

Five psychology students study impact of COVID on Georgia College peers

Five psychology majors are finishing data analysis on several projects relating to coronavirus and worldwide lockdowns that left millions dealing with mental health issues.

The results showed students at Georgia College—like people everywhere—weren't immune to the fallout of isolation and loneliness.

"Our conclusions were that loneliness increased and the reported overall state of mental health decreased, which corresponds to a strong negative correlation between loneliness and mental health across all stages of the pandemic," said senior psychology major Emma Kraby of Athens.

"We can assume mental health will continue to improve," she said, "but it's not quite to the level it was before."

Kraby studied COVID anxiety and mental health with fellow researcher Joseph Wenke, a senior psychology major from Roswell. From March 2020 to Oct. 2021, they surveyed 154 of their peers, learning the effects of quarantine, fear and isolation. As lockdowns continued, charts show loneliness going up and mental health coming down.

Wenke took the research further by examining how loneliness can be mediated by personality traits. He looked at screen time and other variables, like whether students had a pet. More screen time correlated with impaired mental health, while having a cat or dog to cuddle helped fight discouragement.

Upperclassmen, whose lives were interrupted by COVID, were more negatively impacted than those entering college after the pandemic died down, Wenke discovered. Social distancing, wearing masks and other restrictions seem to be the new normal for younger students and more easily accepted.



Joseph Wenke (left) watches with classmates as Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang prints a conference poster.

Contrary to what one would expect—introverts were more negatively impacted than extroverts by isolation.

Things have improved two years later but only a little. Kraby and Wenke were surprised to find loneliness continues to be present in college students.

"It could just be the habits from quarantine—maybe people got used to more screen time and less physical activity. Maybe they're staying inside

more. Or maybe people have gotten used to not having contact with friends," Wenke said.

"There's a lot more to be done on that," he added. "Generally, the results I've seen show introverts were more negatively impacted by quarantining than extroverts, and so were people who were in college before COVID."

These results follow similar patterns experienced by the rest of society and campus. Psychology department chair Dr. Lee Gillis said students and faculty in general are dealing with various levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

Psychology majors Maryelle Michael of Roswell, a senior, and Carson Beasley of Woodstock, a junior, are studying COVID from a different angle. They're examining the role of exercise and how physical exertion improves anxiety levels.

"Pre-pandemic exercise data was pretty consistent," Michael said. "Come March 2020, there was a big halt of exercise among adolescents and adults, because we were all in shock. No one knew what to do, essentially, and you couldn't go to the gym."

Data suggests a reduction in exercise correlates to a reduction in mental health and increased feelings of loneliness. But people soon found creative ways to exercise. They joined online initia-

tives like TikTok and workout routines on YouTube or Zoom.

Nevertheless, exercise levels—like loneliness and mental health states—are not back up to pre-COVID levels.

"That makes sense," Beasley said. "Some people are still scared to go out in public or go to the gym. I think a lot of people underestimate the positive effects physical activity has on mental health. Because COVID has impacted that, we weren't really shocked to see physical activities fall so low."

The COVID research teams will present their findings at a regional conference at the end of March. Twenty-six psychology students will attend the Southeastern Psychological Association's annual conference, showcasing various topics in addition to COVID, such as:

- Microaggressions in the classroom
- Substance abuse in ADHD and bipolar disorders
- Belonging and wellness of minorities in predominately white institutions
- Self-injury and suicide among transgender and gender nonconforming college students
- Stereotypical gender beliefs and harsher disciplinary strategies for male children
- Effects of lying on memory

Conducting quality research in undergraduate years is invaluable, said Dr. Tsu-Ming Chiang, professor of psychology. Her research students often perform higher than peers in graduate school and jobs after graduation. They find themselves ahead in skills like generating ideas, formulating questions, data collection, analysis and communication.

Beasley learned to collaborate in groups, listen to other ideas and interpret information. He's soaking in the experience before he graduates and hopes to get a job as a professional counselor.

Kraby's COVID research helped her get into the University of Denver's Master of Counseling Psychology program in Colorado.

"Undergraduate research makes you a competitive applicant for programs like that," she said, "especially in psychology, where most programs are research-based. Not only conducting the research—but having the opportunity to present it at conference is a really big opportunity."

Senior psychology major named Truman Finalist

For Anne Elise Beals, service work was never a choice. Rather, it was the chance convergence of a lifetime of interests that lead her to being named a finalist for this year's Truman Scholarship.

"Being a psychology major," she said, "and always analyzing the way that people think and why we interact socially the way that we do—it's that mixed background, that liberal arts education that's helped me to combine my interests."

Beals' passion for working with LGBTQ+ youth to prevent homelessness and incarceration and her work for the Women's Center led her to the attention of her philosophy professor, Dr. James Winchester, who suggested that she might be a good candidate for the Truman Scholarship.

None of this was in the plan. Beals credits the work of her non-biological Aunt Beth for inspiring her to pursue public service.

"We met her when I was two, and her daughters went to the same dance studio that I did," Beals said. "She has her own circle of rehab centers for people who are recovering from addiction. Seeing her not only beat addiction in her lifetime but also help her daughter overcome it and help this whole network of people around her overcome their addictions was incredibly inspiring."

