



GCSU Dyslexia Endorsement program equips teachers for reading success

In preschool, a set of twins demonstrated their knowledge and reasoning skills differently than other children. The sisters had trouble remembering the shapes and sounds of letters.

Their special education teacher, Berinda Turk—a four-time graduate of Georgia College & State University—wasn't sure, but she thought the twins might be dyslexic. She couldn't get them out of her mind and heart.

"I wanted to learn more about dyslexia so this year, if I was presented with the same type of characteristics," Turk said, "I'd be able to help kids like that a little better."

Last spring, Turk signed up for a new dyslexia endorsement program at Georgia College.

She had earned her bachelor's degree in business administration in 1992 at Georgia College; her master's in special education in 2008; and her specialist degrees in curriculum & instruction and educational leadership in 2011 and '17.

But as advanced as she is in her knowledge of teaching, Turk said her experience with the twins was puzzling. She wasn't sure how to identify and meet their specific needs.

Then two things happened. In March 2023, state legislators passed Bill HB538, Georgia's Early Literacy Act (K-3). It prioritized the detection and remediation of dyslexia in children and youth. It called for teachers to be trained in "structured literacy, knowledge of the science of reading" and other high-quality educational techniques. And across the state, 20 higher-ed institutions and Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs), previously approved by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) to offer dyslexia endorsement programs for K-12 teachers, received funding from the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) to increase awareness and support for children with reading difficulties.

These developments led to the creation of Georgia College's dyslexia endorsement program and are part of a nationwide push to ensure early and effective intervention for students who find reading difficult.

As many as 20 percent of the U.S. population—one in five people—display mild or more severe signs of dyslexia, a neuro-cognitive disorder, according to the National Institute of Health (NIH). In addition, 37 percent of fourth graders in the United States score below basic reading levels, according to the Nation's Report Card—issued in 2022 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Helping students with things like expressive language, letter shapes, phonetic awareness and word decoding increases self-confidence.

In Georgia, Jan. 31st is designated "Dyslexia Day at the Capitol." The International Dyslexia Association of Georgia invited legislators for lunch and a group photo on the Capitol staircase.

In time for this celebration, Gov. Brian Kemp recently earmarked more than \$5 million for a list of approved statewide screening assessments to detect signs of dyslexia as early as kindergarten.

"There are lots of different states across the country who are all now passing similar legislation," said Dr. Alexandra Berglund, assistant professor of Reading, Literacy, and Language Education and co-principal investigator for Georgia College's Dyslexia Endorsement Program.

"But Georgia is on top of the wave," she said, "with the big push

for schools in the state to have programs like these, in addition to the mandatory dyslexia screenings that are going to start."

Early screenings will be helpful in Turk's job. She co-teaches preschool at the Early Learning Center (ELC) in Milledgeville. Up to now, there weren't any protocols to measure dyslexia in children that young.

When Baldwin County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Nora Price notified teachers about the dyslexia program at Georgia College, Turk jumped at the chance to sign up.

The university received its first grant of \$106,000 from the GaDOE in 2022, followed by another grant of nearly \$92,000 to continue the program this year. Funding pays tuition and fees, making the program completely free for teachers in Georgia.

"I encourage anybody who really wants to learn about literacy to do this program," Turk said. "It's been a godsend for me, because it taught me to be more intentional with my teaching. If we're going to increase literacy, we've got to be intentional about reading."

Turk was in the university's first cohort of 20, a mix of teachers from elementary and middle schools from across the state, as well as high school special education, English language and math teachers. The new cohort just started with 11 additional students.

Georgia College's Dyslexia Endorsement Program is designed for graduate students, like Turk, who are already teaching in schools. This allows busy educators statewide to access the university's top-notch literacy programs, said Dr. Linda Bradley, program coordinator for Reading, Literacy and Language in the department of Professional Learning & Innovation.

"What really makes us unique is we're in a state where there is now a real emphasis on dyslexia—where teachers, policy makers and our accrediting agencies are committed to ensuring that students have every opportunity to learn to read successfully," Bradley said.

