Honors @ Georgia Southern

Spring 2016

University Honors Program Students and Staff

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I am very excited that we are able to share the stories of Cassie and Kate Beasley in this issue. As I complete my eleventh year as Honors Program Director, I reflect with pride upon the many outstanding students we have been able to support and challenge in their studies. Cassie was among the very first students I recruited and offered a 1906 Scholarship and Kate followed in the next year. I was lucky enough to teach both of them in honors seminars. I was struck at first at how similar they were in class—both were generally reserved but when they spoke it was incredibly insightful. Still, despite their similarities, they have very different personalities. Kate has a dry sense of humor that will make you chuckle whereas Cassie tells stories that can not help but lead you to join her in a full-throated laugh. I am thrilled (but not surprised) to see the success they are having in their young careers.

This year, enrollment in the University Honors Program reached over 500 students. While bigger does not equal better, I am delighted that we are able to offer more students these intellectually challenging opportunities. This year’s issue of Honors @ Georgia Southern includes a sampling of the many success stories of our honors students and our honors alumni. Please feel free to let me know if you wish to share your story in next year’s issue or in one of our monthly newsletters.

Sincerely yours,

Steve Engel
Director, University Honors Program

MISSION STATEMENT

The University Honors Program provides a small college atmosphere in the context of a large comprehensive university. The program is designed to foster the development of a critical sense of inquiry, a spirit of creativity, a global perspective, and an ethic of civic responsibility. A hallmark of the program is the emphasis on bringing ideas to life through undergraduate research, experiential learning, and service-learning opportunities. The University Honors Program at Georgia Southern University rests on a foundation of the following ideals that are inspired by the institution’s emphasis on engaged learning.

Critical Sense of Inquiry
Honors students will explore a variety of approaches to research designed to foster the pursuit of knowledge. Students will develop the ability to question with a healthy skepticism toward accepted opinion. The culmination of the undergraduate experience is an independent research or creative project designed to exemplify a critical approach to inquiry.

Civic Responsibility
Honors students will demonstrate an ethic of civic responsibility and exemplify the motto of the program, “Humility before Honor.” Students will be challenged to use their abilities and talents for the advancement of humanity and the pursuit of a greater good. The primary vehicle for the expression of civic responsibility is through service both to the university and the community.

Spirit of Creativity
Honors students will embrace the idea that creativity is a virtue that should be experienced by all students, regardless of discipline. This spirit involves a respect for different ways of knowing and an openness to intellectual discussion and challenge.

Global Perspective
Honors students will develop a perspective which allows them to approach their chosen discipline from an international point of view. This outlook involves the critical exploration of global concerns and generation of proposed solutions to international problems. Honors education provides this worldwide perspective through academic courses, study abroad opportunities, and co-curricular experiences.
Many esteemed writers begin their careers in the college classroom. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, in lieu of studying for his classes at Princeton University. David Foster Wallace's senior thesis culminated in his first published work, *The Broom of the System*. Donna Tartt spent her college years writing *The Secret History*, which launched her into literary stardom only a few years after graduation. Following in this tradition are Honors Program alumnae Kate and Cassie Beasley, who discovered their passions for novel-writing during their undergraduate years at Georgia Southern. As 1906 Scholars in the University Honors Program, they took a nontraditional approach to their Honors theses by embarking on writing their first novels.

“I grew a lot as a writer because of the Honors Program,” said Cassie. “The capstone requirement took me out of my comfort zone, which was writing short stories and poetry. It gave me the push I needed to tackle one of my first novel-length projects. I worked with my advanced fiction professor, Laura Valeri, on a Young Adult (YA) novel, and just having that structure in place that forced me to commit to a longer, more difficult piece was very helpful.”

Kate worked on a middle grade novel under the guidance of Professor Sonya Huber. “It was the first time I’d ever worked on a novel-length project,” she said, “and that experience helped me realize that this was the kind of writing I wanted to do.”

Six years later, the Beasley sisters have not stopped writing. Although their honors theses did not culminate in their first published books, they gave Cassie and Kate the space to explore their talents and prepare themselves for their future careers as full-time novelists. Cassie, in fact, recently made the *New York Times* Bestsellers List. From December 20th, 2015 to January 3rd, her first novel, a middle grade fantasy book titled *Circus Mirandus*, held the tenth spot on the middle grade bestselling list, and it took the ninth spot the following week. *Circus Mirandus* has collected other accolades, as well it was a *New York Times* Book Review Notable Children’s Book of 2015 and one of Amazon’s Best Children’s Books of the Year.
Both debut novels follow headstrong fifth graders with lofty aspirations. Micah Tottle escapes from his mean Aunt Gertrudis to the fantastic Circus Mirandus, where he hopes to find a mysterious illusionist called The Lightbender who owes Ephraim a miracle. In order to show her what she’s missing, Gertie Reice Foy sets out to claim the title of what she’s missing.

KATE AND CASSIE COME FROM Claxton, Georgia, a rural community perhaps best-known for their world-famous fruitcakes, and while small school districts can’t always replicate Harvard’s Havardian family, friendship no longer played a vital role in the cultivation of the Beasley sisters’ talents. “Our parents were big readers,” Kate said. “They read a lot of sci-fi and fantasy, and so we always had these big bookshelves in our house. We were both voracious readers and 1906 Scholars majoring in writing and linguistics. But in spite of a childhood surrounded by books, neither Beasley sister entered college knowing that’s actually where I wrote and essentially finished my growth as a writer. And the support from my professors! I was thrilled with how the book was received. And the support from my professors! I was thrilled with how the book was received. And I was like, ‘what’s wrong? what’s right?’” Cassie remembers. “And I was like, ‘I’m being published!’”

