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Chemistry Student Mariana Hernandez Publishes Research

April 1, 2015

Students join the Honors Program for the research opportunities it presents them. Mariana Hernandez (chemistry '15) has taken her research to the next level: publication. An article she co-wrote with Toan Tran, Dhruvil Patel, and Dr. Ji Wu, "Temperature and pH Responsive Microfibers for Controllable and Variable Ibuprofen Delivery," was recently published in the journal *Advances in Materials Science and Engineering*.

Hernandez's research group sent their article to numerous journals, and they were thrilled to finally receive an acceptance letter.

"Seeing our research in a medical journal was a great experience," Hernandez said. "Knowing that your name is out there in your field is pretty exciting."

Hernandez's research focused on controllable drug delivery through the use of electrospun microfibers, and she sought to find a polymer through which ibuprofen can easily be released. PNIDAM, a type of polymer, was the experiment's primary focus.

Hernandez and her research partners compared PNIDAM's effectiveness to PCL, a control polymer, and discovered PNIDAM's ability to work at high temperatures and at low pH values. Hernandez hopes this research culminates in a wearable patch that can release ibuprofen in controlled doses.

"Participating in this research has not only helped me in terms of applying to graduate school, but has also prepared me for a career in the medical field," Hernandez said. "When I'm a doctor, I'll be able to see the medicine I prescribe my patients from another perspective."

Hernandez appreciates the Honors Program's focus on research, which motivated her to seek out faculty in her department to work with.

"Being a member of the Honors Program forced me to pursue research, which has provided me with invaluable relationships with my professors and leadership experience that will carry over into my career."

Currently, Hernandez is busy applying to medical schools in Georgia, where she will study for a career as a surgeon.



Mariana Hernandez in the lab

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Five Years of the Honors Program's Alternate Break Trip to Camp Blue Skies at Camp Twin Lakes

April 1, 2015



Camp Blue Skies at Camp Twin Lakes with Georgia Southern – 2015 (photo courtesy of Camp Blue Skies)

A five year milestone was reached this spring break as honors program students again volunteered their time with Camp Blue Skies, a camp for adults with developmental disabilities. The camp partners with Camp Twin Lakes in Rutledge, GA to give its campers a fun-filled week of activities like paddle-boating, zip-lining, sports, and arts and crafts. Dr. Jerri Kropp (Child and Family Development) and Dr. Brent Wolfe (Therapeutic Recreation) have led the trip all five years. A handful of students have participated in this trip each of their four years at Georgia Southern, and this year featured the return of some alternate break trip alumni.

Camp Blue Skies promotes recreation and socialization, but the students often find that the camp teaches many life skills. "My experience at Camp Twin Lakes opened my heart in so many ways. Being with the Camp Blue Skies staff and campers reminded me that it's okay to be myself," said Morgan Herrington (Therapeutic Recreation '17). She added, "Being your own individual helps others feel comfortable in their own skin, and it opens so many doors for friendship."

Camp Blue Skies founder and director, Dick Sesler, is each year impressed by the amount of energy and enthusiasm the Georgia Southern students bring to the week at camp. "I tell people that after seeing these students in action, I know the future is in good hands," he said.

Herrington says that the week is a great experience, one that all honors students should consider. "It opens your eyes to many different ways of life, and it helps you adapt to circumstances that you may never think of. You become aware of more things, such as living with a disability, but you become more accepting also," said Herrington.

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Olivia Carter Takes Center Stage (and the rest of it as well)

April 1, 2015

Behind the curtain, many of Georgia Southern University's own students contribute to the magic seen on stage in Theatre South productions. Honors student Olivia Carter's (theatre '15) backstage work has transformed the Blackbox Theater from a bare room to other, fantastic worlds through her prop and set design. Carter's hard work has not gone unnoticed; her prop designs for *Hamlet* and *Race* earned second place in the Allied Design competition at the annual American College Theatre Festival (ACTF).



Olivia Carter at the American College Theatre Festival

A significant amount of research went into Carter's designs for *Hamlet*, which required Carter to create anatomically-correct skulls and bones for the famous graveyard scene in the show's fifth act.

"One of my judges was actually one of the few forensic designers in the theatre industry," Carter said, "so she appreciated the work I put into my skulls, and she was able to offer valuable feedback."