Only 189 students, pulled from 126 institutions from across the nation, have been recognized as Truman finalists. The award recipients will receive a \$30,000 scholarship for graduate



school, and will become part of the larger network of Truman Scholarship alumni, who are some of the highest achieving public servants in the world.

The scholarship was founded as a "living memorial" to the 33rd President of the United States, Harry S. Truman, for those who exhibit excellence in education and public service. Many of the nation's most notable public figures began their careers as Truman Scholars.

Winchester referred Beals to Anna Whiteside, assistant director of the John E. Salstrom Honors College and National Scholarships coordinator, who helped guide Beals through the application process.

"Part of the Truman application is giving a policy proposal," Beals said. "You have to identify an issue and explain how you think it should be fixed."

Since the announcement of the finalists, Beals said life has been "crazy." People who she never would have expected have been contacting and offering their congratulations.

"I went on the website, and they have a list of all the finalists and the schools that they come from," she said. "A lot of them are from schools like Princeton, Yale, Harvard. I didn't know that was going to be my competition."

She's currently gearing up for more mock interviews for the Truman Scholarship process.

Beals plans to pursue a Master's of Social Work and a Master's of Women's and Gender Studies with long-term hopes of one day opening her own community center.

Endowed concert connects students with professional musicians

The Georgia College Music Department will provide a Shakespearean musical experience with "Songs and Sonnets" Friday, April 8, in Russell Auditorium. The evening is part of an ongoing series of free concerts that bring students side-by-side professional instrumentalists and singers to perform masterworks.

The chance to work with professionals elevates student work to the level of real-world performances—something few universities in Georgia can manage.

"The Terry Concerts are a wonderful opportunity for Georgia College students to perform some of the most timeless and beloved works in the classical music canon for the Milledgeville community," said Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, associate professor of music.

All Georgia College ensembles and music groups will perform, and the chamber orchestra will be transformed into a full symphony orchestra with the addition of professional players. This gives students the opportunity to play repertoires only performed at the most prestigious conservatories.

Pegged the "largest donation in a generation, ever in the department"—the endowment was gifted to Georgia College by Gorzelany-Mostak and her parents and sister in memory of John and Margaret Terry of Connecticut. The couple were steadfast supporters of the arts with season tickets



to musical shows and concerts. The endowment honors their legacy, while providing funds for students and professional musicians to perform masterworks together every two years at GC.

Funds are used to purchase music and hire musicians from orchestras in the region. Professional players coach students during rehearsals. This close encounter raises the performance bar high as students try to model a professional's posture and tone.

The university's first biennial "John and Margaret Terry Endowed Concert" presented Czech composer Antonín Dvořák's "Slavonic Dances" in 2019.

"Songs and Sonnets" features the University Chorus, Women's Ensemble, Max Noah Singers, GC Orchestra and Wind Symphony. It includes two musical masterworks inspired by Shakespeare's texts: "Serenade to Music" by Ralph Vaughan Williams and excerpts from Felix Mendelssohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

The University Chorus will perform George Shearing's "Songs and Sonnets," and the Wind Symphony will entertain with excerpts from "William Byrd Suite" by Gordon Jacob. Other pieces include Erich Korngold's "Much Ado About Nothing" for violin and piano, and a piano solo from Sergei Prokofiev's "Romeo and Juliet."

This concert will also be livestreamed at facebook.com/GCMusicDepartment.

What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>5</p> <p>5 p.m. - GC Baseball vs Valdosta State.</p> <p>5 p.m. - As part of our 25th Anniversary of the Public Liberal Arts mission, the College of Arts and Sciences will host an Alumni Panel on the Power of the Liberal Arts. The event will take place in the Arts and Sciences Auditorium. Recent alumni will talk about their experience and how their journeys after graduation have been impacted by their liberal arts education.</p> <p>6 p.m. - Andalusia: the Home of Flannery O'Connor is excited to announce the return of its Front Porch Lecture with a lecture from Bill Griffith and Rachel Hudson from Rowan Oak.</p>	<p>6</p> <p>5 p.m. - GC Baseball vs Valdosta State.</p> <p>6 p.m. - The Department of Art at Georgia College & State University invites you to attend Daniel Britton's public lecture titled "Dyslexia and Design" at the Arts and Sciences Auditorium. Daniel is a graphic designer from London, England who has raised awareness about dyslexia worldwide and will be sharing his research, branding, and design practice with the public.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>6 p.m. - The Department of Art at Georgia College & State University invites you to attend Daniel Britton's public lecture titled "Dyslexia and Design" at the Arts and Sciences Auditorium. Daniel is a graphic designer from London, England who has raised awareness about dyslexia worldwide and will be sharing his research, branding, and design practice with the public.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>2 p.m. - GC Tennis Doubleheader vs Young Harris.</p> <p>6 p.m. - GC Baseball vs Georgia Southwestern.</p> <p>7:30 p.m. - "Songs and Sonnets" in Russell Auditorium.</p>	<p>9</p> <p>11 a.m. - Annual Bobcat Film Festival showcasing films produced by Georgia high school and college students. The event will be held in the Arts and Sciences Auditorium. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. The film festival is free and open to everyone.</p> <p>11 a.m. - The seventh annual ArtHealthy Festival takes place on Front Campus. This popular community event is helping people of all ages celebrate health and fitness with many fun-filled activities. The festival and all activities are free and open to the public.</p> <p>1 p.m. - GC Baseball vs Georgia Southwestern</p>