

## GCSU seniors graduate with diverse majors and plans for the future

This month, nearly 260 Georgia College & State University (GCSU) seniors will graduate and embark on the world. Some will enter the workforce; others will continue their education.

Many graduate with internship or study abroad experience, community service hours and undergraduate research on their resume.

Here is a small sampling of our December graduates and the diverse majors and activities they focused on in college:

Biology major Wesley DeMontigny of Marietta is all a student can be. He participated in several research labs and was the first Georgia College student to win the nationally prestigious Goldwater Scholarship.

DeMontigny studied soil microbiology in Dr. Daniel Burt's lab—how chicken litter survives in soil and its ability to generate crystals of calcium carbonate.

He also examined a harmful plant-infecting fungus found in hemp farms throughout Georgia.

DeMontigny spent a year in Dr. Dave Bachoon's molecular lab too, analyzing the quality of water from streams around Georgia, Florida and Puerto Rico.

He has applied for the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program to help pay for a Ph.D. in cellular and molecular biology at the University of Maryland.

Computer Science major Zeenal Prajapati is from Vadodara, Gujarat, India. She was attracted to Georgia College because of its computer science program and scholarships offered by the university's International Education Center.

Prajapati likes the creativity, innovation and limitless opportunities technology offers. She'd like to make a positive difference in the world using computers.

From her favorite professor, Dr. Gita Phelps, Prajapati learned to keep going and never give up. Phelps encouraged her students to keep developing their skills by doing projects and using programs or interesting computer games to solve real-world problems.

Prajapati hopes to get an entry-level computer job to gain experience, then a master's degree.

Environmental science major Isabella Banich of Alpharetta made the most of her college years by participating in undergraduate research and joining multiple clubs and organizations.

Making connections was the most important thing she learned.

Banich worked with Dr. Allison VandeVoort on sustainability. Their research focused on implementing compostable dishware into the current composting system on campus. Currently, the Office of Sustainability diverts consumer waste from the Maxwell Student Union dining facility to the university's compost area at West Campus. Banich wanted to find a disware that breaks down into compost.

Banich favorite class was Dr. Bruce Snyder's "Ecosystems of Georgia" travel course last May. The group hiked, camped and explored five ecosystems in areas like Jekyll Island, Moody Forest, Cedar Creek Wildlife Management Area, Vogel State Park and Blood Mountain.

They identified different species of animals, plants and insects that are native to Georgia.

Classes like this expanded Banich's education outside the classroom. She feels she's changed a lot in four years of college. She's more

outgoing and open to new experiences. She knows how to present a positive professional image to the world and engage with others.

This will help as Banich looks for an internship in the national or state park service. After that, she hopes to go to law school and study environmental policy.

Criminal justice major Cameron Alee of Augusta plans to use her minor in international studies with her criminal justice major for a career with the U.S. Foreign Service.

Alee studied abroad in South Korea and serves as president of the International Club at Georgia College.

She's learned to take other people's views into perspective and embrace differences in people.

Alee has also become more adaptable in college, which will be useful in a criminal justice career, where things can change at a moment's notice, and she'll need to shift directions quickly.

After graduation, Alee will return to South Korea to teach English to Kindergartners at a private school in Seoul, outside of Changdeokkung



Biology major Wesley DeMontigny presents research in class.



Computer science major Zeenal Prajapati.



Criminal justice major Cameron Alee in Seoul, South Korea.



Environmental science major Isabella Banich collects soil samples at the university compost site on West Campus.

## GCSU first in state to offer new election administration certificate

The United States is in dire need of professional election administrators who understand today's legal challenges, changing policies, vote-collection methods and latest technology.

In response, Georgia College & State University (GCSU) has created a new Election Administration Certificate—the first academic certificate on elections in the state of Georgia and one of only a few nationwide.

"Certificates in election administration go a long way in educating students about the election process, which builds public confidence in the election system," said Claire Sanders, senior instructor of political science at Georgia College.

"Since few universities offer such certificates," she said, "our students will have a unique educational advantage should they ever pursue a career in election administration or if they want to serve their community as a poll worker."

More than 8,000 election officials and 100,000 poll workers administer elections in the U.S.

Georgia College's Election Administration Certifi-



Junior political science major Colin Hall.

cate started this fall as a way to prepare students for a career in public service—and to graduate students who are knowledgeable about election laws and procedures, election bureaucracy, voting rights and political parties.

The program takes students beyond campaigns slogans, party rivalry and polarization—all too

common in today's political environment.

Final projects in Sanders' class recently focused on topics like voter confidence and how state election laws affect voting outcomes.

Junior political science major Colin Hall of Jones County thinks the certificate couldn't come at a better time. He wants to be an elected official but is dismayed by recent partisan fighting and lack of trust in election results.

To help fulfill internship hours, Hall was a Jones County poll worker in the recent mid-term elections. The job gave him newfound respect for poll workers and election administrators.

"This certificate brings awareness that my generation needs to step up, take a role and serve in a public capacity," he said. "The most rewarding part of working in the election process is the feeling I contributed to our democracy and increased my knowledge and trust in the election process."

## Did you know?

Georgia College & State University's beloved bobcat mascot, Thunder, celebrated a birthday recently. He turned 15 on Nov. 26.

The furry green and blue bobcat was the creation of Jason Hendrix, '09, who noticed other athletic university teams had a mascot.

Hendrix led the charge of a rowdy fan group back then, called the Thundercats. They were instrumental in raising money to pay for character design and purchase a mascot outfit.

Everything had to be decided—from the mascot's head and color to the size of his pants.

The mascot's name was put to a vote and "Thunder" won.

Thunder's first public appearance was for the traditional Hanging of the Greens display of Christmas decor on Front Campus in 2007.

Since then, he's become a popular and fun symbol of what it means to be a GCSU student. GO BOBCATS!

## What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit [frontpage.gcsu.edu/events](http://frontpage.gcsu.edu/events)

Tuesday

6

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come see Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion decorated for Christmas.

Wednesday

7

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come see Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion decorated for Christmas.

Thursday

8

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come see Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion decorated for Christmas.

Friday

9

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come see Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion decorated for Christmas.

7 p.m. The Nutcracker in Russell Auditorium.

Saturday

10

10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Come see Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion decorated for Christmas.

7 p.m. The Nutcracker in Russell Auditorium. Last performance is 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 11.