Her work on *Race* also required meticulous detailing, known as hyper-realistic prop design. Carter created the law firm's logo, business cards, letterheads, and diplomas for its employees because the play took place solely in a law firm's office. She recreated famous newspapers such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, and inserted headlines that corresponded with the *Race*'s plot and characters. This process involved scrupulous detail work. From matching the color of newsprint exactly to mimicking each newspaper's layout exactly, Carter made sure each prop mirrored the real thing. She recalled cast and crew members picking up her newspapers to read them, only to realize they were prop newspapers.

Overall, Carter found her experience at ACTF to be immensely valuable. "It was phenomenal hearing people in the industry talk about my work," Carter said. "I was able to get a lot of critical feedback that I really learned from." Carter was also grateful for the chance to network with professionals in her field, as well as other students like herself.

In opposition to her realistic prop design, Carter recently created a mystical world for one of Georgia Southern's spring mainstage productions, *Metamorphoses*, a postmodern rendering of Ovid's collection of Greek myths. Carter designed the show's elaborate set as part of her Honors Capstone project. Both digital projections and a geometric chandelier dangling from the ceiling dazzled the audience. Carter's designs also featured a center-stage pool, the central piece of the performance. Representing such locations as the River Styx and the pool of King Midas, the feature contained most of the play's action and provided a unique centerpiece for the show.

Carter plans to continue theatre in the future. Her experience at ACTF prepared her for the future: "Just to be nominated was a huge compliment and confidence booster," Carter said of her experience. "Now I know that I can really do this as a career." After graduation, Carter hopes to break into the theatre industry and pursue her passion for design work.

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Honors Students Spend Spring Break Volunteering in Costa Rica

April 1, 2015



Georgia Southern Students at the La Paz Waterfalls in Costa Rica

Costa Rica was the destination for this year's newest Honors alternate break trip. Led by Dr. Leticia McGrath, nine students traveled to La Carpio, Costa Rica during spring break to work with impoverished families on community restoration projects such as painting houses and planting gardens. In addition to community service, the students toured San Jose, Manuel Antonio National Park, and the Arenal Volcano and natural hot springs.

"It was amazing to witness how students were able to engage in a meaningful way in a community that is often ignored, where individuals are 'invisible' and not valued," Dr. McGrath said about the inequality found in La Carpio. She added, "Despite the language barrier, or perhaps because of it, students reached beyond simple verbal communication and shared their common humanity, discovering that we all share the same basic need to be valued, to be visible."

Students participated in community restoration projects, such as the installation of a cement floor: "I loved being able to work at La Carpio because it showed me a side of the world that I never would have known was there without this program," said Bailey Kirk (Mathematics '17). She added, "It really showed me what is out there and how a few hours of our time could have a huge impact on their lives."

These changes impact the local Costa Rican culture in great ways. Simply altering a floor from dirt to concrete will impact the health of a family who has no running water, said McGrath.

For some, language was a barrier on the trip. "It was eye opening to not speak Spanish and to try to communicate with people who all knew what everyone else was saying. However, everyone I came into contact with was so generous, caring, and loving," said Salena Neuwar (child and family development '16).



Students mixing cement for a home in La Carpia, Costa Rica

Yet many students drew comparisons between La Carpia and impoverished towns in the United States. "Seeing the La Carpia situation really made me think about how similar it is to some situations in the U.S. and it made me think deeply about how I can take what I learned in Costa Rica and apply here in the States," said Derrick Herrin (Mechanical Engineering '16).

Like many honors students, Laina Latzsch (Biology '15) felt that the best part of the trip was experiencing another culture first hand. "I did not think that this trip would make such an



Students meet with Costa Rican Humanitarian Foundation founder and director Gail Nystrom

impact on me, but it has truly changed my perspective. Of course, the volunteering was such a rewarding experience, but I also

loved learning and living a new culture and language and getting to know my fellow honors students," said Latzsch.

Xxavier Robertson (Film and Business '17) agrees with Latzsch. "This was an experience unlike any other. I have a deeper meaning of what it means to serve."

Several students plan to return to Costa Rica and continue volunteering in the future. "The lessons learned on humility, racial discrimination, and other social issues such as poverty, teen pregnancy, and immigration, will prove valuable to the volunteers as they seek to serve others in our local community here in Statesboro and elsewhere," McGrath said.

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