In spite of the late hour, Kate could not help but be happy for her sister, after all, for the Beasley sisters, part of the joy of being novelists comes from getting to work together every day. “It’s the best part,” Kate said. “We went to undergraduate together, and we’re in all these workshops together, and we went to grad school together, so we kind of have the same sort of vocabulary when we talk about writing. And we’re sisters, so we’re not afraid to be really honest.” Cassie agreed, adding, “I totally respect her opinion. Everything she comments on in my writing I either try to change or at least address in some way, and she does the same thing.” From providing instant feedback on new drafts to celebrating successes in the middle of the night, writing is never a truly solitary undertaking for Cassie or Kate, but an experience they feel incredibly lucky to have. In fact, after their interview, they planned to head back to Claxton and get straight back to work. “As soon as we get home, I’m going to read the first draft of Cassie’s new novel and edit it and make notes,” Kate said.

“I’m going to combine her notes with my editor’s notes and we’re going to write a good second draft.” Here, Cassie paused. “Hopefully. Keep your fingers crossed for me.” With their record of success, we doubt we’ll need to.

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HONORS IN ACTION

Jenny Shaffer
Germany
Research in Engineering
Thing into the Real Classroom and Out of the Classroom and Into the Real Thing

What began as a regular luncheon turned into a career-defining moment for Zack Davidson, a senior computer science major. Last year, Davidson attended a lunch event hosted by the College of Engineering and Information Technology (CEIT), where he met and exchanged contact information with Jim Scholefield, former CTO of Coca-Cola and current CIO of Nike, Inc. This meeting ultimately led to a Coca-Cola summer internship for Davidson, a coveted position not usually awarded to college students. Davidson spent three months at Coca-Cola’s Technology Plaza in Atlanta as a data analytics platform developer/administrator, where he worked primarily with a program called Splunk. His job was to develop and deploy an enhanced monitoring and reporting solution for the IT operations activity of job scheduling, such as running the payroll system. Davidson’s task not only required him to build search scripts and dashboards for monitoring and reporting operations activity of job scheduling, such as running the payroll system, but also to update an outdated system, but he also had to learn how to use Splunk, a program with which he had little experience.

“I was at Coca-Cola for three months,” said Davidson, “and in that time, I went from knowing nothing about Splunk to teaching other interns and employees how to use it. People were actually coming to my meetings just to hear me talk about it.” After learning how to navigate Splunk, Davidson was able to create and deploy an enterprise production ready application in only four weeks. Not only that, but he also gained valuable insight into working in the IT field.

“I completed this internship because I wanted to learn as much as possible,” said Davidson. “I don’t want to just be a guy with a degree. I like to go to new environments and blow people away.”

After graduation, he plans to do just that as he moves to Austin, Texas to work as a Software Developer for General Motors.

Zack Davidson
OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE REAL THING

The typical study abroad program usually allows students to experience another culture through a classroom environment, but Jenny Shaffer’s second summer in Germany found her outside the traditional college experience, conducting cutting-edge research in her field alongside professionals instead of sitting in a classroom. As one of 312 recipients of the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) Research Internship in Science and Engineering, Shaffer (German/mechanical engineering ‘17) spent three months at Ruhr-Universität in Bochum, one of Germany’s industrial hubs. Her internship focused on material science, a subfield of mechanical engineering built on researching new materials and improving materials already in use. She assisted a doctoral candidate, Maximilian Walter, with his thesis research on the development of new high speed steels to compete to the industry standard.

“What we wanted was metal with better wear resistance at higher temperatures,” said Shaffer. “My job was to take metals the industry was using, run them through several different types of heat treatments, and then see which one worked best. Then I took that treatment and tested it on our steels.”

Not only was their preliminary work on Walter’s thesis highly successful, but this project also bolstered Shaffer’s interest in material science and let her see parts of Germany one does not usually visit while studying abroad. Last summer, she joined several Georgia Southern students in Regensburg for a cultural immersion study abroad trip.

“Regensburg was much more rural than Bochum, but the cultural immersion aspect of last summer’s trip gave me the language skills to connect with my coworkers,” said Shaffer. “Bochum was not the only new landmark on Shaffer’s itinerary. During one weekend, she gathered with her fellow DAAD interns in Heidelberg, a city of flourishing culture and historical charm, where hundreds of students from varying fields exchanged and presented their research.

“I loved getting to hear the other interns talk about their research,” said Shaffer. “It was cool to see students so passionate about what they were studying.”

This summer she will return to Germany a third time for another exciting research opportunity. Shaffer received another internship through the DAAD RISE Professional Program, this time with Bosch, a multinational engineering and electronics company, in Stuttgart, Germany. Her position will require her to investigate the effects of environmental load and design geometry on localized corrosion behavior of aluminum and aluminum-alloy automotive parts.

Shaffer said, “I’m really excited to get to work with such a well-known company in the automotive field.”
Valerie Welty (math ’16) won a Patterson Prize for her undergraduate presentation at the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) Southeastern Section Meeting at the University of Alabama-Birmingham. The prize is for outstanding undergraduate presentations of the conference, and Welty won for her research she conducted for her thesis.

Welty also presented her research, entitled, “Mathematical Models for Infectious Disease Epidemics, With an Emphasis on Measles and Computer Simulation,” at the Joint Mathematics Meetings this past January in Seattle, WA.

“For my thesis, I created a program that simulates a measles outbreak based on such factors as self-quarantine, contact rates, and vaccines,” Welty said.

This Java-based computer program allows one to input different variables to determine various methods for preventing the spread of measles. Welty, for example, used this program to look at the amount of vaccination needed to keep a measles epidemic from worsening. Her preliminary results suggest that vaccine percentages above ninety decreases the chance of an epidemic, and that contact rate has a huge influence over the likelihood of an outbreak.

Creating this problem required Welty to familiarize herself with programming, a field with which she was initially only slightly familiar. “I had to teach myself more programming beyond what I had learned in an introductory course,” said Welty. “It was definitely a learning experience.” In addition to navigating more complex programming, Welty also had to prepare herself for another first—her first research conference.

