GEORGIA COLLEGE This Week
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Prepared by Office of University Communications Feb. 22, 2022

Georgia College students learn about Ukrainian strife in real time

If rising tensions in Eastern Europe don't abate–Dr. William Risch's students will learn history as it unfolds.

The Ukraine has endured more than its share of war, dominance and struggle for identity. Lately, it's been in the news with a build-up of more than 100,000 Russian troops at its border. A spar of words between superpowers is fueling fears of confrontation and a third world war.



Dr. William Risch teaching about Eastern Europe.

"I wish things had taken a different path, because war exhausts people. They become embittered," Risch said. "Some want a military solution to drive out the Russians. But the reality is–the Russians could smash the Ukrainian military with its might because of their sheer numbers and kind of weaponry."

"There've been some war scenarios," he said, "where Russia takes out the Ukrainian infrastructure in an hour."

Students in Risch's Modern Eastern European class couldn't be in a better position to learn about this crisis. Their professor is an expert on the often-rocky relationship between Ukraine and Russia. In 2011, Risch published a book on the Western Ukrainian city of Lviv after the death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. He recently received a fellowship from George Washington University to finish a second book on events leading to the Donbas War in 2014.

Risch also taught for a year at Omsk State University in Russia. He spent two years working on his dissertation in Lviv, Ukraine, and another two years teaching at Lviv National University.

Junior history major Sean Fulmer of Oxford, Georgia, signed up for Risch's class to learn about Eastern Europe–a "new frontier" for him. It piqued his interest because he has friends living there.

"If I was some modern philosopher king–I would suggest that the current situation is nothing more than saber-rattling between major powers to justify boosting their defense budgets," Fulmer said.

"This is not to say the corrupt, autocrat in Russia is an angel either," he said, "but it's rather eerie to witness such wide-scale manufacture of consent to what could potentially be a major conflict costing millions of lives."

Still, Fulmer's excited to study these centuries-old struggles at a time when the Ukraine's security is again in the crosshairs.

With a population of about 40 million, Ukraine plays an important role in Eastern Europe. Many citizens want the Ukraine to retain its sovereignty, Risch said. Others are reluctant to upset Russian President Vladimir Putin. Like much of Europe, Ukraine now depends on Russian gas to heat their homes, although the gas is shipped through a third-party country. The Russian pipeline transports natural gas to Europe through Ukraine. Metallurgy, mining, machine building and other Russian industries provide jobs for Ukrainians, stabilizing their economy.

Russia is concerned about Western interference and the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO.

Risch's new book covers these issues, focusing on protests in 2013 that led to Russian intervention. Spurts of violence, shelling and skirmishes continue to this day, despite an accord signed between the two nations in September 2014.

This is nothing new for Ukraine–a region continually dominated in a tug-of-war by other nations. Russia, Poland, Lithuania, Austria, Romania, Turkey and the old Czechoslovakia have all claimed Ukrainian territory as their own since the 800s. The nation has endured centuries of suffering, including the Soviet-induced famine in the early 1930s that led to the starvation of 4 million people.

Students in Dr. Steven Elliott-Gower's National Security Policy class are also learning about Eastern Europe but from a different perspective. They're drawing upon the Ukrainian crisis to play a simulation game called "Russia, NATO and the Baltic States." It involves a hypothetical buildup of 100,000 Russian troops on the border of Latvia, a NATO country neighboring Russia.

In the game, Russia claims to be concerned about the rights of ethnic Russians living in Latvia. But its real motives are similar to what's currently happening in the Ukraine, Elliott-Gower said.

Students act as various U.S. officials to avert invasion and reduce tensions.

"This is a very teachable moment," Elliott-Gower said. "The Russia-Latvia simulation the students are playing has many similarities to the real-world Russia-Ukraine crisis."


Dr. Steve Elliott-Gower in one of his role-playing simulation classes.

"Students are weighing the pros and cons of a series of diplomatic, economic and military measures to deter Russian aggression. In the process," he said, "they're learning valuable leadership lessons about the complexity of foreign policy decision making."

Both professors are guiding students to make sense of the current escalation in threats, the maneuvering of weapons and failed attempts at diplomacy.

By the time Risch's students learn Ukraine's long, tumultuous history–watching a film on the Donbas War at the end of this semester–there could be war.

"It will be of interest to them, because we don't know what this will do to our military or what will happen with our security," Risch said. "The other thing too for all of us, not just the students, we sort of assumed with the end of the Cold War in 1991 there'd be no more major problems from this part of the world."

"But there are," he said, "and they're getting worse."

