art therapy and help children with developmental disabilities.

Gentry understands hardship. She entered college, grappling with the loss of her father, who passed away in 2015. She also questioned her desire to major in art, since her family didn't think of it as an employable field.

Professors like William Fisher, Valarie Aranda and Matt Forrest helped Gentry grow and see her worth as an artist.

"These were people who really helped shaped me into who I am now," she said. "They gave me great advice and such love. I can't say enough how I wish I could thank them. They've done so much for me."

In the same way, Gentry found photography and the hours she spent in the darkroom to be therapeutic. Mixing chemicals and developing pictures seemed almost magical.

"I call it the wizard room," she said. "It's very calming in there. It's so rewarding. You really have no idea what the picture's going to look like. That anticipation builds up, and that's what makes your final product so meaningful and better."

Gentry quickly learned darkroom techniques and changed her capstone exhibit to photography. Her work, "Notions of Serenity," is displayed at Leland Gallery at Ennis Hall. Ten black-and-white photos tell the story of her college years, but also give viewers a sense of timelessness.

"I felt I had shut myself in a box," Gentry said. "Doing these photos, I was able to just take pictures of the things that are meaningful to me. I was excited to go develop them. I wanted to be in the darkroom. I loved it. It became my safe haven."

Her subjects are deceptively simple: a friend's door; a small shack on Columbia Street; her meadowy backyard at home; a path on the Greenway in Milledgeville; rocking chairs on an Ennis Hall balcony; keys hanging in a keyhole.

The close-up intimacy of the exhibit makes it meaningful—not only for Gentry who has special memories tied to each subject—but for viewers who find themselves standing before the photos longer than anticipated, mesmerized by their stillness and endurance.

Gentry hopes the pictures resonate with gallery visitors, causing them to pause and think about items in their own lives that carry weight and meaning.

"I want people to see this is a personal project. It obviously means a lot to me. I've dreamed of having my pieces up here in the gallery since I was a freshman," Gentry said. "These are all things from my season of life here at Georgia College. These are some of the things and experiences that've given me peace and comfort during my time here."

Her work ties in with the overall capstone exhibit called "Boundless." Eleven students from the class of 2021 displayed artwork that shows the obstacles they've overcome. They lived through COVID lockdowns and online classes. They faced the unknown.

Like Gentry's photos, the exhibit speaks to their resilience and ability to adapt.

"I want people to be able to identify with those things in their own lives—the things that bring them peace and comfort and show them a little bit of confidence and ability they didn't know they had. That's what these things have done for me," Gentry said, "and why I thought they needed to be shared."

During college, Gentry was involved with the Student Council for Inclusion and Diversity and the Georgia Education Mentorship program. She worked at the library and as a practicum student in Aranda's drawing class. She was also an honors student and president of the Women's Action Collective on campus.

All these things help Gentry know she'll continue to overcome and do well in the future.

Her advice to incoming students is "don't be afraid to ask questions," because professors really do want to help. For art students, specifically, she recommends trying out more than comfort allows.



Meet some of our new graduates



Khaliq Thomas-Sousa graduated with a degree in management. The Milledgeville native started out in marketing, but really enjoyed sales—advertising and being able to talk with people to grow their business.

"As I moved towards the management side of things while working at Zaxby's as a general manager, I realized that I had a passion for management. Marketing is still one of my favorite things to do, so I can join that with my management experience to really help me propel my career."

Isabella Bruen is from Milton, Georgia, and graduated with a mass communication degree with a concentration in digital media productions. She loves creating videos that elicit emotion.

"In videos and all things in life, sentimental moments are what stay with people – feelings are what people remember," she said.

Her favorite spot on campus are the trails on East Campus. "It has a trail that goes around the entire lake, and it's beautiful," Bruen said. "They also have ropes courses and rock walls that are 40-feet tall, and they're so fun to climb."



From Macon, Daria Brown majored in criminal justice with a minor in French. Coming into college, she knew that she wanted to ultimately become a lawyer.

"I chose to pursue a criminal justice degree because I wanted to understand the sociological underpinnings of crime and deviancy to better empathize with and understand some of the people that I anticipate interacting with throughout my legal career," she said.

She plans to move back home and work full-time until Fall 2022 when she plans to attend law school.

Nursing major Darby Pinkard will start her career in the field she hoped to specialize in—hematology/oncology pediatrics with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA) at Scottish Rite in early January.

While at Georgia College, she played outfield in softball. Participating in sports taught her time management, when she juggled that and maintaining good grades through the nursing program.

Although this wasn't an easy task, Pinkard feels this experience will prove useful in her career.



Tytiana "Ty" Marie Bentley is from Macon and majored in environmental science. She worked for GC catering for about two years, was a part of University Chorus and the GC Women's Ensemble and also participated in Community Council as treasurer for her freshman dorm, Wells Hall.

"My study abroad experience cannot be put into words because it was that amazing," she said. "I studied abroad on San Salvador Island in the Bahamas for 2 weeks. I learned so much about algae and corals that opened my eyes to a lot of what's happening in our oceans."

She plans to move to Colorado and put her environmental science degree to good use.

Cole Hanlin is a theatre major with a political science minor. Originally from Green Bay, Wisconsin, he decided to attend Georgia College after seeing several performances by the theatre department.

"Theatre is my life's passion project. I'm never not working on theatre in some way, and I love it," he said.

After graduation, he plans to work for 6 straight months before moving, as of now, to New York.

