

# College of Education News

August 31, 2018

College of Education, Georgia Southern University

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# Thompson receives 2018 staff award

August 31, 2018



*Chris Thompson*

The Betty-Ware Wray staff award is given annually to a College of Education (COE) staff member who has excelled in his or her job performance as well as University service. During the College's annual meeting on Aug. 8, COE's Student Success Center (SSC) Director, Christina Thompson, was named the 2018-2019 award recipient.

A member of the College for 18 years, Thompson serves as the liaison to the Professional Standards Commission (PSC) Certification Division and handles all certification processes for the COE's initial educator preparation candidates in undergraduate and graduate programs. She also oversees the advising staff for undergraduate students in the College.

Staff members are nominated for the Betty-Ware Wray Award by COE faculty, staff and students, and the nominations are reviewed by the College's Staff Advisory Council. The nomination letter for Thompson included comments about her leadership and exemplary work performance for the College.

The writer indicated that, "Chris is the type of person who adjusts to changes easily and accepts challenges as a part of the job."

"Her positive nature and her own willingness to take on extra work inspires her staff to rise to the occasion and go above and beyond to carry on the good work of the SSC," the writer continued.

The Betty-Ware Wray staff award honors the memory of former COE Student Services staff member Betty-Ware Wray. Wray's in-laws established the award to honor Wray and her legacy as a beloved member of the College family.

"I was very honored and humbled to be chosen for this award," Thompson said. "This award means a lot to me, as Betty-Ware hired me, and she was a mentor and a friend. She loved the COE and worked very hard. I am one piece of this larger 'machine,' and we all have to be working hard in order to keep the COE running."

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# Four faculty members recognized for Jack Miller Awards

August 31, 2018



*2018 Jack Miller Award recipients include (l-r) Antonio Gutierrez de Blume, Ph.D., Mete Akcaoglu, Ph.D., Alisa Leckie, Ph.D., and Catherine Howerter, Ph.D.*

The Jack Miller Faculty Awards are given annually to recognize Georgia Southern University College of Education (COE) faculty for demonstrated excellence in areas of teaching, service and/or scholarship. Awards can be given in each area along with an additional Educator of the Year Award, which recognizes scholarship in all three of the considered areas.

For the 2018-2019 academic year, four COE faculty members received Jack Miller Awards including Mete Akcaoglu, Ph.D., Antonio Gutierrez de Blume, Ph.D., Catherine Howerter, Ph.D., and Alisa Leckie, Ph.D.

**Mete Akcaoglu** received the **Jack Miller Educator of the Year Award**, recognizing his proven success in all award areas including teaching, service and scholarship. Akcaoglu is an associate professor of instructional technology in the Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development. He earned a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology from Michigan State University and joined Georgia Southern faculty in 2014 after teaching at West Virginia University.

Akcaoglu's research is focused on the design and evaluation of technology-rich and innovative learning environments for developing critical thinking skills in K-12 children. He is particularly interested in using game-design activities as a means of scaffolding students' problem-solving skills and STEM interests. Akcaoglu is a co-founder of the College's Innovation Studio, which opened in 2015 as a makerspace to provide pre-service teachers and the schools they serve access to cutting edge technologies that can be used to foster innovation in the classroom.

**Antonio Gutierrez de Blume**, recipient of the **Jack Miller Award for Scholarship and Creative Activity**, is an assistant professor of research, with specialty areas in research methods, statistics and learning and cognition.

Gutierrez de Blume earned a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and joined the College's Department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading in 2014. His research interests include metacognition, metarepresentation, metamemory, self-regulated learning, critical thinking, problem solving and reasoning, epistemic beliefs, executive function and creativity and creative thinking.

This fall, Gutierrez de Blume will be traveling to Chile to continue an international research collaborative he began with a group of international scholars two years ago, led by Christian Soto, Ph.D. of the Department of Spanish, Psycholinguistics Area, at the Universidad de Concepción. Activities will include mentorship of doctoral students on advanced quantitative methodologies. Research objectives will include evaluating the effectiveness of two instructional technologies (COMPRENDE 2.0 and iStart) on the reading metacomprehension (an index of metacognitive monitoring) of Spanish-speaking Chilean learners.

