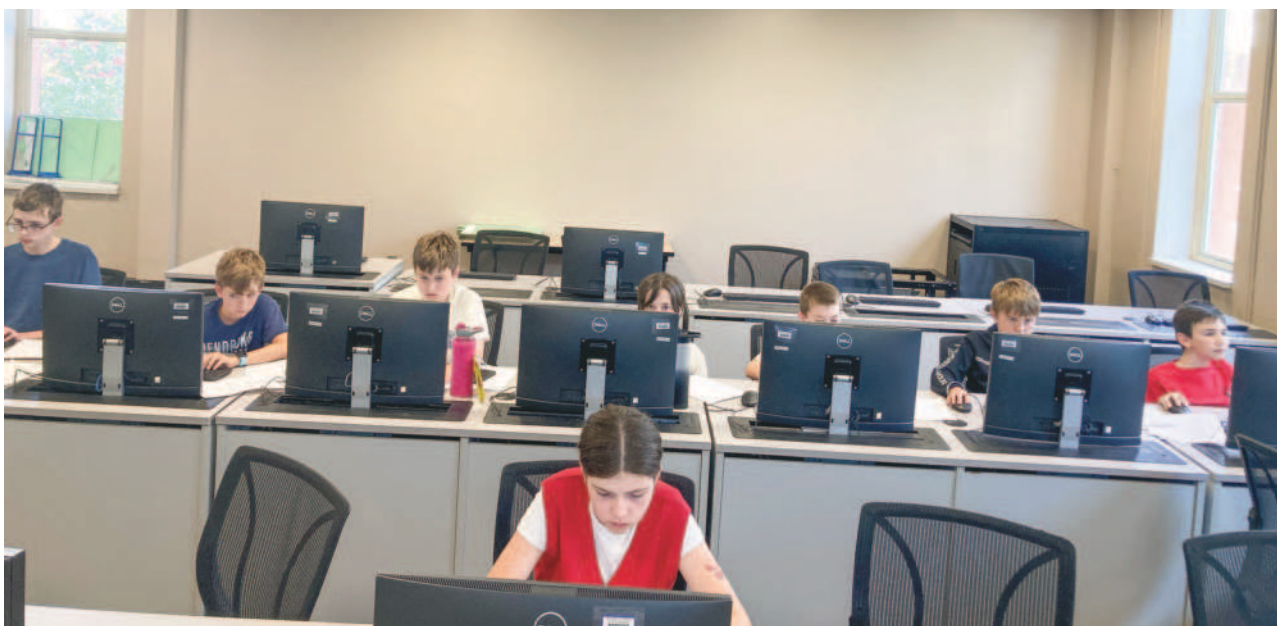
>> SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY



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Eight students took the part in the debut coding camp to learn the basics of coding and what an interest in technology and technological creation can lead to in the future.

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Students used practice tracks to learn how to code the robots to move and change direction.

Georgia College debuts coding camp

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Georgia College & State University's Continuing & Professional Education Department debuted its coding camp July 7-11, introducing eight sixth-through-ninth graders to the science behind our everyday technology.

Continuing & Professional Education Program Coordinator Kirsten Schipper had been working for over a year to introduce a coding camp to the list of options for summer camps.

"We recognized a need in the community for more middle school camps and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) courses," said Schipper. "This was my baby project for the last year and through partnering with our camp instructor Jeannie Pridmore, we were able to make it a reality."

The camp took place from 8 a.m. to noon with the goal of teaching coding basics and leading students to code their own self-driving robots. Pridmore had been looking to introduce a coding program and the partnership was the open door to that wish and to support the learning center in the College of Business.

GCSU's College of Business hosts the Learning Center of Technology and Empowerment, founded in December 2024, which aims to prepare the next generation for technology pathways and encourage interest in the field.

"We have a lot of jobs coming in the technology field and a lot of jobs currently available because we do not have the right talent and number of people," said Pridmore. "We outreach to middle and high school students. We host events and programs throughout the year. The money from the coding camp will go toward the center, rather than paying me, to support programs and events."

