



Students improve communication skills through action and adventure

Walking campus this fall, you might've seen some peculiar sights.

On Front Campus, student groups were moving on and off tarps, touching and calling out numbers. Students were seen building tall towers, piece-by-piece with plastic piping. On the walkway between Arts & Sciences and Beeson Hall, groups moved slowly, tightly gripping brightly-colored bandanas and balancing cups of water.

These activities were being used in Dr. Lee Gillis' senior capstone class "Experiential Therapies." The psychology chair is a leading researcher of adventure therapy, which uses challenging ventures for healing and treatment.

Now, he's showing students how action plays a role in communication. It helps when identifying problems and finding solutions. Gillis first learned about experiential activities from his mentor, Karl Rohnke, who used them to foster trust and encourage cooperation.

Call it career-ready competencies—wrapped in a bit of fun.

"In traditional therapy, you have the therapist and client sitting in chairs," Gillis said. "We want to get them out of their chairs and out doing something. I have broadened the class beyond my area of expertise, Adventure Therapies, to include other experiential therapies like art, music, the wilderness, equine and gardening."

On Mondays, Gillis assigned a psychology article for students to read. They used Galileo or another database to research and dispute or support assigned reading. Data collected in class was used in their final capstone presentations at the end of the semester.

On Wednesdays, his class put what they learned into action—experiencing firsthand the therapeutic activities they read about. Afterwards, they discuss what happened, assessing what worked and what didn't.

They answered a questionnaire about the day's activities, then wrote a Descriptive Assessment and Plan (DAP), which are common observation notes used by psychologists.

The class did about eight different activities this fall.

In one, the entire group was blindfolded except for a 'consultant' who verbally instructed the others as they put large, plastic puzzle pieces together. Blindfolded members asked questions, but the consultant could only answer 'yes' or 'no.'

In another activity, two groups worked together—one with eyes open and the other with eyes tightly shut. Students with sight told those without how to rubber band cups together and insert an object on top.

Good communication skills are required to accomplish each task. The purpose of 'blind' experiments is to get students accustomed to open-ended questions and the need for precise language.

The most popular activity involved bandanas and cups of water.

Student groups moved about 30 yards—maneuvering corners, steps and platforms without spilling.

Almost always at first, groups super focus on the cup and the outcome.

In time, they became more aware of the process, and how they're treating others. They learned to give clear instructions, telling others when obstacles or steps are behind them. They quickly figured out the shortest person should go upstairs first, and the tallest should go down first.

When someone is tired, they learn it's easier to ask for help.

Cooperation and communication get the job done, Gillis said. Students

become more encouraging with each other and exact in the words they use.

Gillis once used the bandana/water experiment with a troubled family. They sought help because of a rebellious teenaged son. But during the activity, it became obvious to everyone—including the mother—that she was overbearing. While she barked out orders, the family was unable to complete the task without spilling water. Had he told the mother she was domineering, Gillis said, she might've been disbelieving and defensive.

The activity changed the dynamics of the family group, and they began working together.

"Literally, in this activity," Gillis said, "people have to pull together to get a task done. We don't have to talk about what happened yesterday or last week. It's happening right here in front of us, right now. Everybody sees what's happening."

"The problem solving that goes on during activity helps build trust," he said. "This will help when students get jobs as counselors or psychologists and must quickly establish relationships with their clients."

Students like the element of physical movement. Senior psychology major Mitchell Foskey of Tifton, Georgia, said most of his classes are sitting through lectures and taking notes. He liked the group aspect of experiential therapy.

"Sometimes we're too focused to speak. We pay way too much attention to the cup instead of teamwork. It's a lot harder than you'd think," Foskey said.

Someday, he'd like to work as a sports psychologist. Foskey knows he'll be able to use the activities he's learning about this semester.

"There's a wide variety of different experiential therapies, like doing nature walks," Foskey said. "You get to see everybody's point of view. I thought experiential therapy was something you experience within four walls, but it's more than that. We get to live out the example and experience the activity for ourselves."