The **Jack Miller Award for Service** was awarded to **Catherine Howerter**, associate professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education. Howerter joined Georgia Southern in 2013 after earning a doctorate in special education from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She serves as the director of the B.S.Ed. Dual Certification in Elementary and Special Education program. Howerter also participated in the Faculty In Residence program, a partnership between the College and local schools, to offer her expertise to K-12 teachers and administrators in specific areas of need. This past year, she also assisted with the International School Exchange (ISO) to develop a project for students supported with seminars.

Howerter is an active participant in multiple professional organizations including the Council of Exceptional Children and the Council for Learning Disabilities. She is also a member of the Editorial Board of the *Intervention in School and Clinic* of SAGE Publications.

Her research interests include co-teaching, access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities and pre-service teacher education.

**Alisa Leckie** was named the winner of the **Jack Miller Award for Teaching**. An associate professor in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education, Leckie teaches courses including middle grades practicum and supervision, applied linguistics, cultural issues, and English as a Second Language (ESOL) methods. Leckie serves as the program director of the graduate certificate and M.Ed. in Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students. Leckie joined the College in 2013 after earning a Ph.D. in Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies from the University of Arizona.

Her research centers on the education of language minority students, critical analysis of policies impacting education, literacy across the content areas and adolescent literacy.

The Jack Miller Faculty Awards are given each fall during the College's annual meeting. The awards are open to all full-time, tenure-track COE faculty who have completed at least three years of full-time service at the University.

Jack Miller was the former Dean of the College of Education at Georgia Southern. He endowed the Jack Miller Faculty Awards in 1994 after leaving to accept the position of Dean of the College of Education at Florida State University. Miller retired in 2016 from his position as the President of Central Connecticut State University. Miller passed away in April 2018, leaving behind a legacy as a passionate and dedicated leader in higher education across the nation.

For more information about the Jack Miller Awards or to view past recipients, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/awards/>

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# Georgia Southern alumna, principal applies doctoral research to prepare others for administration jobs

August 31, 2018



*April Hodges, Ed.D., (pictured back row, center) serves as the principal at Blue Ridge Elementary School*

In education, everything doesn't always go as planned. After 10 years as a middle school educator, April Hodges, Ed.D., originally thought she would work with curriculum once she left the classroom. However, her first position as an assistant principal changed the direction of her future, guiding her to administration.

"I thought the first job I got as an assistant principal would be a stepping stone into a curriculum position, but when I got into the job I really liked it," Hodges said. "I liked working with the students and their families, and my ambitions melded into something else."

After serving as an assistant principal for five years, Hodges earned a position as principal. After her first year as principal, she began working to earn a doctorate in educational

leadership from Georgia Southern University. Before even beginning the Doctor of Education program, Hodges already knew what topic she wanted to research for her dissertation.

"My research surveyed principals and assistant principals and asked about preparedness when entering the workforce as a principal," she said. "It was very personal to me."

Hodges did not feel completely prepared to take on the role of principal when she started.

"I felt like as an assistant principal, I did my duties, and I did what I was supposed to do," Hodges said. "But when I became a principal, I realized there was a lot that I had not been exposed to that I needed to be exposed to in order to be prepared to be a building leader. I don't feel like I was ill-equipped, but I don't feel like I was well-equipped."

The research showed that most administrators felt the same way Hodges did about her own experience. The best way, according to the research, to prepare individuals to be principal was job-embedded exposure to principal responsibilities.

She found that it is better if assistant principals are not isolated into specific tasks but are instead allowed to take charge of certain roles and responsibilities that the principal manages. Then assistant principals can develop a well-rounded knowledge and application of both roles.

"I think it is important that you assess the goals of your assistant principals," Hodges said. "Then think about your responsibilities as a principal and what you can feel comfortable relinquishing to your assistant principals so they can take charge and understand that responsibility without you swooping in and saving the day. You have to push, encourage and support."

After 10 years of experience as principal, Hodges has had four assistant principals move on to principal and board office positions. Hodges said that since beginning her dissertation research, she has incorporated her findings with people she has worked with. She has also had the opportunity to share her research with some

district level peers in Fannin County, Georgia, where she now serves as principal of Blue Ridge Elementary School.

Hodges continues to engage in active conversation about her research and preparing school leaders via Twitter and hopes to formalize the information to present to additional groups and districts in the future. She said the Doctor of Education in educational leadership program gave her the confidence to better develop her professional habits and day-to-day routine.

“I love Georgia Southern,” Hodges said. “And the professors in the (educational leadership) program push you, provide really good guidance and want to see you succeed.”

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