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Georgia Southern awarded National Science Foundation grant; will lead collaboration with state universities to improve STEM education

June 11, 2018

Georgia Southern University was recently awarded a National Science Foundation grant totaling more than \$50,000 to lead a collaborative project that will address science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education concerns at Georgia's comprehensive universities. The project will be presented at a symposium in spring 2019.

While enrollment trends for STEM majors in Georgia colleges have increased, many institutions continue to struggle to retain and graduate students from these programs.

The 2019 symposium will bring together stakeholders from collaborating institutions, Kennesaw State University, University of West Georgia and Valdosta State University, to discuss a plan to implement changes and to improve undergraduate STEM education across the state.

"Our four institutions are comparable in our ability to provide resources and supplemental instruction," said Kania Greer, Ed.D., principal investigator for the Georgia Southern portion of the grant and coordinator of the College of Education's (COE) Institute for Interdisciplinary STEM Education. "Together we want to build our capacity to improve undergraduate education and learn from each other on strategies that work best for student success."

The symposium will focus on three areas for improved undergraduate STEM education. Attendees will examine the transition to postsecondary education and student engagement in gateway courses to determine issues for the course topics or institutional practices that hinder students' continuance into upper-division STEM coursework.

Balancing faculty teaching and researching, and the importance of undergraduate research as a vital component to student success and practical application of STEM education, will also be discussed.

"Research provides clear applications of basic scientific principles students often struggle with in the classroom and reinforces knowledge presented in the classroom," said Greer.

Administrators and representatives from STEM disciplines, as well as education and teacher preparation, will attend the symposium to establish collaboration and best practices, initiate change and study the impact of change on recruitment, retention and graduation rates.

"We are looking to build on the University System of Georgia's (USG) STEM Initiative," said Greer. "And we want to take learning and self-evaluation deeper while considering elements of change such as undergraduate research, faculty development, the role of K-12 participation, peer learning and tutoring and learning communities."

Launched in 2007, the USG STEM Initiative is a project designed to improve student access and success in the STEM fields and enhance existing instructional capabilities of STEM faculty in Georgia's postsecondary institutions. During the conference, the USG will provide guidance on the initiative.

Greer added that experts from the COE can offer a pedagogical perspective on best teaching methodologies and curriculum development including differentiated learning for diverse student populations.

"The COE has the unique ability to provide content instruction and help bridge the gap between teaching and learning and STEM content," she said.

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Georgia Southern's online Master of Education Program earns Top 50 national ranking

June 11, 2018



Georgia Southern University's online Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Educational Leadership degree was recently ranked No. 48 in the nation by BestColleges.com, a leading source that provides students with higher education research and free college planning resources.

"Our newly redesigned master's in educational leadership is a great opportunity for those looking to transition into leadership roles within their school systems," said M.Ed. Educational Leadership program coordinator Juli Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D. "Our program assists candidates in growing professionally through collaboration with our expert faculty and relevant, applicable curriculum."

To determine the Top 50 rankings, BestColleges.com analyzes statistical data and guiding principles to score factors in the areas of academic quality and affordability. Academic quality is determined by admissions, enrollment and retention rates, as well as the number of master's in educational leadership graduates. Data is compiled from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and College Navigator, both of which are hosted by the National Center for Education Statistics.

"Our online graduate educational leadership ranking aims to highlight school programs that offer quality academic curriculums while remaining accessible, affordable and flexible for today's students," said Stephanie Snider, director of BestColleges.com. "By earning a position on our ranking, Georgia Southern University has demonstrated their continued commitment to academic excellence and student outcomes."

Georgia Southern's 36-credit hour online master's in educational leadership prepares classroom educators for entry-level, K-12 leadership positions. Candidates explore core curriculum courses such as transformational school leadership, financial matters for educational leaders, politics of public education and developing professional learning communities. Upon completion of the M.Ed. in Educational Leadership, students will have earned 250 supervised field experience hours, as well as leadership certification at the Tier I level for the state of Georgia and a Teacher Leader Endorsement.

The program was redesigned in 2016 to meet the recent revisions of the Georgia Professional Standards Commissions (GaPSC) standards.

For more information about Georgia Southern's M.Ed. in Educational Leadership, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/edld/p-12-leadership/masters-p-12/>. To review the Best Online Master's in Educational Leadership Programs on BestColleges.com, visit <https://www.bestcolleges.com/features/best-online-masters-educational-leadership-programs/#row-48>.

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Georgia Southern faculty author child trauma series in national psychology publication

June 11, 2018



T. Diamanduros



D. Tysinger



J. Tysinger

Georgia Southern University school psychology faculty Terry Diamanduros, Ph.D., Dawn Tysinger, Ph.D. and Jeffrey Tysinger, Ph.D., recently published a child trauma series, including two articles and a handout for teachers, in *Comminiqué*, the official publication of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

“Each of us worked with traumatized children prior to becoming university trainers,” explained Diamanduros. “From our own professional experiences and given the number of school shootings that have occurred in recent years, we became interested in developing a manuscript that focused on child trauma and the role of the school psychologist.”