Riley Theis (chemistry ’16) is engaged in research that reaches for the stars, and this past year her work shone brightly as she received a first-place award for her research talk at the Southeastern Undergraduate Research Conference (SURC). Theis’ presentation, entitled, “Spectroscopic, Structural, and Energetic Analysis of Noble Gas Molecules,” is at the core of her thesis research in the subfield of chemistry called astrochemistry, a branch of science dedicated to better understanding the universe and its chemical components.

Her work focuses specifically on noble gases and their ability to create molecular bonds. A recent break-through in the field discovered a noble gas molecule, argon hydride, in an exploded star. This was a watershed moment in astrochemistry as noble gases typically are incapable of binding to form molecules. This discovery inspired Theis’ project, in which she tested other noble gases for the ability to bond in space, focusing on argon and neon.

“My mentor, Dr. Fartenben, was very interested in the recent discovery of argon hydride, and I became interested in it as well,” Theis explained. “I wanted to know if other bonds like this were possible.” Because these chemical bonds can only occur in space, Theis’ research is grounded in theory.

She tested four different reactions that could produce molecules similar to the one found in space. Her research gives optimism to the search for other noble gas molecules.

“The first molecule we tested was ArOH or Ar0H+,” Theis said. “This molecule had the highest bond strength of all the ones we tested, meaning it has a high potential of being found in space.”

In addition to presenting at SURC in January, Theis also presented at the National American Chemistry Society meeting in Boston last August. Theis learned a lot at both conferences, which drew professors, scientists, and students from all over the world, and found them to be excellent opportunities for meeting professionals in her field and individuals who shared her passion for astrochemistry.

“It is truly gratifying to know that people took interest in my research and appreciated all my hard work,” she said. “These conferences are a great place for networking and just getting to talk about things you enjoy. It was great to be able to see all the research that’s out there.”

Connor Rentz’s (film and production ’19) film career takes flight

It is difficult to spot Connor Rentz (film and production) without a camera in his hand. Between classes and on the weekends, Rentz can usually be found working on his latest short film, doing anything from editing the script to shooting scenes.

Maintaining a strong academic record, especially while on the pre-med track, and on the weekends, Rentz married his college life with his passion for filmmaking, it was no surprise that Rentz's latest short film, Spectrum, was his first nationally distributed film. This past December, Spectrum was available to watch on Vimeo, in-flight entertainment system, and on their “best of the web” feature.

Rentz’s short film was one of five films chosen from the Jury Award winners of Campus Movie Fest, the world’s largest student film festival, to be screened by VirginAmerica, beating hundreds of other entries. Rentz’s film had an “outstanding” Jury Award-winning film from universities across the globe. Spectrum’s ascension into the sky, however, began at Georgia Southern.

“Every idea for this short film came around when we first heard that Georgia Southern was participating in Campus Movie Fest,” said Rentz. “Since the rules required entries to be shorter than five minutes, we wanted to do something unique.”

Perhaps Rentz’s film stood out against the competition because of its unusual stylistic elements. Not only was it the only silent film chosen by VirginAmerica, but it also makes use of color symbolism, an artistic choice alluded to by the film’s title. Of the film’s plot, Rentz said, “Spectrum is essentially a timeless love story—boy likes girl, boy gets separated from girl, boy and girl are reunited—told simply through colors and music.”

In spite of the script’s ostensibly simple, filming called for an elaborate backdrop. Alongside David Bash, the film’s co-editor and producer, Rentz traveled to Lookout Mountain, Georgia, where he enlisted high school friends to help him with the shoot at Lula Lake Land Trust, a picturesque nature reserve that boasts, among other natural wonders, a 100-foot waterfall. Shooting at Lula Lake involved a bit of luck; as a nonprofit location, it is only open to the public two Saturdays each month. Luckily for Rentz and his crew, they happened to find themselves at Lula Lake during its “Founders’ Weekend,” the only weekend during the year when it is opened two days in a row.

“We were incredibly lucky we were there at the right time, because Lula Lake perfectly matched the script, allowing for a dynamic range of natural scenery,” said Rentz. “The staff was also incredibly supportive of our shoot and eager to help us. We’re proud to have made the first film ever shot at Lula Lake.”

After editing the film, Rentz submitted it to Campus Movie Fest, “The idea for this short film came around when we first heard that Georgia Southern was participating in Campus Movie Fest,” said Rentz. “Since the rules required entries to be shorter than five minutes, we wanted to do something unique.”

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Collin Daly’s (electrical engineering ’16) honors thesis deals with a problem we have all encountered—video buffering on the Internet. Many Netflix binges have been interrupted due to that pesky rotating circle, signifying a discrepancy between the bandwidth needed to play the video and the bandwidth that is actually available, but Daly’s research strives to find a solution. His thesis, entitled “Predicting H.265 Video Traffic Using Neural Networks,” focuses on using artificial neural networks to replicate how the brain works. In other words, we’re using many slower, more accurate calculations at the same time rather than a series of faster, less efficient, and more error-prone calculations so we can figure out how much bandwidth is required to play high-definition videos without waiting for them to buffer. This experiment involved comparing two different styles of neural networks, a recurrent system using error correction and one that did not. Of the two, the former proved to be a much better system and will be used as a basis for further research.

In the meantime, Daly took his findings to both the Georgia Collegiate Honors Council conference at Augusta University and the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE) conference at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. At both meetings, Daly had the distinction of being the only undergraduate representing Georgia Southern.

“Attending both conferences gave me a lot of perspective,” said Daly. “The engineering conference was obviously much more tailored to my project, so there was much more general interest and many technical questions. It was interesting to see the other side at the general honors conference, though, because you get feedback from students coming from different disciplines, bringing fresh perspectives to your project.”

Daly’s hard work won him second place in the undergraduate research division of the ASEE conference, an award well-deserved.

“Conferences like these are really encouraging,” he said. “They give you the opportunity to realize that there is an outlet for research, and that we can contribute to conversations in our fields in meaningful ways.”

