



GCSU alumnus and Fulbright scholar supports democracy abroad



Kevin Morris at Kolesino Falls in the Republic of North Macedonia and below with his class, also in N. Macedonia.



To say that Kevin Morris, '17, is globally connected is an understatement.

As a Fulbright Scholar in North Macedonia and a Marshall Scholar, Morris obtained two master's degrees in London. With so many accolades and assignments in international relations, Morris has been busy abroad since he was a student at Georgia College & State University.

Also, as one of two individuals selected as Honors College Young Alumni of the Year, he recently spoke with John E. Sallstrom Honors College students, encouraging them to take advantage of these kinds of opportunities and how doing this got him where he is today.

Morris is a program associate for the Carter Center's Democracy Program—a non-governmental organization founded by President Jimmy and his wife, Rosalynn, after his presidency. The program is a unit of Emory University, working globally to support democratic elections and strengthen participatory democracy for all, especially groups that have been historically marginalized or that face political, cultural or socioeconomic barriers.

His portfolio focuses on the Citizen Observation Program in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is where he organizes, coordinates and plans operational facets of the Democracy Program's projects. Morris coordinates resources for trainings to support the citizens by providing the skill sets they need to attain true democracy.

"We have a great program for supporting citizen observation work in the Democratic Republic of Congo," Morris said. "We partner with local communities to empower them to monitor their elections, so they know how to watch for election irregularities and hold elections with integrity."

While studying for dual degrees in economics and history at Georgia College, Morris was always interested in empowering local communities to work for free elections. As a Marshall Scholar and through the Carter Center, he discovered that people in the Balkans and Congo are innovative and resilient communities in the process of democratic capacity building. They're the key driving force behind it. Morris has attended

many barbecues, long dinners and coffee shop meetings, talking with residents about democracy.

"It's important to have experts and people who've developed relationships, who guide the work they do in partnership with this community," Morris said. "Then you have local people feel comfortable telling you, 'These are our priorities. We know what we need to do. We just need the resources.'"

The National Scholarship Office and the Georgia College Honors College walked Morris through the application process for a Fulbright Scholarship, which he received in 2017. It funded his year in the Republic of North Macedonia.

That experience was a culmination of all the work he accomplished at Georgia College. This included extra projects, internships, classes and presenting at conferences. Everything he learned helped Morris understand the challenges the people of North Macedonia had in securing their democratic future.

"It was so neat to go to North Macedonia and immerse myself in what I'd studied and seen," he said. "Living among people and places that I've literally written papers on really drove home how real the challenges are and how important it is that we collaborate with local communities on solutions."

Morris credits Georgia College for empowering him to be a bit audacious.

"I got a fantastic education at Georgia College," he said. "I would not be able to do this work had I not taken advantage of the liberal arts education model. I studied history and economics, which gave me a good understanding of what I wanted to do in international relations, national development and democracy development."

He had some "standout" economic professors at Georgia College including Drs. J.J. Arias, Chris Clark and Brooke Conaway. The department was "like a little family," and the group of economic students he knew have all gone on "to do amazing things," Morris said.

"Dr. Risch shared my passion for the Balkan region," he said.

Axel Hawkins is named GCSU's second-straight Truman Scholar

Axel Hawkins, a history major from McDonough, Georgia, is Georgia College & State University's second Truman Scholar in as many years.

Established in 1975, the Truman Scholarship serves as a living memorial to Harry S. Truman. The foundation awards scholarships to exceptional college juniors who demonstrate outstanding leadership potential, a commitment to public service and academic excellence.

Hawkins' receipt of the scholarship makes back-to-back winners and four Truman finalists in the last five years from Georgia College.

"We are thrilled that Axel has been named a Truman Scholar. She represents Georgia College & State University so well as a student leader and has already shown such commitment to public service. This will be a tremendous opportunity for her continuing journey on that path," said GCSU President Cathy Cox.

"Her selection makes two consecutive years that Georgia College students have been named

Truman Scholars—a truly amazing feat for our university," Cox said. "Congratulations to Axel and the amazing support team she had from our Sallstrom Honors College guiding her in every step of the nomination process."

This year, the 60 new Truman Scholars were selected from 709 candidates. Hawkins was also the only student with Georgia as their home state, making her Georgia's 2024 Truman Scholar.

Last year, senior Colin Hall, a political science major from Jones County, was named the first Truman Scholar in Georgia College history.

