



Congrats to the graduates, Fall Class of 2023!



Nearly 350 students received undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees Saturday, Dec. 16, from Georgia College & State University. Nine valedictorians with perfect 4.0 GPAs graduated with majors in mass communication, political science, accounting, management, biology and nursing. The university also had its first two students to graduate with the new Education Doctorate Degree in Curriculum & Instruction.



Class of 2023: French tennis player scores top notch at GCSU

Management major Aurelien Arlot of Paris, France, is a member of the Bobcat Men's Tennis Team at Georgia College & State University, typically playing on the fifth line in singles. Prior to transferring, he was the No. 2 singles player for Riverside City College in Riverside, California, in his freshman season. "We have a very good tennis team at Georgia College," he said. "It's better than the one in California. I've had to work hard to get to a better position on the team."

Arlot was glad to get recruited to Georgia College. He wanted to see more of the United States than just California. He's met new people here and learned how to make better use of his playing time in tennis. Working on a schedule was challenging at first, but now he's thriving.

"As a student-athlete, I needed to make my own schedule, choosing morning and early afternoon classes, so I could practice tennis," he said.

Arlot dedicates three hours a day toward practice and one hour for conditioning. During fall, the team practices more to get ready for matches in the spring.

Arlot made friends with several international players on the GCSU tennis team. They're from Argentina, Germany, Japan,

Switzerland and other countries. He enjoys learning some of the different languages.

"I'm at Georgia College, but I feel like I'm still traveling," Arlot said. "When I talk to my teammates, it's very interesting to communicate with them and compare their cultures."

Playing tennis is a way for Arlot to relax and relieve stress. "When I walk on the court and play tennis, I forget about everything else and just have fun," he said.

The professor who made the greatest impact on Arlot was Dr. Ward Risvold, lecturer of business communications.

"He's very nice to me," Arlot said. "And I know from my teammates that he's also eager to help them. Dr. Risvold assisted us during class and outside of class. He even asked me if I needed help finding a job."

Steve Barsby, assistant athletic director and head Men's and Women's Tennis coach taught Arlot to be more independent. "He let us practice by ourselves, teaching us to figure things out on our own," Arlot said, which is very important in life to be able to handle every situation by yourself."

Once Arlot graduates, he's going back to Paris to enjoy some time with family for a few months.

Math major tells others bad times can lead to something good

There was a dark moment in Monica Lichtenwalner's college years when things seemed bleak.

In fall of her sophomore year, 2021, she got COVID-19 the first week of class and felt "very sick" for two weeks. A month and a half later, she still didn't feel fully recovered and dropped half her classes, because she was falling behind.

She knew this would delay her senior capstone project and cause her to graduate later than she planned.

It was disheartening at the time. But Lichtenwalner soon realized it was a gift in disguise.

Prior to her illness, she didn't know which area of math she wanted to work in or who to choose as a mentor.

The additional semester allowed Lichtenwalner to take "Abstract Algebra" before starting a capstone. She enjoyed the course so much she chose that professor, Dr. Marcela Chiorescu, as her capstone advisor.

That class also led to what Lichtenwalner calls her "biggest achievement" in college.

Chiorescu encouraged Lichtenwalner to apply for a Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU), funded by the National Science Foundation.

Lichtenwalner got one last summer with Virginia Commonwealth University—and used what she learned in class to research ways for simplifying complex Lie algebras.

"That delay also established my desire to study math, specifically abstract algebra, at the graduate level. So," she said, "the advice I would give incoming students is focus on doing what you can, and everything else will work itself out. You never know what the future holds, and something that might seem bad at the time could eventually result in something good."

During the REU, her group was able to prove a few results relating to the sequence of Lie algebras associated with graphs. They presented their findings at a research symposium and have a paper in progress.

Before this experience, the idea of mathematical research seemed intimidating. But the REU gave Lichtenwalner a boost of confidence. She now plans to pursue a Ph.D. in math and a career in academia.

"I found this to be a valuable experience," Lichtenwalner said. "It gave me more insight into what mathematical research is like."

"I've changed a lot in the years I've

been at Georgia College & State University," she added. "I've grown more confident, my mental health has gotten significantly better, and I feel like I know what direction I want my life to go in after I graduate."

Dr. Rachel Epstein also made a big impact on the Cumming, Georgia, resident. Epstein was the first math professor Lichtenwalner had in college and advised the Math Club, which Lichtenwalner served as vice president and president.

Lichtenwalner was also a Supplemental Instructor (SI) in Epstein's precalculus class this semester.

Epstein led a group of Math Club members to Math Jeopardy victory last semester at the 2023 Mathematical Association of America (MAA) Southeastern Section Conference in South Carolina.

It was the first time Georgia College won this grueling, three-day competition. And it was "the most fun" Lichtenwalner had in college. She was one of a four-member team competing against 15 schools in the Southeast.



Lichtenwalner credits the Georgia College Math Department for presenting opportunities like Math Jeopardy and the REU. Faculty also helped ensure her success.

"The mathematics department at Georgia College is full of really amazing and helpful professors who definitely had a lot of influence and impact on my goal to pursue a Ph.D.," she said. "My experience as an employee for the Learning Center also helped me realize that I really enjoy helping other people understand and appreciate math."