



Jain Studies students see the great and ancient temples of India

After traveling 24 hours by plane and a motorized rickshaw ride through the twisting streets of Udaipur, India, to their 'haveli' (hotel)—a mansion several centuries old—two Georgia College & State University students were exhausted and barely able to keep their eyes open. Although they hadn't eaten, they said they just wanted to go to bed and sleep.

Trudging to their rooms, the students looked out at the stunning city—the "Venice of India"—emerging from the serenity of a lake. All of a sudden their eyes popped wide open, the surreal beauty reigniting their adrenaline.

"I was in India already. So, I joined them in the city. They had just flown in, and the two students looked very tired," said Dr. Sunita Manian, chair of Georgia College's Department of Philosophy, Religion and Liberal Studies (PALS).

"Oh my goodness, they're probably thinking this was a huge mistake," Manian said. "But when checking into our hotel and they see the view of the lake, they perked up and were ready to go to dinner. Seeing the difference by how tired they looked and then how excited they were—it was very rewarding."

After that, the students—Liam Landry of Athens, Georgia, and Basil Cooper of Suwanee, Georgia—couldn't wait to soak everything in.

They went on the 15-day study trip in December with Manian and Dr. James Winchester, who incorporates Jainism into the philosophy and religion courses he teaches at Georgia College. The trip was paid through generous donations from the Jain community and university grants.

The group didn't waste one minute on the journey, which took them on breathtaking excursions to see temples, art, caves and architecture in seven Indian cities.

It was all part of a new position at Georgia College, the "S & R Palvia Endowed Veetraag Vigyaan Professorship in Jain Studies." The endowment was established in fall 2023, funded by a \$250,000 gift from Dr. Shailendra and Rajkumari Palvia, who live in Atlanta.

It's the only Jain professorship in Georgia and one of about a dozen across the nation.

"This adds a new dimension to our study of contemporary challenges facing humanity and the world," Manian said. "It will help students to further explore diverse religious cultures of the wider world and learn about similarities and differences between various religious traditions."

Jainism is one of the world's most ancient religions, slightly older than Buddhism.

There are about 33 million gods and goddesses in India, many of them Hindu. But there are no gods in Jainism. People go to Jain temples to learn about the great thinkers and contemplate how they lived their lives.

Jains are non-violent and believe in reincarnation. There is no process for converting to Jainism.

Still, people can adopt the Jain way of life—eating vegetarian and respecting all living things, even the smallest.

"The three key principals of Jainism are of non-violence, non-dogmatism and non-possessiveness," Winchester said. "Jains think the world would be a better place if more people took those principals seriously. That's the goal of the professorship—to increase understand-

ing and knowledge of Jainism in the world."

For Landry and Cooper, classroom lessons became first-hand realities in India.

The group visited Jain temples in Udaipur, known as "the beautiful City of Lakes." In Verul, India, they toured the Ellora Caves—a massive complex of 34 caverns sculpted in the 7th and 11th centuries. They learned about Jain "tirthankaras" or spiritual teachers.

The caves were Landry's favorite site, the largest statues he's ever seen. The junior is double majoring in mathematics and philosophy. He had seen pictures of places like this in books.

"But nothing compares to being able to see them in person," he said. "The size of Ranakpur really floors you when you see it with your own eyes. The carvings at Dilwara were probably the most intricate I've ever seen."

Double majoring in philosophy and liberal studies with a concentration in religion, Cooper was excited to see India's great temples up close. The junior is also double minoring in art history and museum science, so the trip was a chance to combine all disciplines into one learning experience.

In Ranakpur, they saw a distinctive temple with 1,444 pillars, intricately carved in marble. Its 24 halls were dedicated to the first spiritual teacher, Parsvanatha, who is remembered in a single-marbled statue in the temple's center.

On that first transformative day, Cooper got a new perspective of South Asian religion and culture. It reinforced a desire to get a Ph.D. in South Asian religious studies and continue researching Jainism.

"I was excited to be able to experience a culture and landscape so vastly different from my own," Cooper said. "Not only this, but I've been interested in studying South Asian religions since high school, so the fact that the opportunity to travel came with the research obligation was something I was beyond excited for."

Landry enjoyed learning about Jainism too. He plans to go to law school. The trip prepared him for this future by expanding his world-view.

There were museums, lectures and a visit to the International Schools of Jain Studies in Prune, India. The group also attended a conference hosted by the Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies and Academic Exchange. Landry presented his research on the ways he thinks Buddhism, Jainism and Marxism can contribute to the end of human suffering.

Cooper presented a paper on temple art and architecture in India. Seeing the structures up close and learning about the "austere" religion devoted to non-violence was strikingly different than Western culture. It was a chance to learn "something new" at every turn.