The first part of the series, “Trauma and its Impact on Children,” provides information on basic core concepts about trauma such as types of trauma, protective and risk factors and how trauma impacts children on an emotional, behavioral, social and educational level.

“Trauma and the Role of the School Psychologist,” focuses on the role of the school psychologist in addressing the needs of traumatized children in a school. In the article, the faculty detail the methods for assisting students including: raising awareness among educators of trauma’s impact on children; facilitating the use of school-wide, trauma-informed practices to create an environment where traumatized children feel safe and supported; implementing trauma-informed assessment practices; and providing evidence-based mental health interventions in the school that are designed to reduce traumatic stress symptoms in children. To assist in the school-wide awareness and initiatives, a handout is included for teachers with condensed, relevant information about assisting children in these circumstances.

The faculty submitted the manuscript to *Comminiqué* with the intent of making the information easily accessible to field practitioners.

“We have received positive feedback about the series from NASP members including other university trainers who also have an interest in child trauma,” said Diamanduros. “The president of NASP, Dr. John Kelly, contacted us about the series and thanked us for the articles, commenting about the importance of the topic for the school psychology profession.”

According to a recent national study cited in the publication, approximately 34 million children in the U.S. have experienced at least one of nine adverse childhood experiences, which can lead to traumatic stress.

“We hope that the series will be helpful to school psychology practitioners in their work with children,” Diamanduros added. “Our primary purpose in writing the manuscript was to raise an awareness of how trauma can impact children, promote an understanding of how children respond to trauma and provide a useful resource for school psychology practitioners that promotes trauma-informed practices in schools.”

For more information about the child trauma series, contact Diamanduros at tdiamanduros@georgiasouthern.edu. To discover more about the school psychology program at Georgia Southern, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/espy/eds/>.

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Georgia Southern research promotes faculty and staff collaboration

June 11, 2018



Jennifer Syno

Jennifer Syno has spent her entire career in education. Starting out as a middle grades math teacher, she transitioned to a dual enrollment program for at-risk students, and today she serves as the advising coordinator for Georgia Southern University's Waters College of Health Professions.

"I am really passionate about student success," said Syno. "Working with students to help them figure out how to overcome obstacles, be successful and find their pathway in education—that's where my heart is."

In her quest for helping students, Syno has witnessed firsthand the successes and failures students encounter in their academic pursuits. Now a candidate in the Ed.D. Educational Leadership program in the College of Education (COE), she is focusing her research on what can be done to help students succeed at Georgia Southern.

"Faculty and staff, we have the same ultimate goal for the student population," she said. "We want our students to be successful, yet we often stay in our silos and do not work together to achieve this goal."

During an action-research project required of her program, Syno surveyed the faculty from the former College of Health and Human Sciences (CHHS) as well as staff from areas including CHHS advisement and the University's career services, housing and academic success center. Her survey examined

perceptions, such as how participants perceived faculty and staff collaboration, whether collaboration contributes to student success, the value of collaboration and whether or not individuals were willing to participate in faculty-staff collaborations.

"The most interesting thing I found is that faculty and staff all valued collaboration," said Syno. "Participants indicated they are willing to collaborate, and I think that is a great start. Now I want to know why we aren't doing it more often."

Participants were also asked to share perceptions of respect when considering various perspectives of faculty and staff.

"My initial findings indicate that faculty perception of staff had no bearing on willingness to collaborate, which goes against much of the existing literature," said Syno. "This could be a small indication that relationships between the two parties may be improving. It is noteworthy, however, that there was a disconnect in that faculty perceived themselves as respectful to staff when staff indicated a slight disagreement with the statement of "faculty respect staff.""

Syno plans to treat her first study as a pilot for her dissertation.

"My hope is that with my dissertation, pending Institutional Research Board approval, I could do this study University-wide," said Syno. "Having spent my entire career in education and knowing that as a classroom educator we were always trained to collaborate, I would also be curious to see if the results would be different, for instance, in College of Education, than they would in other colleges at Georgia Southern."

Syno, herself, is already seeing the benefits of faculty-staff collaboration as she works with several of the College of Education's educational leadership faculty to complete her research. Most recently, she received word that an article about her research co-written with faculty members Juliann McBrayer, Ed.D., and Dan Calhoun, Ph.D., was accepted for publication in the *College Student Affairs Journal*. Syno also presented findings of her study, "Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Organizational Units and Collaboration Impact," at the 2018 Georgia Southern University Research Symposium where she was awarded the COE's Graduate Best Poster Award.

"The faculty in my educational leadership program are challenging me and having me step out of my comfort zone and do things I never do, like the Research Symposium and a upcoming conference presentation as well," she said.

Ultimately, Syno hopes her research could help lead to more collaborative efforts between faculty and staff at Georgia Southern.

“It will give the University a better understanding of how to have successful collaborations and maybe even areas to start in or areas of improvement for collaborative efforts and relationships,” she explained. “We have to work together and help the students, and my research has already shown that the desire is there.”