"I think this is a good demonstration of our ability to produce strong leaders," said GCSU National Scholarships Office Coordinator Anna Whiteside. "This really speaks to our ability to produce students who adhere to our value of the pursuit of knowledge and truth for the public good."

Hawkins joined the Student Government Asso-



Axel Hawkins reacts to the news she's a Truman Scholar.

ciation as soon as she started classes freshman year to improve life for her fellow students. Now elected as the upcoming SGA President, Hawkins will continue enacting changes to their benefit.

Did you know?

Georgia College & State University is one of 145 universities nationwide that received recognition from the American College of Sports Medicine for involvement in "Exercise is Medicine - On Campus."

Georgia College received bronze-level recognition.

The program launched at the university last year. It offers a one-on-one approach to improving students' mental and physical health. It also makes daily movement a goal on campus to create lifelong healthy habits.

Wellness & Recreation, Student Care & Outreach, Student Health Services and Counseling Services at Georgia College collaborate in this endeavor.

Dr. Dan Nadler, interim vice president for Student Life, noted the significance of the achievement.

He praised Amy Whately, director of Student Care and Outreach in the Office of Student Health and Wellbeing, for her leading GCSU's chapter of the program.

"I am very pleased and proud to have Georgia College & State University recognized," Nadler said.

GCSU Most Valued Person: Liz Speelman honored with collaboration Award

Liz Speelman has a motto that has gotten her through life: "If I did this, what else can I do?"

It got her across North America and over the Atlantic Ocean to become director of Georgia College & State University's Outdoor Center and senior lecturer of outdoor education.

Speelman, '07, has been a faculty and staff MVP at Georgia College for the last 15 years. She plays many parts across campus.

From teaching classes in the Outdoor Center to serving Leadership Programs and supporting the strategic plan—it's hard to find a place where she hasn't made her mark.

"I like being here, I love teaching our students, and I love who we get to work with," Speelman said.

She was honored recently with Georgia College's

School of Continuing and Professional Studies' first Collaboration Award.

"Liz has worked closely with our High Achievers Program, provided support for retreats in historic museums and serves as one of our valued instructors in the Leadership & Management Academy," said Angela Criscoe, executive director of SoCPS.

"Her interpersonal skills, flexibility and willingness to share the responsibilities of providing a quality program are reasons we value our partnership with her," Criscoe said.

As a youth in Toronto, Canada, Speelman's fascination with the outdoors was fostered by family camping trips and activities outdoors.

Continuing that adventurous tradition, she later crossed the Atlantic to study abroad at the

University of Stirling in Scotland. Studying environmental science there, Speelman developed her positive mentality.

She taught in Ghana and West Africa and worked as a service volunteer overseas and at a nonprofit international development charity.

Speelman also worked for the Youth Learning Institute at Clemson University, before coming to Georgia College for a masters in outdoor education administration.

Now, at her 'dream job' at Georgia College, Speelman puts students first.

"Number one for me is the interaction with the students," Speelman said, "It's that mentorship of our students that motivates me."

"I absolutely do what I do for our students—number one, hands down," she said..



Liz Speelman, right, gets a congratulatory hug from Angela Criscoe.

What's going on in Bobcat Territory?

Visit frontpage.gcsu.edu/events

Tuesday

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4-7 p.m. GCSU Baseball vs. North Greenville University at John Kurtz Field.

4-5:30 p.m. Book talk by Michael L. Thurmond, who wrote "James Oglethorpe: Father of Georgia," hosted by Center for Georgia Studies and GCSU Department of History in A&S Auditorium.

7-9 p.m. GCSU Jazz Jam at Amici Café, downtown Milledgeville.

Wednesday

24

Noon-1 p.m. Come see the results of student work collecting information about the great Southern author Flannery O'Connor, at the Sallie Ellis Davis House.

6:30-8:30 p.m. GCSU Creative Writing program presents MFA graduate students reading their works in the Pat Peterson Museum Education room in Ina Dillard Russell Library.

Thursday

25

4:30-5:30 p.m. A Zoom discussion on Flannery O'Connor's letters hosted by the Flannery O'Connor Institute for the Humanities. Call 478-445-2645 for help registering.

7:30 p.m. Sound Sculptures XIX: Journeys & Remembrance concert in Max Noah Recital Hall.

Friday

26

1:30-8:30 p.m. GCSU's 35th annual Jazzfest on Front Campus.

Saturday

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7:30 p.m. GCSU Spring Dance Concert in Russell Auditorium. Also at 2 p.m. Sunday in Russell Auditorium.