

## Leadership of first-year program recognized for outstanding work

Transitioning from high school to college can be tough. Everything about life changes—from where you live to who you live with, what you eat and how you spend your time. To help make that transition a bit smoother, Georgia College created dedicated programming, courses and support through the Office of First-Year Experience.

At the helm as director since its inception in 2019 is Dr. Erin Weston. She was recently recognized by the National Resource Center and Cengage as one of 10 Outstanding First-Year Student Advocates. She received the award at the 41st Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience in Orlando in February.

"It was very surprising," Weston said. "It's sometimes hard to see the impact of what you're doing. To be recognized, especially on a national level, for a lot of the changes that we've made these last couple of years, it was exciting."

The award recognizes and rewards individuals across the nation who are advocates involved in high-impact practices for first-year student success.

"The rich tradition of this award includes more than three decades of recognizing the outstanding work that takes place making immeasurable impact on the lives of first-year students," said Jennifer Keup, executive director of the National Resource Center, in a press release. "It's an absolute honor to add 10 more names to the list of esteemed colleagues who have previously received this honor."

At Georgia College, various components of the first-year experience have been in place for years. When the office was created, it brought all the pieces under one umbrella, allowing for more collaboration and the expansion of programming.

"We do have some pieces of our first-year experience that are unique to us, particularly in the state of Georgia," said Weston. "We have the advantage that all of our students are living on campus, so we have this co-curricular learning environment where we can partner with Student Life to make sure there are lessons and experiences that our students are taught that may not fit within the classroom."

The summer reading program for incoming students, called GC Reads, is also unique. Instead of students reading a common book, at Georgia College students choose from a list of essays and take part in micro-seminar sessions where they discuss the essay with faculty and fellow students. The university is one of the few in the nation to do this.



Dr. Erin Weston

The feedback on GC Reads has been overwhelmingly positive. That helped lay the groundwork for more innovation in the first-year programming.

First-year guides were recently introduced into the seminar course. These upperclassmen serve as peer resources and mentors to help in the transition to college.

"We've gotten a lot of feedback from students about the impact their first-year guides have had in making them more comfortable in the classroom," said Weston. "We survey all the students and just ask 'Would you be comfortable reaching out to your first-year guide for help? Have you contacted your first-year guide?' The responses to that have been highly positive."

Georgia College also offers a first-year seminar one-credit-hour college transition course.

"It's taught by either a faculty member within their department or an academic advisor and paired with that person who is a first-year guide," Weston said. "From what I can tell, there aren't any other institutions that have both a three-credit-hour course all their first-year students take like our GCIY and the one-credit-hour course for all first-year students like our seminar."

With the primary goal of connecting new students with resources on campus, the entire first-year experience is both intentional and always developing.

"We are trying to better tailor the first-year guide program to provide more major-based support for students to match up with mentors within their program," Weston said.

They're also looking to build connections for first-year students with faculty in their major. Typically, during the first two years of college students primarily take core classes. Weston hopes to encourage students to get involved with things like student organizations or research in their major earlier.

"We've been exploring different opportunities for students to feel like they're involved in their major early on communicating different opportunities they have," she said. "We are trying to let them know that maybe some of those experiences they assume are just for upperclassmen—like undergraduate research—they can do as a first-year student and continue throughout their four years."

Weston's recognition with this national award shows her work and innovation are getting noticed. "I think what's nice about it is that it shows that some of the risks and some of the new ideas that we've tried are being recognized by our national organization as being good practice," Weston said.

## 'Ride the Cyclone:' Spring musical promises a thrilling ride

Georgia College's first in-person spring musical since the start of COVID promises to be much like the pandemic—a topsy-turvy ruckus leaving audiences unsure what happens next.

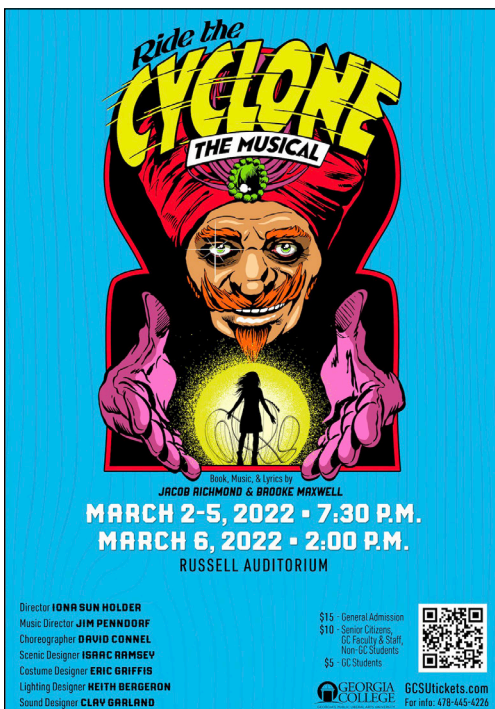
But, unlike COVID, its turns and twists prove enjoyable with toe-tapping tunes and non-stop action. Narrated by a mechanical fortune teller, the play takes audiences on a rollercoaster of ups and downs, sharp turns and sudden changes.

"As soon as you think you've got things figured out, it twists a totally different way," said Director Iona Holder. "A lot of people will want to see it more than once. The music is catchy and stays with you in the best way. People will look back and say, 'That was really fun.'"