"In the West, it feels like there's always ongoing war and violence, plus a huge cultural dedication to materialism," Cooper said. "I wanted to know more about Jain philosophy and how I could better understand a lifestyle away from these things. Spreading an understanding of Jain philosophy could also be incredibly beneficial for propagating a greater understanding and respect for people with different backgrounds and lifestyles."

In addition to mouth-dropping temple sights, Landry and Cooper also got a taste of Indian cuisine. At first, Manian said Landry would only



Liam Landry and Basil Cooper, above. The temple at Ranakpur, below.



eat pizza. But he soon started experimenting and came to love a spicy, black lentil dish call "dal makhani." Cooper misses a sweet dessert of fried dough, called gulab jamun.

The students appreciated traveling with their professors, who could explain the history, ancient scrolls, rituals and culture. Manian was born in Calcutta, India, and speaks the Indian languages of Hindi, Bengali and Tamil. The nation has about 300 languages altogether and 560 dialects.

This semester, Landry and Cooper are continuing their study of Jainism by learning Sanskrit, an ancient South Asian language. Most Jain texts are written in Sanskrit, so this will help with their research with Smith, the new endowed professor.

"Overall, honestly, it was amazing," Landry said. "Everywhere we went was utterly breathtaking."

"We can learn about these things in a classroom," he said, "but when you see it up close and feel how tirelessly people worked to create these sites, it gives you an appreciation not only for the cultures and history but for the people who lived and experienced life there."

GCSU alumnus presents \$100,000 check to GCSU on behalf of Aflac

Virgil R. Miller, '92, is the president of Aflac U.S. He jumped on that prestigious path as an accounting major and mathematics minor at Georgia College & State University.

Outfitted in an Aflac-blue blazer lined with both Aflac and Georgia College logos, Miller recently presented a \$100,000 Aflac CareGrant to the university's College of Health Sciences—the first of its kind in the state of Georgia. The money will support implementation of COHS' newest initiative: a mobile health clinic.

"Anytime we see an organization trying to improve healthcare outcomes for individuals, especially those in underserved communities, we want to help," Miller said. "We established this CareGrant program and have donated over \$2 million to organizations just like right here at Georgia College."

The check marks the first time a CareGrant has been awarded to a Georgia institution and is the single biggest donation made toward the mobile health clinic.



Alumnus Virgil R. Miller on the Aflac bench at GCSU.

To commemorate the occasion, an Aflac-blue bench emblazoned with the organization's signature duck portraits was installed outside the Parks Memorial Building on N. Wilkinson Street.

"The CareGrant is designed to ease the burden of medical care costs in rural and underserved communities, and Aflac thought our mobile health

clinic aligned with their grant's mission," said Dr. Will Evans, dean of the College of Health Sciences. "This donation puts us a lot further down the road at establishing this clinic and extending the Health Sciences mission into our rural communities."

The mobile health clinic is an initiative borne out of the Georgia College Center for Health and Social Issues. Once established, the mobile clinic will provide screenings, as well as primary, maternal and obstetrical care to Baldwin and surrounding counties.

In addition, the College of Health Sciences will use the unit to extend their portfolio of experts into the community while providing field experiences and internship opportunities to Georgia College students.

A true lifelong learner, Miller has continued to educate himself throughout his career.

"I believe in what we're doing, and I believe that people in this community deserve that type of help," Miller said.

Did you know?

Georgia College & State University's J. Whitney Bunting College of Business & Technology is offering free tax assistance for qualified taxpayers in Central Georgia through its department of Accounting and Business Law and in partnership with the United Way of Central Georgia.

Accounting undergraduate and graduate students will provide free tax return preparation services as part of the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA). They'll give advice with accounting instructors overseeing the process.

This initiative offers the broader community a valuable service while also giving students real-world experience and the opportunity to give back to Milledgeville and Central Georgia.

Services are 5 to 7 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays through March 13 in Atkinson Hall, room 110.

To register, call 478-388-1956 or visit the VITA scheduling website for Central Georgia.

What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/events

Tuesday

5

8 a.m.-3 p.m. Mobile mammogram bus at Student Activities building, Front Campus. Schedule your appointment at <https://gcsu.mymammo.net>.

Wednesday

6

5-8 p.m. GCSU Baseball vs. Valdosta State University at John Kurtz Field.
5-7 p.m. "She Speaks," a Women's History Month Event, A&S Auditorium.

Thursday

7

5-7 p.m. Reception for "Journey to Asia, an Exhibition by GCSU Museum Studies II Students" will be at Underwood House Gallery.

5-6:30 p.m. "Be Resilient: Stories, Strategies and Tools to Rise Above Your Circumstances" with Dr. LeAnn Salazar-Montoya in Peabody Auditorium.

Friday

8

7:30 p.m. Jazz Band concert "Tunefull Jazz" in Russell Auditorium.

Saturday

9