By joining this ongoing project, Anderson has the opportunity to work with both biology and mathematics, and has the potential to discover new treatments for lice, which are becoming increasingly difficult to eradicate, primarily through detecting an endosymbiont called Wolbachia. Endosymbionts are bacteria that live inside other cells and provide benefits to their hosts, such as synthesizing nutrients to provide the cell with nourishment, so creating an antibiotic to kill them could help treat difficult cases of lice.

Already-existing studies suggest Wolbachia should be present in lice, said Anderson. “Our goal is to identify and understand the metabolic role it provides to lice. Just knowing it’s there can provide useful insight into the treatment and evolution of lice in general.”

Head lice—the mere mention of these pesky creatures is often enough to make anyone cringe or scratch a phantom itch on their scalp, but for Matthew Anderson (’17 mathematics), lice have given him an itch for research.

Working alongside Dr. Marina Eremeeva, Anderson has investigated new approaches to the treatment of human head louse infestations, and his work was recently awarded with the 2016 ASM Undergraduate Research Fellowship synBio (URF) Program Award by the Education Board of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM).

This award provides a stipend for guided research during the summer and pays his travel expenses to attend the 2017 ASM Research Capstone Institute. Additionally, he will present his research at the ASM Microbe Meeting in New Orleans.

Anderson was introduced to this project this past September when he changed his major to mathematics and developed an interest in bioinformatics and molecular biology.

“I’m really interested in bioinformatics and bioinformatics and its uses in answering questions about public health or biological sciences,” said Anderson. “I feel the mathematics major is giving me excellent quantitative skills that will help me with my future goals in bioinformatics and bioinformatics.

Matthew Anderson

Tayor Yancey

WINNING AN AWARD, EARNING A JOB

Taylor Yancey attended a career fair while on her trip to New York and had the opportunity to speak with Ryan Forder, the Senior Director of Displacement at Walmart. He spoke in front of a large group of students, but Yancey knew she was only one of two students in attendance who had a focus on logistics and made a point to introduce herself directly. That initiative opened up a new opportunity for her.

“Tayor attended the scholarship presentation given by Georgia Southern’s College of Business, who recommended her for the award. Dr. Denton directed her to Dr. Kathleen Gruben, who helped her complete her application, which consisted of an essay about how Yancey saw herself going into retail in the future. The plans she outlined in that essay have quickly become a reality.”

Tayor Yancey

WINNING AN AWARD, EARNING A JOB

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Georgia Southern’s Mock Mediation Club is one of the largest and most successful mediation teams in the United States. Thanks to the efforts of its thirty-five members, it has brought home endless accolades from both regional and national tournaments. Only two years ago, however, it was not even recognized as a student organization.

In 2013, honors student Dylan John (construction management ’16) convinced two friends to compete in the regional mock mediation tournament. John’s expectations were exceeded when his team won seven awards and qualified for nationals, but without university funding or support, attending nationals seemed like a faraway dream.

“The Mock mediation isn’t just about competing,” said Shanken, president of Mock Mediation Club. “We’re trying to work with other student organizations to do something for the student body. We’ve also been working with service-learning by teaching at-risk youth mediation skills.”

Devot, the Vice President of Public Relations and Community Engagement, elaborated on the club’s community involvement: “Next semester we’re planning to become more involved with campus by collaborating with other organizations and finding opportunities to spread conflict resolution skills to fellow students.”

In addition to their community involvement, the Mock Mediation Club has found immense success at various tournaments. At last year’s Regional Mediation Tournament, hosted by Brenau University from October 8-9, the club received several awards, including four of the top twenty advocates, two of the top ten individual mediators, one of the top six teams in the advocate/client team category, and one of the top six teams in the mediation team category. These awards qualified the team for the undergraduate international competition in Des Moines, Iowa, which took place in early November.

Shanken said, “Getting ready for competition this year was hectic, yet so rewarding. It was so cool to see everyone so excited, lights in their eyes, as we prepared for competition in Iowa.”

But even for a team that consistently excels, winning is not everything. One of the club’s primary focuses is helping its members develop leadership and communication skills.

Hawkins, the club’s secretary, spoke about how joining Mock Mediation Club helped her step outside of her comfort zone. “When I first started college, I was really shy, but I wanted to keep up the level of involvement I had in high school. After observing a competition, I thought, ‘I could do this, I can, too,’ and from there, I jumped into it. Now I’m not afraid to speak at rotunda tables or at meetings. Mediation has expanded my leadership abilities—I’ve come such a long way.”

Perhaps the Mock Mediation Club’s achievements can be credited to their focus on the personal growth and development of each of their members, as well as their dedication to further understanding mediation techniques.

“We don’t go to competition to win, but to learn,” said Shanken, “and that’s why we win.”

With hundreds of literary magazines in circulation and thousands of writers peddling their prose and poetry, sometimes writing can feel like shouting into an echo chamber. Short stories languish in obscure magazines; journals go under a month after their acceptance. While breaking into the literary scene can be a daunting expedition, four writing and linguistics majors, three of them Honors students, joined creative forces to found a publication with potential staying power. Over Christmas break, Ben Baker, Devon Pride, Kristin Flippo, and Aleyna Bents created Moonglasses Magazine, a bimonthly online journal devoted to humorous, experimental writing.

“I started all of this with Ben,” Flippo (’16) said. “He’s one of the finest, most talented writers in our department, but all his fiction is so weird that it doesn’t quite fit the traditional aesthetic of most literary journals, so we thought, why not fill that space by creating our own journal?”

After coming up with a clear focus for the magazine, the students were eager to begin working on it right away.

Pride (’17) said, “When we first threw around the idea of starting a publication, I was really excited for the chance to contribute to something that will last, something that will give us a chance to break into the publishing world. It’s a learning experience for all of us.”

Their hard work paid off. In February, the first issue of Moonglasses was released, featuring the work of several established writers.

