Dr. Eduardo Mercado knows Milledgeville. The current Martha Daniel Weaver Visiting Scholar spent the first 20 years of his life as a native, attending Baldwin County High School, going on to study computer science at Georgia College and eventually getting his degree of Georgia Tech.

But his path as a cognitive neuroscientist researcher wasn’t always a smooth one.

“I started getting into what brains were capable of while I was at Georgia Tech,” said Mercado. “I was interested in philosophy, so I was focused on what the mind could do. Then I started thinking ‘why couldn’t computers do what the human brain does and what’s the thing that stops them?’”

Those questions continued to plague Mercado. Eventually, they led him to pursuing a doctorate in psychology.

“From then on, I decided to pursue the things I was interested in,” said Mercado, who started studying animal cognition while at Georgia Tech. “I found the psychology department at the University of Hawaii to be focused on dolphins, memory and abstract learning. I decided if I wanted to do it, I would have to go there. And it meant I had to become a psychologist. That’s what I decided to do.”

Mercado ploughed all his faith into getting into the University of Hawaii, and he did. It was time spent on islands studying whales where he started thinking about what would become his life’s work so far: brain plasticity.

“What do these things like other animals do?” said Mercado. “As adults they develop a sequence of sounds that are novel. It’s hundreds of sounds and that are patterned and as various as human music—and they change every year.”

These sequences of sounds are equivalent to an American moving from China to Germany to Turkey in the span of three years—learning each native language as they move, said Mercado. These sounds made Mercado think about the learning capacity of the brain. He came up with three questions: what determines how fast the brain can change, how fast can it change, and how much better can it get with these changes?

“It’s really surprising that we don’t know much about how it works,” said Mercado. “We’re learning new things, solving new problems and developing new technologies and all of that on the go and brain plasticity—the ability of the brain to change.”

The possibility of adapting plasticity to computer hardware and software brings new opportunities for improving computer systems and for understanding the brain itself.

Mercado also says drugs that enhance brain power are outcomes of increased understanding of brain plasticity.

Dr. Eduardo Mercado teaches his class on neuronanatomy.

“Dr. Eduardo Mercado recently helped the Baldwin Life Enrichment Center write and secure a $100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The funding offers activities for adults with disabilities living in and around Baldwin County.

“For many adults with disabilities, when they leave the Center at 5 p.m., everyday, they sit at home,” said Dr. DeClouette, assistant professor of special education. “But with this grant, we’ve increased our resources, increased our opportunities and provided a safe haven for many adults with disabilities.”

During the last year, nearly 4,000 trees were planted on the campus by 100 volunteers. The bulk of the planting took place from February to April 2016 when students and organizations on campus by 100 volunteers. The bulk of the planting took place from February to April 2016 when students, organizations and departments on campus volunteered to plant trees.

Dr. Beulah Dugosh, psychology coordinator, accepted a plaque Feb. 14 at the Mayor’s Symposium on Trees and Statewide Arbor Day celebration.

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“GC collaborates with local organization that offers activities for adults with disabilities

The activities are led by GC students, and they’ll provide a variety of activities,” said Mercado, chair of the creative arts therapy department.

“An exciting experience is the sensory room. This area filled with burlap, visual and olfactory stimulation in a quiet environment gives participants a place to relax,” first-year music therapy major Conor Dugosh said.

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