



For this alumnus, community always comes first

Dylan Amerson, '12, grew up in Milledgeville but always wanted to explore beyond the area. Once he did, he came right back to where his heart is—the community—and transformed the family store into Huff's Market.

Amerson's passion for sustainability and the outdoors started with Georgia College & State University.

He went to Armstrong State University for two years but moved back to home due to a health condition. When he started school at Georgia Military College, he heard about Georgia College's Outdoor Education program and realized it'd be a perfect fit.

Amerson met with Dr. Jeff Turner, associate professor of Outdoor Education and liked what he had to say about the program. Amerson also met with his surgeon, who encouraged him to find a job where he could stay active. It would be best for his health.

"I've always loved being outside," Amerson said. "I spent a lot of time surfing, kayaking and backpacking throughout college. So, I decided to give this major a try."

He took Theory of Outdoor Education and other classes with Dr. Will Hobbs, a former assistant professor of kinesiology at Georgia College. Hobbs taught him the foundational skill of critical thinking.

Amerson considers the program "life changing."

"It was incredibly thought provoking to think how people connect through adventure, pushing boundaries and just being outside," he said. "That really resonated with me. I was hooked after his second class. Dr. Hobbs was incredibly challenging and just awesome."

"He challenged me to think about things in a different way," Amerson said. "Anytime I made a statement, he would constantly ask 'Why?' I had never been challenged to think about why I see the world the way I do."

Amerson was in classes with a cohort of 15 other students. Some became his best friends. He especially enjoyed the trips they took nearly every other week.

"It was good to grow and learn a lot together and even be challenged by each other," he said. "There were some people who I just didn't mesh with, but learning how to work with them was one of the most beneficial things for me in the long run. That great lesson has helped me throughout my career."

After Georgia College, Amerson worked at a wildlife center in Mansfield, Georgia. Then, he got a job at the Great Smoky Mountains Institute at Tremont in Tennessee. He taught environmental education and led backpacking trips each summer. He lived in the national park for four years, and that's where he met his wife, Kensey.

"It was the most formative job I've ever had," Amerson said. "It helped me solidify some things that started to form in college—like who I wanted to be, what I cared about and what work values I had. That was very beneficial for me."

Turner was professional in the classroom. But when he went on a trip with students, he showed a more personable side.

"It's tough for people who live out here to get produce. We want people to have healthier food options, so we can go to bed at night feeling good about what we've sold to people," Amerson said.

"That has carried with me, especially when I worked in wilderness therapy with kids who were very challenging," he said. "It's better to

start off as a professional, like showing them what we're here to do. Then, slowly peel back those layers as a person, letting more of your humanity show in a thoughtful way."

In 2021, Amerson's mother called to ask if he'd be interested in buying the family business. The store had been his great uncle William Huff's, then his great aunt Dorothy "Dottie" Huff's for over 60 years. His wife also talked about raising their now two-year-old son, Sawyer, closer to family.

The couple sold their Tennessee home and moved to Baldwin County to run the family business. They wanted to make it their own and alleviate a missing food element in the area—so they challenged themselves and transformed Huff's Store into Huff's Market to sell local produce, meats, dairy and more.

Before Huff's Market, there was no store in this part of the county to get local produce, meats, dairy and more.

"We wanted to cater to people, who live out this way, who didn't have access to fresh, whole food," Amerson said. "It's also a place where you can feel a sense of community."

The couple has built relationships with the local residents, including the most of the local farmers where they get their meat from. They even know the individuals who make the cheese straws where only quality, wholesome ingredients are used.

They recently visited a cattle farm for the third time.

"These cows are sustainable," Amerson said. "We get to go see them out in their pasture to know how well they're cared for. We try to have the same relationship with our other farmers. And that's really cool—feeling so tight with the community."

"We're taking care of our neighbors by buying their products," Amerson said. "We care a lot about that."

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Dylan Amerson with his chickens. (Below) Fresh veggies at Huff's Market.



Search, Rescue & Prepping for Disaster: Just another day for this intern

Between meetings at her internship this summer, Elizabeth Czarick, '23, talked about missing persons, radiation attacks and disaster prep.

