

GCSU students work to improve health in Baldwin & surrounding Counties

As the 15th-century historian Thomas Fuller once said: "Health is not valued till sickness comes."

That's why students at Georgia College & State University's Center for Health & Social Issues (CHSI) intertwine health screenings with other attractions like fun and food.

Public health majors and student nurses gather wherever the populace is likely to be found. At monthly food drives, neighborhood meetings or holiday gatherings—they can be seen chatting and laughing with residents; giving finger prick tests for diabetes; tightening blood pressure wraps around residents' arms and handing out health materials.

"We try to meet the public on their terms and on their turf, and people are just blown away by these events," said Dr. Damian Francis, epidemiologist, assistant professor of public health and director of CHSI. "Our success in a community is going to depend on community buy-in and whether residents really support what you're doing," he said.

A student nurse takes notes at a recent health screening day in Baldwin County.



"That's why we go into the community often. Residents see us, and they know we're committed to them and to their health."

Since taking over the center in 2020, Francis has led more than 60 Georgia College students in conducting health screenings. In that time, they've assisted more than 1,000 residents in Baldwin County and more than 200 in Hancock, Houston and Macon-Bibb counties.

Their major function is operating a pop-up health clinic and assisting with a drive-thru food distribution, occurring the third Wednesday of each month at the Collins P. Lee Community Center on Harrisburg Road, Milledgeville. The Middle Georgia Community Food Bank provides a truckful of fresh and canned foods. Items are boxed and handed to residents who line up early outside in their cars—as many as 300 a month—for the 10 a.m. event. Sometimes, local churches and Habitat for Humanity also provide free clothing onsite.

While residents wait, they're greeted by students who conduct health screens and pass out information sheets. Each month, they focus on a different health topic like heart disease, obesity or Alzheimer's and refer people without doctors to clinics.

On a hot day recently, about eight nursing students darted car-to-car offering their services and talking about prostate cancer. About half the residents agreed to have their blood pressure checked and finger pricked for diabetes.

Tanner Cobb of Savannah organizes this event each month. He graduated last year with a degree in public health and is now getting a master's health and human performance. Originally, he wasn't sure what to do in life. But, once he started health screenings, Cobb wanted to multiply the great feeling he got from helping others.

Cobb is a Type-1 diabetic and understands the importance of preventive health measures.

"I'm really open to serving and doing any kind of health promotion I can, because ever since I started, I haven't stopped, and I love doing it," Cobb said.

"This event is like ants going in all directions but it's beautiful,

organized chaos because everyone has a job, and I fell in love with the fact everyone has the same motive, which is to serve the community," he said. "I can't even describe how happy it makes me feel to see other people getting what they need. It makes me feel like we're doing something good for the community. We're bettering their lives, and that makes me want to keep doing it."

Dr. Talecia Warren, assistant professor in the School of Nursing, often accompanies her nurses to the monthly food drive. Being in the community is different from hospital settings, allowing students to meet residents on a more personal level.

It also helps them keep track of patients. They see familiar faces each month, which enables them to ask residents if they remember to take their medicines. They rejoice when blood pressure levels improve.

"Getting to see patients that I have not seen outside the hospital and to see them out in the community doing well—that feels good," Warren said. "The best feeling in the world is knowing that you actually made a difference."

"One of the things I love about the liberal arts is getting to know your community. As a nurse," she said, "I know it doesn't just stop at the hospital. If you meet people where they are and give them the resources they need, then that decreases their need to go to hospitals which are already overfilled."

Senior Avery Urban of Atlanta chose nursing because she enjoys science and likes being social. After graduation in December, she might do labor and delivery. Meeting everyday people from all walks of life is preparation for that.

"It definitely feels good to help people," Urban said. "This school offers a lot of different options to go into the community and do that. It's nice to be able to give back to a place that's given us so much."

In addition to the monthly food drive, about 10 public health students help Francis plan and promote other monthly events. These include health screenings and education in various neighborhoods, on campus and in Baldwin County, Macon, Houston County and Sparta.

Flannery O'Connor made impression on author

In 1954, Susan Lindsley of Peabody High School, '54, met American-famed author Mary "Flannery" O'Connor, '45. Although Lindsley's mother was childhood friends with O'Connor's mother, Regina, when both lived in Milledgeville, Georgia, it wasn't until after Regina and O'Connor left Savannah and moved to Andalusia that Lindsley and O'Connor met. The O'Connor and Lindsley lands shared a mile-long fence for many years, even before Regina and O'Connor moved to Andalusia.