“It was so exciting for our first issue,” Flippo said. “It was just a few days before my birthday, so it was like an early birthday present for me.”

Bents said, “This just proved to me that if you want to do something, all you have to do is commit yourself to it and go for it.”

With a successful April issue and several pieces already lined up for the June edition, the editors are optimistic for the future of Moonglasses.

“I can see us really expanding in the future. I’d like for us to start accepting artwork, maybe even run a print edition,” said Pride.

“Working on this magazine with my friends has been such a fun, rewarding experience,” said Flippo. “I just want Moonglasses to bring as much joy to our readers as it brings to us.”

Visit www.moonglassesmag.com/submission-guidelines for information on submitting work to Moonglasses.
In summer 2015, honors students found the outdoors to be their classroom. Eleven students trekked to Red River Gorge, Kentucky, for the latest addition to the University Honors Program’s line-up of alternative break trips. Developed by Julie Swantek (’16) and Justin Yun (’16), two honors outdoor recreation majors, the five-day trip featured day-hikes, volunteer work, and kayaking. Both students worked with Dr. John Peden, who also went on the trip. Students volunteered at Daniel Boone National Forest doing cleanup and maintenance. The National Park Service strives to promote the management of natural resources, so Yun felt this was a good match for the University Honors Program. “The honors program focuses on civic responsibility and we wanted to reproduce that in the wilderness, too,” Yun said. On the way back from Kentucky, the group stopped in Boone, North Carolina, and took inflatable kayaks down Wilson Creek. This May, Dr. Peden and two returning students from last year’s trip—Leah Anderson (recreation ’18) and Garrett Metropol (mechanical engineering ’18)—will lead a group on a weeklong trip to Cumberland Island.

The Honors Inquiry in Ireland program continues to result in outstanding opportunities for students. In 2015, ten honors students traveled to Southeastern Ireland to investigate the push and pull factors that contributed to migration from County Wexford, Ireland to Savannah, Georgia. As part of the ongoing transatlantic research project entitled the Wexford-Savannah Axis, and led by Dr. Steven Engel and Dr. Howard Keeley, honors students spent two weeks looking for answers to such questions as why Wexfordians immigrated to Savannah and what they left behind.

Partnered with the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), honors students analyzed primary sources at locations such as the Wexford County Archives, the newly created Graves Archives at WIT, and even the National Archives of Ireland and the National Library in Dublin. Some answers, however, could not be found on paper. “This trip taught me that primary research isn’t just sitting in archives,” said Kayla Allen (civil engineering ’18). “Primary research involves getting out there and seeing the places you’re studying for yourself.”

In November, this project was awarded a $25,000 grant from the Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs to promote broader understanding of Wexford heritage among Savannah’s Irish-American community. Past participants in the research, Aleyra Renta, Olivio Perdue, Britanny Swale, and Scott Oswald, delivered poster presentations of their findings to a group of about 100 at the Savannah Golf Club at an event to formally announce the grant.

Oswald said, “Presenting in Savannah was such a positive experience. It’s great to see so much community interest in our research.”

A group of 14 students, including four past participants, will continue the research project in May and June 2016.
The Program returned to Costa Rica this past March for the second year of Project Pura Vida! Six students joined Dra. Leticia McGrath in volunteering at the Costa Rican Humanitarian Foundation (CRHF) in La Carpio. Students met with CRHF founder Gail Nystrom and learned about the work that organization does in assisting the Nicaraguan refugee community.

Bailey Kirk, who went on the trip last year and this year returned in a leadership role said, “I don’t know what was the most amazing part of the Pura Vida trip, meeting new people, being in the gorgeous environment, or interacting with the people of La Carpio.”

Students worked on various physical improvements in the community, including painting a house for one of the older residents. “This year, we were given the opportunity to help with the elderly of La Carpio,” Kirk said. “We heard their personal stories of arriving to Costa Rica from Nicaragua and how their lives have changed drastically. There is so much more to be done within La Carpio, but with the Costa Rican Humanitarian Foundation they are well on their way to becoming a great community.”

The Honors Alternative Break Trip to work with Camp Blue Skies at Camp Twin Lakes had another successful spring break. Now in its sixth year, the longest running Honors trip took 20 students to work at camp as cabin counselors and activity leaders for adults with developmental disabilities.

Dr. Brent Wolfe, who leads the trip with Dr. Jerri Kropp, describes Camp Blue Skies as “a place where those typically ignored and marginalized by society are embraced and accepted. These amazing individuals become the therapists and counselors for all the volunteers and teach us the value of life and what it means to be human.”

Students participated with campers in all sorts of outdoor and recreational activities from arts and crafts to yoga and zip-line. This year, Sarah Holmes returned for her fourth year of work at the camp. Erica Teihaber and Madison Monk (also multiple-year participants), completed honors thesis projects that involved research focused on Camp Blue Skies at Camp Twin Lakes.
In the Eidson House kitchen, a sign tacked to the bulletin board reads “Please keep our kitchen clean! Remember... your mother doesn’t live here!” Under this admonition, an anonymous Honors student scribbled their rebuttal: “Mrs. Rushing is our mother! But she just works here.”

Even if she did not literally live at the Eidson House, administrative assistant Linda Rushing served as a maternal figure for students from the many students who frequently stopped by the Eidson House. “She makes you feel at home.”

Alicia Carter (psychology/sociology ’15), one of the student union, Rushing moved into a new position on campus before, “I remember being so excited when Dr. Jenifer, the Bell Honors Program director, knew he wanted to hire Rushing the moment he spotted her name in the pool of applicants. “I knew from what Dr. Nolan told me that she’d be a gem for Bell Honors—she was good with students and really cared about her job,” said Dr. Jenifer. “Just jumped at the chance to hire her, and she’s been in that chair ever since.”