"I think we're also unique in the sense that this is for graduate credit. That's important for a lot of our teachers. Collectively," she said, "we're working with educators across the state to make a difference."



Berinda Turk at the ELC. Below: Drs. Linda Bradley and Alexandra Berglund.



Nursing grad is more than a translator for French Canadian patient

A native French speaker from Quebec wasn't responding well to care at a medical center in Madison, Georgia, this fall.

She was confused, unresponsive to treatment and not receiving the best care she could. But when graduating nursing senior, Claire Halloran, entered the room with a cheerful, "bonjour madame," everything changed.

"She just lit up," Halloran said, "it was like night and day. I figured it would help, but I just had no idea how big of an impact it would make."

Immediately Halloran's patient relaxed with a much softer, receptive disposition. And though Halloran isn't qualified to speak medical French, her friendly greetings and casual chat made a real difference in her patient's comfort.

"That was one of my favorite nursing days ever," Halloran said. "It was so clear that she felt so much more seen and understood. It was just so special, because I really wasn't sure if that was something I'd ever get to live out."



"I want to be a knowledgeable nurse, I want to be a capable nurse," she said. "But above all, I want to be an empathetic nurse."

When she graduated from her nursing cohort in December, Halloran completed two minors: French and women and gender studies.

Originally, she pursued French after taking it at Lassiter High School. As she explored the

language at Georgia College & State University, however, she learned the value of embracing world cultures, and the impact it can make on your perspective.

"I want to encourage anybody, especially nursing students, to pursue a language even if it's just a few courses," Halloran said. "I think being able to communicate with patients in their first language, making that additional effort to make them feel comfortable and heard, can make such a difference in a patients' care."

"Anywhere that you're going to work, you're going to encounter a variety of languages and a variety of cultures," she said. "Being well-versed in how to receive those cultures, and how to approach them and appreciate them, is going to improve the level of compassion and empathy you can give those patients."

After graduation, Halloran will work as a progressive care unit nurse at Northside Hospital Gwinnett.

Did you know?

Georgia College & State University's Office of Student Inclusion and Belonging is sponsoring two self defence workshops from 3 to 5 p.m. and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. this Friday, Feb. 23, at the GCSU Wellness & Recreation Center.

By learning how attacks occur and where your risks really lie, you can better recognize when being targeted.

In "Defend Yourself," an interactive, participatory workshop, you'll learn practical skills to protect yourself and others.

Safety tools include the foundations of self defence, such as awareness and prevention; verbal skills; boundary setting; and assertiveness.

You'll learn to stop an attack or abuse before it becomes physical. You'll also learn physical self defence techniques, like effective strikes that allow you to stop an attack and flee to safety.

To register, visit: <https://bit.ly/DefendYourself223> or call (478) 445-8156.

What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/calendar

Tuesday

20

7:30 p.m. Guest Artist Recital: The Catacoursic Consort: Secret of the Muse" in Magnolia Ballroom.

Wednesday

21

11 a.m.-7 p.m. GCSU Softball vs. Shorter University, doubleheader at Peeler Complex, W. Campus.

Noon Times Talk on "Should Presidents ever be immune from following the law?" in Ina Dillard Russell Library, room 241.

3:30-10 p.m. GCSU Basketball vs. Clayton State University, doubleheader at Centennial Center.

6 p.m. Book Talk by Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, author of "Tracks on the Trail: Popular Music, Race, and the U.S. Presidency" in Georgia's Old Governor's Mansion.

Thursday

22

5-7 p.m. Artist reception for "The Transients Mundi Project" with artists Candida Borges and Gabriel Mario Velez in Leland Gallery, Ennis Hall.

Friday

23

3-9 p.m. GCSU Baseball v. University of North Georgia, doubleheader at John Kurtz Field, W. Campus.

Saturday

24

4-9 p.m. GCSU Softball vs. Flagler College, doubleheader at Peeler Complex, W. Campus.