National Pan-Hellenic Council Plaza is a beacon for education, change

The creation of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) Historical Preservation Plaza at Georgia College stemmed from Fraternity and Sorority Life looking into celebrating the heritage of these organizations on campus.


One of the many markers displayed at the NPHC Historical Preservation Plaza at Georgia College.

Honoring the nine historically African American international fraternities and sororities–the "Divine Nine," the collective efforts of Stacey Milner, '11, '15, director of Fraternity and Sorority Life, African American Alumni Council (AAAC) founding members, donors, students and staff contributed to the Plaza's existence.

"What students and alumni wanted was something to really connect them to the institution," Milner said. "We noticed other campuses have plots and monuments, so we wanted to have something similar at Georgia College."

She researched institutions like Wake Forest University, which had a Divine Nine site. Milner then created a mockup of the NPHC Plaza for former Georgia College President Dr. Steve Dorman, and developed the concept from there.

Milner credits the founding African American Alumni Council (AAAC) members including Debra White Minor, '88, and Pamela Trawick, '91, as well as students like Jazmin Hunt, '21, and donors, including Milner, and Retired Brigadier General Jonathan McColumn, '86, with helping to push for the plaza to exist.

Hunt was a liaison between NPHC, alumni, contractors and school officials, who helped facilitate the identity NPHC strived to share with the campus and community.

"It was a great experience to see the alumni and even chartering chapter members during the unveiling of the plaza," she said.

McColumn envisions the NPHC Historical Preservation Plaza as a place that will build unity and cohesion.

"My donation to the NPHC Plaza represents my commitment to join others in building a permanent shrine for students to inquire about its purpose and motivation," he said. "For alumni, to include Divine Nine members, it represents Homecoming on campus–a place to reflect and provide well wishes to a curious bystander or a familiar face."

The NPHC Plaza is historically significant to McColumn in his reflection upon the unique friendships made with his fraternity brothers while balancing the rigors of academics.

"It highlights the cherished brotherhood experience I enjoyed with the young men of Kappa Alpha Psi," McCollumn said. "Even more, the experience was broadened through the collective camaraderie now etched in my memory by, with and through the shared joys and struggles with the Divine Nine at GC."

The NPHC Plaza became official with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held during Homecoming 2019.

"To me, that was the best Homecoming ever," Milner said. "It was great, because we welcomed alumni home, who hadn't stepped foot on campus in 30 to 40 years."

Today, some students use the plaza as a backdrop for graduation photos. It'll also be used for events like when students are introduced to Georgia College.

"My hope is that the NPHC Plaza serves to tell the story of our history, and that it functions as a place where people who visit Georgia College see it as a symbol of change–the university's embrace and appreciation of culture. And that it allows individuals to ask questions of who we are, and what is special about our organizations."

Many of the organizations have existed for over 100 years. And, many of the world's most iconic individuals are affiliated with these organizations, including Civil Rights Leader Dr. Martin Luther King, who was a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

His wife, Coretta Scott King and United States Vice President Kamala Harris are members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Homecoming celebration this weekend

Georgia College's annual Homecoming celebration takes place Feb. 25-26, 2022, with several events for the community to enjoy.

The Homecoming Parade will be Friday at 3 p.m. It begins at the Depot on W. Greene Street and travels along S. Clarke to Hancock then down S. Liberty.

This year's theme celebrates different eras of music throughout history. Campus departments, student organizations, athletics and community groups will show their school spirit in the parade.

Saturday tailgating opens at Centennial Center at noon. Then stay for the basketball doubleheader as the Georgia College Women's team plays at 3:30 p.m. and the Men's team at 5:30 p.m. Come cheer on the Bobcats as they take on Columbus State.

Photos from previous events






What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
22 7-9 p.m.- Come out and enjoy our GC Jazz Jam Session at Amici Café, downtown Milledgeville, presented by Jazz at Georgia College. Hosted by our faculty and student jazz musicians, the GC Jam Session is open to all members of the community interested in working on their jazz and improvisation skills.	**23** 5:15 p.m.- Draw from a live model in an academic setting in Ennis Hall 217. There is a suggested minimum donation of $4 to pay the model. All artistic skill levels are welcome. Bring your own materials. No photography. There will be a mix of short and long poses to work from.	**24** 2 p.m.- Georgia College Women's Tennis vs. Brenau.	**25** 3 p.m.- Homecoming parade.	**26** 12 - 4 p.m.- Tent City at Centennial Center. 3:30 p.m.- GC Women's Basketball vs. Columbus State. 5:30 p.m.- GC Men's Basketball vs. Columbus State.