When Dr. Nolan had to leave the university to tend to his wife’s health problems, his replacement came in with her own secretariat, leaving Rushing without a job. She applied for several open positions on campus, including two part-time secretarial jobs, one for the Bell Honors Program and the other for the University Honors Program, which were separate at the time. While she was surprised to get both positions, Dr. Jenifer, the Bell Honors Program Director, knew he wanted to hire Rushing the moment he spotted her name in the pool of applicants. “I knew from what Dr. Nolan told me that she’d be a gem for Bell Honors—she was good with students and really cared about her job,” said Dr. Jenifer. “I jumped at the chance to hire her, and she’s been in that chair ever since.”

Until the integration of Bell Honors and University Honors, Rushing worked for Dr. Jenifer in the morning and Dr. Martha Abell, the University Honors Program director, in the afternoon.

Dr. Abell said, “She was a really big help when Bell Honors merged with the University Honors Program. She made the transition a lot easier for students.”

Since 2005, she has worked with Honors Director Dr. Steven Engel, the longest amount of time she has spent with any one supervisor. “Linda has truly been the constant for the Honors Program since the turn of the century,” said Dr. Engel. “When she started with the program we had less than 200 Honors students. Now we have over 500. She truly cares about the students and that has made all the difference for so many of them over the years.” For Rushing, the students have made the past several years worthwhile.

“The best part of my job was getting to help students, as well as get to know them,” said Rushing. “I’ve never had any student act rude or disrespectful towards me.”

According to Dr. Jenifer, Rushing reciprocates that niceness: “She’s just really warm and outgoing and treats everyone nicely. It’s genuine, not an affectation. For some people, it’s a mask, but not with Linda. She just gets along with everyone.”

Carter echoes this sentiment, “She’s one of the friendliest people I know. She’s always interested in hearing about what’s going on in your life.”

In addition to befriending all the students, Rushing also seemed to be acquainted with everyone at Georgia Southern. “I really learned a lot from Linda, especially when it comes to knowing who to call on campus whenever I needed something,” said Dr. Abell. “She always knew exactly who to get in touch with.”

Dr. Jenifer agreed with this point, “She literally knows everyone on campus.”

At Georgia Southern, we talk often about the “small-feel” of the campus, said Dr. Engel. “Well, it’s people like Linda who give us that feeling. She cared for the students as individuals—often patiently listening to their concerns and worries. We all miss her very much.”

In regard to Rushing’s relationships with everyone both in the Honors Program and across the University, it is easy to see why she initially had reservations about retiring.

“I never really planned to retire, but I think while I’m in good health I should get out and do things I don’t have time to do while I’m working,” said Rushing.

Her plans include visiting family and friends, volunteering at a local church camp this summer, and, perhaps most important, spending time with her two grandchildren, Cal and Lucy.

“Even though they’re little, we’ve already started talking about college,” said Rushing. “They said they’re coming here so they can live with me.”

While looking forward to spending retirement with her family, Rushing said she’ll miss the family she has within the Honors Program.

“The students I originally started working with are all grown up, and some are married and have children. Seeing what they accomplished after graduation is so awesome. They’re like my children,” said Rushing. “It’s a bittersweet goodbye when they leave, and I’m going to feel the same way when I leave.”

It was bittersweet goodbye for both the students and faculty in the Honors Program, as well, because for us, Linda was not just an administrative assistant, she’s family—even if she does not actually live at the Eidson House.

“In the Eidson House kitchen, a sign tacked to the bulletin board reads “Please keep our kitchen clean! Remember... your mother doesn’t live here!” Under this admonition, an anonymous Honors student scribbled their rebuttal: “Mrs. Rushing is our mother! But she just works here.”

Even if she did not literally live at the Eidson House, administrative assistant Linda Rushing served as a maternal figure for students from both the Bell Honors Program and University Honors Program for the past fourteen years.

“When your family lives far away like mine, Linda’s like an extended family member,” said Alicia Carter (psychology/sociology ’15), one of the many students who frequently stopped by the Eidson House. “She makes you feel at home.”

For many students like Carter, Rushing’s retirement feels more like a family member moving away. After all, Rushing has been a part of the university system for the past thirty-one years. She first began working on campus in 1984 as part of the USA Cooperative Extension Service, a job that found her in the Rosenwald Building helping coordinate conferences for agricultural specialists. In 1990, Rushing accepted her first position as a Georgia Southern employee at the newly-opened University Union, known to current students as the Russell Union. Her new job allowed her to experience the grand opening of Georgia Southern’s first student union.

“Linda has truly been the constant for the Honors Program since the turn of the century.”

DR. STEVEN ENGEL
Director, University Honors Program
One of the Honors Program’s missions is to provide bright and motivated students with an interactive, academically-enriching community, and this year’s inaugural Honors Living Learning Community (LLC) took that experience to the next level.

HONORS MOVES

Last August, Honors freshmen settled into their new home away from home in Centennial Place Building 2. Their transition to dorm living was made easier by Honors volunteers, including Community Leaders and upperclassmen residents of the Honors LLC, who helped unload cars and transport students’ belongings to their new dorm rooms.

“The volunteers at move-in day were extremely helpful,” said Lilly Donnell (English & writing and linguistics ’19). “I appreciated having people there to help me get my stuff moved upstairs. It made me feel very welcome here.”

Following move-in day, members of the Honors LLC participated in a day of activities designed to get new students acquainted with one another and the Honors Program. The morning kicked off with Campus as Text, which required students to explore campus to formulate an understanding of how individual locations create one unified campus. Students shared their insightful findings with their peers and gained new perspectives on Georgia Southern University.

“It was a good time to interact with my peers in a fun way we might not be able to in class,” said Connor Rentz (film and production ’19). “It was a great way to get to know my classmates.”

HONORS COMMON READ

The day’s events also featured a discussion of the common read for Honors freshmen, The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction by Michael Crawford. The conversation was led by Dr. Steven Engel and Dr. Fred Richter, who discoursed with students on topics inspired by the book, ranging from distraction in the digital age to writer David Foster Wallace to what it means to be an honors student.