For Pridmore, the goal of the camp was to get students active with technology rather than consuming through it, encourage interest in technology, teach them how to be creators, and to teach awareness of how to be safe online and aware of how online data is tracked.

"I want them to take away that they can be a creator and give back to the world," said Pridmore. "Our week was a mix of coding blocks and testing their programs. I want students to know that anyone can program that can read and that logical thought and critical thinking are essential to coding."

The week began with the basics of coding through coding blocks and teaching students how to move the robot through structures, loops, and functions. The robots offer "immediate feedback" through direct visualization as students watch their coding in action. So, the first two days were spent with students learning and troubleshooting.

"Coding blocks are the best way to learn the structure and flow of coding. However, somebody had to program those blocks, so if you do not want to be tied to those blocks, you have to be able to do the structured text programming," said Pridmore. "So, we moved from code blocking to using Python, which gave the students more power."

Using Python, students completed three "art projects" including a spinal graph, a print statement, and a random code project to draw 20 snowflakes in different colors. Students also attempted to complete a "joke chat bot" using Python.

"I had only one student, our one female student, complete the joke bot. It was a more advanced project and was 93 lines of code," said Pridmore.

On July 10, students programmed the robots to be self-driving cars and navigate an obstacle course. Then, Friday morning, Pridmore introduced them to artificial intelligence, machine learning, and data science and students completed a small amount of binary coding.

"I wanted to introduce them to those topics because that is at the top of the list for what is a critical need. I wanted to offer them some vocabulary and what opportunities may exist for them by the time they reach college," said Pridmore. "And at the end of the day students presented everything they learned to their guardians, including their Python programs, a video game they made using a block program, and their self-driving robots."

Pridmore and Schipper aim to host this event again next year, potentially making the length of the camp day longer and adding more activities to the curriculum.

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The lone female student at camp was the only student to complete the joke chat bot with 93 lines of code.

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Student coders work on programming their self-driving robots.

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Students designed an obstacle course for the robots to maneuver in the hallway.

>> LOCAL ART

Allied Arts accepting submissions for Capture and Release Challenge

Allied Arts is debuting a new challenge to bring together photographers and artists of every medium through its Capture and Release Challenge.

Through Aug. 13, photographers may submit family-friendly photos to Allied Arts that artists will recreate or reimagine for an upcoming exhibition in December at Allen's Market. Specific dates will be announced later this year.

"There is no theme for this challenge. Since it is our inaugural year, we wanted to give participants the opportunity to take their best photo and for our artists to create from a wide selection," said Rebekah Tobar, executive director of Allied Arts. "This challenge is about creative connection and transformation."

Photographs can be dropped off during the Creator's Club meeting July 26 from 10 a.m. to noon at Allen's Market, 101 Floyd L. Griffin Jr. St., or at the Marlor Arts Center, 201 N. Wayne St., through Aug. 13 at 3 p.m.

"The competition is open to everyone, but we are getting our Creator's Club directly involved," said Tobar. "The club is essentially our local art alliance that meets monthly."

Creator's Club meets the last Saturday of each month at Allen's Market. The club is for artists of all disciplines and media to unite and share what they do, encourage each other, and teach their techniques.

Creators Club artists and any artist wishing to join the challenge, will choose a photo to transform in their chosen media. Paintings, sculptures, carpentry, digital art, and other mediums may be used to recreate or reimagine the photo.

"We would love to see a range of media and interpretations," said Tobar. "The only restriction is that it must be able to be physically displayed. So, for example, digital art submissions will need to be printed."

To ensure the protection of photographers and artists, all participants will sign a release form to protect their work and an agreement to care for photos responsibly. According to Tobar, Allied Arts wants to ensure the integrity and value of both submissions.

"The photograph is equally as important as the artwork that it is inspired from it. We want to ensure all submissions are protected and cared for," said Tobar.

For more information about the contest or Creator's Club, contact 478-452-3950.

"As it is our inaugural year, the goal is to have fun. We want to see the community's creativity and bridge the divide between mediums to create a beautiful exhibit for locals and visitors alike," said Tobar.

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