"Flannery walked into my house on her crutches, carrying a smile," Lindsley said. "When I saw her dressed in her deceased father's clothes, I loved her instantly, for I wore dirty jeans and a sweat-soaked shirt."

O'Connor told Lindsley that she wore her father's clothes, because it would be a waste to discard them.

"Genius and very practical, with a barn full of common sense," Lindsley said.

Regina came over to talk "farm business" with

Lindsley's mother.

"They had a rousing conversation," Lindsley said. "Flannery spoke barely a word after introductions, but sat and listened. I began to wonder if she were already plotting a new story based on the political topics of conversation."

O'Connor was a great listener. Then, she wrote about everything happening around her and even included her mother, Regina, in many of her stories.

When displaced World War II refugees worked on Andalusia, O'Connor took notice and wrote about them, as well.

"Flannery could take reality and give it a twist, usually while laughing," Lindsley said. "It didn't matter how serious the moment was. She could see the humor in any situation."

When O'Connor first showed Lindsley the room where she wrote, she noticed her desk didn't face a window or the door to her room.

"Flannery told me to always face the wall, because if I didn't, I could be easily distracted



Photo credit: Roy Davis

when writing," Lindsley said. "So, I always face the wall when I write. It really works."

One of Lindsley's favorite works is a poem about a tree, written while she was a student at Mercer University. She also wrote her first novel while in college and her second before age 25.

Did you know?

Linda Bowden, a textile artist in Eatonton, shared her expertise with textiles to a group of Georgia College & State University Ceramics Art students recently.

Drawing on Japanese roots and her textile training in Tokyo, Japan, Bowden developed a workshop on Furoshiki, when elegant cloths are used for wrapping and carrying bundles.

Ceramics art students are studying the ritual of using cloths to wrap and display chawan tea bowls. Seasons were an inspiration for their bundles, which are on display in Ennis Hall.

Bowden's excitement and passion for materials is 100% contagious.

All students were energized and eager for a second workshop involving salt shibori dye baths.

Bowden taught students dye techniques that have roots dating back to the Asuka and Nara periods of Japan. Students squeezed, pressed, stitched and pulled threads to resist all sorts of dyes.

GCSU selected to help close equity gap in education

Georgia College & State University (GCSU) was chosen as one of 19 colleges and universities nationwide to participate in an equity-gap initiative to level the playing field for historically-underrepresented students in education.

Equity gap refers to disparities in educational outcomes among minority populations. Closing this gap means moving beyond race, socioeconomic status and ethnicity or physical and mental disabilities to guarantee student success.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently announced a multi-year initiative to help educational institutions close this gap. In the next five years, it will fund \$100 million to six recipients, including the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), to participate in the Student Success Equity Intensive (SSEI).

In turn, AASCU chose 19 "equity-driven" institutions from rural, urban and suburban areas to play a vital role in SSEI's collaborative and transformational experience. The application process was highly competitive. GCSU and the University of North Georgia were the only two selected in Georgia. Other designated institutions are in Texas, Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, Kentucky, New York and Guam.

"It's a privilege to be selected for this innovative effort that will enable us to learn best practices and rely on data to assure all students can succeed here," said President Cathy Cox. "Georgia College & State University is dedicated to providing opportunity and ensuring success for all students—especially for our underserved student populations."

"We're committed to bringing more diversity to our campus. As a public liberal arts institution," Cox said, "we are in a unique position—with small class sizes, one-on-one mentorship and great support systems—to help under-represented students thrive and complete their degrees. Through this program, we will learn how to do so much more."

Each college or university is tasked with creating a team of campus leaders "to learn promising practices to close equity gaps and ... to ensure that race and income are no longer predictors of success," according to information released by AASCU.

This cohort of schools can accelerate the closing of their equity gaps for minorities by utilizing specific and customized support from AASCU, which includes peer-to-peer learning sessions across institutions.



What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/events

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

1

7-9 p.m. GCSU's Music Jam Sessions at Amici Cafe.

2

3

7 p.m. Talk by Urologist Robert S. Cowles on "How Big City Medicine Came to the country—and Why" in Max Noah Recital Hall.

7:30 -8:30 p.m. GCSU Music Department presents "Eclectic Jazz" in Russell Auditorium.

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