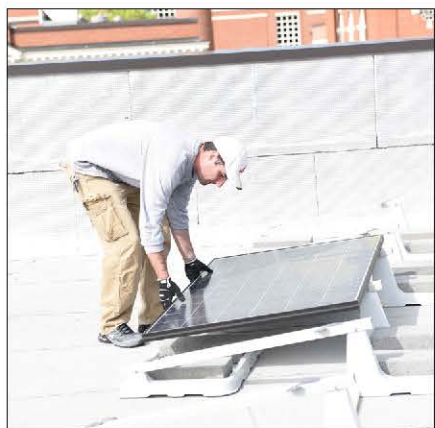
GCSU's free solar and green business certification course open to residents

A new grant program at Georgia College & State University gives Central Georgia residents the opportunity to take a free certification course in solar and green technology. It will also provide the tools for starting their own businesses.

The 40-hour course, "An Introduction to Solar Technology and Entrepreneurship," launches in January through Georgia College's Department of Continuing and Professional Studies. It's paid from a \$100,000 grant from the Partnership for Inclusive Innovation (PIN), awarded to the university's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship in September.

The course is for anyone interested in getting trained in green technology, solar power and next-generation business tactics. Underserved residents and the unemployed are especially invited to apply. The course will be taught by Dr. Nicolas Creel, assistant professor of business law and ethics, and Dr. Hasitha Mahabuduge, associate professor of physics.

Special emphasis will be placed on the design



and installation of photovoltaic electrical systems for residential and commercial use. Participants will also be taught about entrepreneurship and how to start their own businesses in the solar and green-energy market sector.

Participants will receive a certificate of completion and selected individuals will install solar panels on local government buildings in



Milledgeville.

There will be four cohorts of classes from January to June 2024. Participants must be age 18 or older with an interest in solar power. To sign up, please visit: <https://cpe.gcsu.edu/gcsu/course/course.aspx?catId=115>.

For more information, please contact Nancy Finney at 478-445-2762.

Did you know?

Dr. Ellen France, a biology professor at Georgia College & State University, recently took the "Best in Show" prize in the fine arts amateur division at the Georgia National Fair.

France submitted four original watercolors. Two were given first-place awards: The Best in Show winner depicts a carousel horse with bright lights in the background, and the other shows a brown cow in a golden field.

"This was completely unexpected," France said. "This is my third time participating in the Georgia National Fair fine art competition. You have to attend the artist reception to find out if your paintings won anything. To be honest, I was completely surprised by winning the Best in Show prize. I had no expectation of winning anything."

To see her watercolors, please visit Front Page at frontpage.gcsu.edu/node/5057 and France's Instagram page at <https://www.instagram.com/ecfrance/>.

There's still time to enjoy Christmas lights and festive music this season

It's almost Christmas! Time's running out to enjoy the holiday festivities with Georgia College & State University.

There are still two great events for you to enjoy:

- The university's Max Noah Singers will embark on their annual Holiday Tour, singing festive songs in various cities in Georgia and finishing with a homecoming performance in Milledgeville, Dec. 20.

Audiences will be treated with holiday favorites like "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" and "Christmas Time Is Here."

The concert closes with Palestrina's "Adoramus Te," the university's Alma Mater and "Silent Night."

First performances are 10:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Dec. 17 at Haddock Baptist Church. At 7 p.m.,

Dec. 18, Max Noah Singers will be at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Warner Robins.

The trip culminates with a homecoming concert

at 7:30 p.m., Dec. 20, at First Presbyterian Church in Milledgeville.

A \$5 donation is encouraged. For more information, please email music@gcsu.edu or call 478-445-8289.

- Through Friday, Dec. 22, Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion holds its annual "Christmas at the Mansion" tours. Tours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and Sundays 2 to 4 p.m. Tours start on the hour. The last tour begins at 4 p.m.

This year's focus is on the year 1851 during the administration of Howell Cobb.

Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$7 for senior citizens and \$2 for students. To learn more, visit <https://www.gcsu.edu/mansion> or call 478-445-4545.