The book continued to be a focus in discussions in the Honors FYE classes and among the students in the community. The program is already looking forward to next year’s book.

HONORS IN THE LLC

The faculty who teach honors sections of the First-Year Experience course hosted various events in the Café and Community Rooms in the LLC. Dr. Chris Caplinger held a primaries debate watching party for his course on Modern Political Debate, and Dr. Jerri Kropp and Dr. Trent Maurer met with their Animal-Assisted Therapy class to watch the film Dogs on the Inside about the use of therapy dogs in prisons.

The faculty who lead the Honors Program’s study abroad and alternative break trips held information sessions in Centennial Place, giving the students an opportunity to learn more about these trips and how to apply to participate. Dr. Leticia McGrath talked about Project Pura Vida! Honors in Costa Rica with the help of students who participated in last year’s trip, Dr. Jerri Kropp and Dr. Brent Wolfe recruited participants for Camp Blue Skies at Camp Twin Lakes. And Dr. Steven Engel and Dr. Howard Keeley presented on the Honors Inquiry in Ireland study abroad trip.

HONORS COOKS

One of the more popular events during the year was Cooking with the Profs. Not quite a cooking show, but not exactly the classroom either, these events brought students and faculty together around food and fun. Faculty could share favorite meals and maybe a little history of the dish, and students helped out with the process and told their own culinary stories. Dr. Francis Desiderio kicked off the series with his recipe for marinara sauce. Dr. Howard Keeley showed the students how to make pizza. Fried shrimp was on the menu when Dr. Brad Edwards visited. And Dr. Nathan Palmer created a bean dip.
THOMAS EISENHART

Life has been busy for 2010 Honors alumnus Thomas Eisenhart since his graduation six years ago. After spending his first post-graduate year in Northern Ireland to study at Queen’s University, Belfast with a Rotary Foundation Ambassador Scholarship, Eisenhart returned to America to complete his Ph.D. in analytical chemistry at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Despite the demands of graduate school, Eisenhart found time to pay his alma mater a visit on October 15, when he presented his research to the chemistry department.

His talk, “Spectroscopic Monitoring of Proton-Coupled Electron Transfer Reactions,” documented his work over the past four years to develop new methods to better monitor a class of reactions, proton-coupled electron transfer, which play an important role in developing new energy technologies.

“Through my research, I’ve been able to deeply explore the chemistry associated with many of the energy challenges facing society today,” said Eisenhart, “and I’m glad I got to share this research with both students and members of the department.”

As a former 1906 scholar, Eisenhart was in these students’ position only a few years ago. He cites this time as an honor student as a period during which his intellectual curiosity was enhanced and his critical thinking skills sharpened.

“These two qualities,” Eisenhart said, “along with the drive needed to push through the ups and downs of graduate school, were key in helping me successfully work towards a Ph.D.”

His spirit of intellectual inquiry has led him to pursue opportunities outside the field of chemistry. Following graduation, Eisenhart will begin working in the opportunity to help solve some of the most complex and important issues facing large, global corporations,” said Eisenhart. “Also, while a Ph.D. in chemistry takes around five years, the typical client engagement is only a few months, so the opportunity to experience numerous industries and business models is also an exciting proposition.”

ADAM HILLS (BHP, English, 1988) received a Masters of Science in Management from Georgia Tech in 2000, and has worked in various areas of information security. He is now an industry analyst for Gartner, and helps clients optimize their security postures. He and his wife Courtney have two children, Walker (14) and Sadie (8).

ASHLEY ANDERSON (BHP, Art, Minor in Philosophy, 2005) currently lives and works in Atlanta, showing art frequently. He recently sold three of his pieces to the High Museum of Art for their exhibition “Sprint” which ran from July to October of 2015.

NATHAN DUNN (UHP, Math, 2011) currently works as an assistant actuary for USHealth Administrators in Texas.

MANDY (WOHMACK) NASWORTHY (UHP, Biology, 2011) attends the Medical College of Georgia where she is currently a senior medical student. She was married in July of 2013. She graduated in July of 2015 as a fellow Georgia Southern University graduate.

JACOB TAYLOR (UHP, History, Geology, 2011) has been working in the field of outdoor education since his graduation. His work has included environmental programs, adventure programs, and risk programs. He has been running trips that involve hiking, canoeing, sea kayaking, sailing, climbing, rock climbing, and bushcrafting from Australia, along the US East Coast, and now in the country parks of Hong Kong. He is also a Leave No Trace Master Educator, Life-Guard and CPR Instructor, Coastal Sea Kayak Coach, and a nationally recognized Assessor in Australia.

CESAR PEREZ

Cesar Perez, a recent graduate in multimedia communications, got his start in the film industry by unusual means: he missed a casting call.

“Magic Mike XXL was filming in Savannah, so I went in my resume and got called in, but I wasn’t able to go because I had exams,” said Perez. Although Perez could not work on this particular film, the casting director, one of the biggest in the Southeast, asked Perez to keep in touch. This relationship ultimately led to stand-in roles in several films and TV shows filmed in the area, specifically in Georgia. Now, only a few months into his acting career, Perez has already worked alongside such household names as Robert DeNiro, Zac Efron, Danny McBride, and Adam Sandler—and that’s only naming a few.

Perez explained his role in these movies: “As a stand-in, you’re essentially an actor’s double, so you do everything they do in a scene. You help them set up the scene and prepare for filming it.”

Despite the jobs obvious perks, filming high-profile projects with Hollywood’s elite certainly isn’t an easy job. Sometimes, shoots can go on for hours, occasionally extending into the night.

“It is pretty exhausting work depending on the scene,” said Perez. “It’s time consuming, but everyone does their best to make sure everything goes smoothly. It’s all worth it for the finished product.”

Perez’s initial goal was to work in television production, but he’s content with the unexpected turn his career has taken. For now, he plans to stick with acting, but he’s open to whatever comes his way.