The musical runs four nights, March 2-5, with a 2 p.m. matinee Sunday, March 6, in Russell Auditorium.

The play is about members of a high school choir who visit an amusement park and lose their lives on the rollercoaster. They find themselves in a type of purgatory, retelling their lives or what they wish their lives had been like. It's a game that gives the winner a new chance at life.

The high-energy production is filled with big dances and every kind of music genre from rap, hip hop and rock to Broadway, classical and opera. The journey of self-exploration is filled with magical moments and opportunity to laugh and cry.



"It's a beautiful story. It ends up being about how to stop and appreciate your life. The final message is heartwarming. I cry every single time we get to the last song," Holder said.

"Ride the Cyclone" has seven main actors. To give more students a chance to act, the cast was upped to 14. Characters include choir members in school uniform and carnival "shadow people"—a snake charmer, strong man, bearded lady, tattooed man, clown and lion tamer.

About 50 students worked behind the scenes doing set construction, lighting, costumes, stage management and make-up. Alumnus David Connel designed the dance choreography.

Eric Griffis, interim chair of Theatre and Dance, chose "Ride the Cyclone" because it's one of the few plays with streaming rights. Plays at Georgia College are chosen a year in advance.

His committee wanted one that was flexible, in case the pandemic caused more shutdowns.

In the past two years, students took their craft online and used film to help produce shows. In-person productions resumed last fall. This will be Georgia College's first in-person musical since 2020.

"It's so full of unexpected things," Griffis said. "You have no idea when you first watch it where it's going to take you, and you leave with that warm feeling at the end."

"Ride the Cyclone" is recommended for mature audiences. Performances are in Russell Auditorium at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, March 2 to 5, and 2 p.m. Sunday, March 6. Tickets are \$15 for general admission; \$10 for seniors, GC faculty, staff and non-GC students; and \$5 for GC students.

## 'Raising Her Voice' choral performance

Two Georgia College's choral ensembles—Women's Ensemble and Max Noah Singers—will present an evening of music by women composers Saturday, March 5 at 7:30 p.m. in Magnolia Ballroom, located in the Student Activity Center.

The concert will also be livestreamed at [facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment](https://facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment).

"Raising Her Voice" features compositions spanning almost 400 years and include pieces by well-known female composers, such as Fanny Hensel, Felix Mendelssohn's sister, and Clara Schumann, wife of Robert Schumann.

The choirs will perform music by other lesser-known but no less-worthy composers, like Undine Smith Moore, the "Dean of Black Women Composers," and Rosephanye Powell, Auburn University professor of voice and winner of a "Living Legend Award" presented by the California State University African Diaspora Sacred Music Festival in Los Angeles.

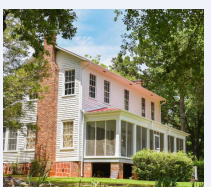
Student vocal soloists will be accompanied by faculty pianists Dr. Lev Ryabinin and Dr. Hue Jang in collaboration with Dr. Jennifer Flory, mezzo-soprano, flutist Laurie Peebles and Youngmi Kim, soprano. Choral conductors include Flory, Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Megan Ostrat, Conner Garmon and Kelley Monahan.

A \$5 donation is encouraged. Online donations can be made at [alumni.gcsu.edu/music](https://alumni.gcsu.edu/music). 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?

Andalusia Farm—home of American famed Author Mary "Flannery" O'Connor, '45—was designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Park Service. This designation has been awarded to a small number of campuses in the U.S., and is carried by less than three percent of America's historic sites.



## What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

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

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p><b>1</b></p> <p>4 p.m. - GC Softball vs Shorter.</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p>4 p.m. - GC Baseball vs Lenoir-Rhyne.</p> <p>6:30 p.m. - Georgia College's 2022 Darugar Distinguished Visiting Scholar, novelist Rabih Alameddine, will hold a public talk, "Concerning the Political in Art," in the Arts and Sciences (A&amp;S) Auditorium. For more information, please contact Dr. Kerry Neville at <a href="mailto:kerry.neville@gcsu.edu">kerry.neville@gcsu.edu</a>.</p> <p>7:30 p.m. - Georgia College presents its spring musical, "Ride the Cyclone," a story of sudden changes and second chances in Russell Auditorium.</p>	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>6:30 p.m. - Georgia College's 2022 Darugar Distinguished Visiting Scholar, novelist Rabih Alameddine, will give a public reading of his work in the A&amp;S Auditorium. For more information, please contact Dr. Kerry Neville at <a href="mailto:kerry.neville@gcsu.edu">kerry.neville@gcsu.edu</a>.</p> <p>7:30 p.m. - Georgia College presents its spring musical, "Ride the Cyclone," a story of sudden changes and second chances in Russell Auditorium.</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p>7:30 p.m. - Georgia College presents its spring musical, "Ride the Cyclone," a story of sudden changes and second chances in Russell Auditorium.</p>	<p><b>5</b></p> <p>1 p.m. - GC Baseball Doubleheader vs Young Harris.</p> <p>7:30 p.m. - Georgia College presents its spring musical, "Ride the Cyclone," a story of sudden changes and second chances in Russell Auditorium.</p> <p>7:30 p.m. - Raising Her Voice: An Evening of Music by Women Composers in Magnolia Ballroom.</p>