She has just finished an internship with the Gwinnett County Office of Emergency Management. She graduated with a public health degree from Georgia College & State University and will move on to her master's in Health and Human Performance.

As a unit of the Gwinnett County Police Department, the agency plans for emergencies, coordinates response resources and assists the public in recovery following a disaster.

Her first project was identifying the critical infrastructure located at 2,000 different addresses. This was crucial for the county's hazard mitigation plan which was due for its five-year update.

Czarick worked with Deputy Director of the agency, Michael Shaw, and met with representatives from municipal utilities and agencies like the Department of Homeland Security, Georgia Department of Health and American Red Cross.



Elizabeth Czarick

"I've seen how much [my team members] work together, so I feel like I could work with them too," Czarick said.

At a conference in Marietta, she also learned about disaster response to radiation and the coordination required between critical agencies to prevent catastrophes.

"I think the internship site was the best place I could have picked," Czarick said. "Most of the emergency management agencies I saw were for the city. Working with the county as a whole, I got to see it more in-depth. The county works with all the cities, metro Atlanta and other offices as well."

Working with police, fire and health services showed her the impact disasters have on a community's public health, and how hard people work behind the scenes to avert emergencies.

"I've seen how much they work together, so I feel like I could work with them too," Czarick said. "I'm glad I interned here, because they were all amazing, and I discovered how much emergency management ties into public health."

During her internship, Czarick traveled with the team wherever they went and helped during search and rescue training mission. "I was able to get hands-on experience," she said.

Did you know?

Georgia College & State University's Learning Center just celebrated 10 years of its Supplemental Instructor (SI) program where students tutor other students.

One of the first accredited SI tutoring programs in Georgia, SI tutoring sessions offer close-knit study sessions, learning activities and advice for students who are struggling in a particular class.

An SI leader is a student who just finished a course with high marks. They're matched with professors within their discipline, then audit a course alongside peers who need assistance.

In spring 2023, 50% of all Georgia College students attended SI sessions. Of those, only 11% dropped, withdrew or failed their difficult class—compared to 27% of those who did not participate in SI.

"I think it's a wonderful resource that the school provides that you don't see in some other universities," said Dr. Kelly Lee, '15, lecturer of economics and former SI leader. "I think it makes a big difference."

New chief diversity officer has big plans for campus and community

Dr. Michael Snowden has big plans in the works for diversity, equity and inclusion at Georgia College & State University.

Snowden began serving as Georgia College's new chief diversity officer in July. He feels honored and privileged to have been selected to spearhead the vital work of inclusion and belonging within the university community.

"Inclusion signifies granting individuals a seat at the table while belonging affirms their rightful place in that very space," Snowden said. "My commitment lies in empowering marginalized groups and guiding the majority through the ever-evolving landscape."

Georgia College President Cathy Cox welcomed Snowden to campus saying he "joined our university's leadership team at a time when we recently

welcomed the largest and one of the most diverse first-year classes we have had in years. GCSU will benefit greatly from his passion and deep experience in this field and his willingness to share that knowledge across our campus."

Snowden's professional journey began at the University of Minnesota Morris, where he was an educational and Gateway Program coordinator, providing students of color the tools they need to excel in college.

He was also chief diversity and Title IX officer for McNeese State University, where he was selected for the University of Louisiana Management & Leadership Institute. He served as director of Multicultural Affairs at Armstrong Atlantic State University, as well.

Snowden most recently served as vice president

of Inclusion and Diversity at Northwestern State University. He developed a strategic plan and provided coaching seminars there for diversity, equity and inclusivity as part of the Northwestern Inclusive Coaching Seminar Series. He was also a keynote speaker at many high-impact events.

He envisions Georgia College as a welcoming, inclusive campus where everyone can be their authentic self. This vision includes balancing student diversity numbers and bringing African American and Latino Hispanic numbers up. He began doing this by connecting with Georgia College Early College students.

"That's a big step toward letting that student population know they have a home here," he said. "All they have to do is matriculate."



GCSU's new Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Michael Snowden.