“Since Georgia’s film industry has grown so much, I may stay here,” said Perez, “but if opportunity knocks, I’m willing to take it.”

JENNIE WARD (UHP, Chemistry, 2011) moved to Atlanta, Georgia after her graduation, where she worked as an Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education Fellow in the Tobacco and Volatiles Branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for four years. While living in Atlanta, she attended the Georgia Institute of Technology and earned a Master of Science in Chemistry degree in December of 2014. She then moved to Albany, GA and joined the United States Department of Agriculture’s Science & Technology Program as a temporary hire in May of 2015. She was then selected for a full-time Chemist position in July of 2015.

She works at the National Science Laboratory (NSL) in Blakely, GA and in the new NSL’s Blakely satellite laboratory in Dawson, GA. She currently lives in Albany, GA where she enjoys spending time with her fiancé, Jake Wallace, another University Honors Program alumnus, family, and friends.

MICOLE IRRANGIATTO (UHP, Biology, 2012) began working as a research technician in a neuroblasta laboratory at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia soon after her graduation from Georgia Southern University. This two-year experience sparked her interest in cancer biology and reaffirmed her desire to pursue a PhD. She is now a first year graduate student at the Rockefeller University in New York City and she plans to join a thesis laboratory where she can study cancer or stem cell biology. She is also engaged to Ryan Pfitz, a Georgia Southern University Men’s Soccer Team alumnus now working in investment banking.

ALLYSON LUMPKIN (UHP, Multimedia Communications, 2012) currently works for the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama as a Law Clerk.
KELSEY KEANE

After completing her English degree at Georgia Southern a little over a year ago, Honors alumna Kelsey Keane packed her bags for Kosovo, a small country located in Southeastern Europe. Keane settled into Mitrovica, Kosovo in September 2014, where she worked as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant for nine months. “It was a cultural ambassador to high school and university students in Kosovo,” said Keane. “While abroad, my greatest responsibility was to implement Western classroom models with the city’s high school curriculum while engaging students through student participation, extracurricular activities, and innovative curriculum development.”

Her positive impact on Mitrovica was not limited to the classroom as Keane served as a guest lecturer at local nonprofits and universities concerning American culture and its higher education system. She also participated in teacher training programs, summer camp development, and community service projects throughout the city. Keane’s recent return to her hometown of Savannah has provided her with the opportunity to fight economic inequality at home. She currently works as a loan associate for the United Way of the Coastal Empire annual giving campaign, a local organization whose mission is to combat poverty in certain counties of Southeast Georgia.

While Keane is not currently planning to work abroad in the near future, she is preparing for her next big adventure; law school.

“Nine months living in Kosovo provided the context to establish my ideas on communal transitions from negative to positive peace,” said Keane. “My observations also led me to commit fully to the study of law as my research interests expanded to exploring legal codes impact on post-conflict societal progress.”

KATHRYN BRENDAU SCONYERS (UHP, Early Childhood Education, 2012) taught Pre-K at Gabriel’s House, a foster home in Midway, GA for two years, and is currently teaching at Julia P. Bryant Elementary. She was married in November of 2014 and began her Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education in January of this year.

PHILIP STEVENS (UHP, Physics, 2012) is currently a Junior Engineer at Bill Austin and Associates in Indiana.

BENNY RATLIFF (UHP, Music, 2014) is currently a graduate assistant with the Ole Miss Pride of the South band at the University of Mississippi. He is working on his Masters of Music in Music Education, and assists with the conduct and curriculum development of the Ole Miss Pride of the South band at the University of Mississippi. He is working on his Masters of Music in Music Education, and assists with the conduct and curriculum development of the Ole Miss Pride of the South band at the University of Mississippi. He is currently a graduate assistant at the University of Mississippi.

TY VON PLINSKY (UHP, Information Technology, 2014) interned twice at NPR since his graduation from Georgia Southern, and is currently a Technical Support Specialist at Discovery Communications.

JAMES DEVLIN (UHP, Writing and Linguistics, 2015) is currently a graduate student at Georgia Southern University studying Student Affairs. He has started an assistantship with the Office of Student Organizations.

KAITLYN CARMICHAEL (UHP, Writing and Linguistics, 2015) is currently a research assistant for the Associate Dean of Nursing Research in the College of Nursing at Augusta University. She is involved in piloting a study that tests the implications of diet changes for individuals affected by diabetes and colorectal cancer. The study includes clinical research, direct interaction with patients, and analysis of samples collected. In addition to this, Kori is undergoing training to become a Phlebotomy Certified Technician.

GISELLE DEVOT (UHP, Writing and Linguistics, 2015) is currently pursuing her Masters in Education at Georgia Southern University. She is involved in publishing in the top Journals: A Cross-Disciplinary Study. She is also currently a Technical Support Specialist at Discovery Communications.

MISCHAK SPENCER (UHP, Early Childhood Education, 2015) is currently a research assistant for the Associate Dean of Nursing Research in the College of Nursing at Augusta University. She is involved in piloting a study that tests the implications of diet changes for individuals affected by diabetes and colorectal cancer. The study includes clinical research, direct interaction with patients, and analysis of samples collected. In addition to this, Kori is undergoing training to become a Phlebotomy Certified Technician.
Honors by the Numbers 2015-2016

Honors 2015-2016 Data

501
Honors Students
(34% Men, 66% Women, 77% White, 23% Non-white)

443
Georgia Residents

20,818
Hours of Service and Leadership

93%
Freshman Retention Rate

140
Faculty Teach Honors Courses

98
Honors Courses Offered

2016 Incoming Freshman Class Projections

134 New Freshmen
122 Georgia Residents (91%)
1245 Average SAT
28.8 Average ACT
3.81 Average GPA (Unweighted)

Honors Students by Academic College

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<th>Academic College</th>
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<tr>
<td>Science and Mathematics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Information Technology</td>
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You can invest in the outstanding students of the University Honors Program by visiting our website and clicking 'Invest in Honors.'