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College of Education alumnus, professor emeritus named Deen Day Smith Lifetime Achievement recipient

June 11, 2018

Two-time alumnus of Georgia Southern University College of Education Charles Wesley Bonds II, Ed.D. (M.Ed. Reading Education, '72, Ed.S. Reading Education, '74) was named a recipient of the Deen Day Smith Lifetime Achievement Award during a ceremony in spring.

The award honors Statesboro and Bulloch County citizens for dedicating their lives to serving others, making the world a better place, and spreading life and compassion through continuous acts of kindness. The Deen Day Smith Awards annual banquet is hosted by the *Statesboro Herald*.

Bonds joined the University in 1972 as an instructor for the grant-funded Right to Read program. Affectionately known as the "Reading Professor," Bonds gave stuffed animals that he called "reading buddies" to children as he read to them wearing full academic regalia. He was invited to join the education faculty and became Georgia Southern's first african american american professor in 1973. Bonds also became the first african american faculty member to earn the rank of professor in 1991 and upon his retirement in 1996 was honored by the University with the title professor emeritus.

Marilyn Smith, a retired educator and former student of Bonds, was one of the individuals who nominated him for the award.

"I had Dr. Bonds as a professor when I was working on my master's in reading at Georgia Southern," she said. "One of the things I admire most about him is his sincerity. He was such a kind professor and very refreshing."

His dedication stretched beyond the University, as Bonds served the community and several civic organizations including the Bulloch County Historical Society, the Bulloch County Retired Teachers Association, United Way and NAACP. He served on the Bulloch County Board of Education for 16 years and oversaw the construction of several of the newly-built schools.

When nominating Bonds, Smith referenced an article published in the *Statesboro Herald*, written by Enola Mosley, Ed.D. from the English Department at Statesboro High School. The article, Smith said, captured the essence of Bonds accomplishments.

"I cannot say enough good about him," Smith added. "He is truly a statesman. If I were to describe him in one word that's what I would say—statesman."

Today, Bonds continues to serve his church, the Original First African Baptist Church in Statesboro, where he has been a member for 44 years.

Bonds was one of three citizens to receive a 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Deen Day Smith Awards event is named for renowned humanitarian Deen Day Smith Sanders, whose husband founded Days Inn of America. The exclusive gala honors area residents who are nominated by peers and selected by a committee that reviews their history of compassion, giving and helping others. The event is sponsored by several area businesses and individuals.

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Georgia Southern students partner with Wesley Community Center to encourage literacy

June 11, 2018



Students participating in the project included (l-r): Nakkia Kyles, Hannah Moisant, Eboni Brown, A'lexia Jenkins, Victoria Bryan, Kayla Wilharm, Shayla Brown, Summer Flournoy and Mia Williams.

Georgia Southern University College of Education students on the Armstrong Campus in Savannah recently created family literacy projects to benefit the local Wesley Community Centers, which offer affordable services for families and children in need in Chatham County.

“Our focus was on ‘mathematizing’ children’s books by weaving together read-alouds, discussion, writing and mathematical concepts in order to creatively engage students and families in their learning,” explained Anne Katz, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading.

The research-based activities corresponded with a range of children’s books to benefit family literacy initiatives. In each project given to the Wesley Community Centers, students included a letter to the parents/caregivers, materials and instructions for the activity including step-by-step procedures. The idea was to prompt questions, content-area vocabulary connections and ideas for differentiation or extensions of the activity. Wesley Community Centers’ Executive Director Tammy Mixon-Calderon also visited the University to speak with students about the programs the Centers offer.

Katz invited students to participate in the project as a final assignment in her language acquisition course, for which education majors explore language components including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics.

Kayla Wilharm, a junior early childhood education major, said she gained valuable knowledge for her future career with children and was proud to have helped the community.

“Reading to and with your child is so very important for the child’s language development, for creating a stronger bond within a parent-child relationship and for fostering a love for books,” she said. “I feel that this project helped me learn a lot about helping children and their families come together through books and learning, which is something that I plan to use in my future career, because reading and writing are very important and can often be therapeutic as well. It also gave me experience and the opportunity to have an impact on a child’s life and the community, which is something I am very passionate about.”

The Wesley Community Centers of Savannah, Inc. are urban-based community centers that work to enhance the economic, educational and spiritual growth through early learning care and services for women, children and families of Chatham County. The partnership, which began three years ago, Katz says, was a natural fit, as the Centers promote early literacy to its patrons.

“The university-community center partnership aims to bridge theory with practice for Georgia Southern students in the College of Education,” she said. “It simultaneously provides parents and caregivers with tools that will enable them to create high-quality early learning environments for their children. Providing parents with strategies and resources to design meaningful early learning experiences at home will prepare students to be active participants in language and literacy learning when they enter formal schooling, optimizing children’s academic and personal success.”

To complete the project, Katz had students in the course write reflection essays that considered how they can involve families in their future students’ literacy learning.

“As college students are developing their individual teacher literacy identities, this collaboration empowered teacher candidates to apply their content knowledge while building valuable connections with community members,” explained Katz.

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