

# College of Education News

June 11, 2019

Georgia Southern University

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## Fisher named VP of Georgia Council for Exceptional Children

June 11, 2019



*Karin Fisher, Ph.D.*

**Karin Fisher, Ph.D.**, assistant professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education, was named the vice president for the Georgia Council for Exceptional Children (GCEC). Election includes a four year term commitment including: vice president (2019-2020), president-elect (2020-2021), president (2021-2022), and past-president (2022-2023). As the faculty advisor for the Georgia Southern Student Council for Exceptional Children, Fisher played a role the state's executive board in the past. Her new role as vice president will allow her to take her expertise and passion to a new level with the Georgia Chapter of the national CEC.

The announcement of Fisher's nomination and receipt of position on the executive board was announced on the opening day of the Georgia Special Education IDEAS Conference on June 4. Fisher's term will officially begin on July 1.

# First-ever EAGLE Academy student defies odds, graduates with Eagle Nation at Paulson Stadium

June 11, 2019



Kasey Hayes (left) participated in the Spring 2019 Georgia Southern University Commencement Ceremony in Paulson Stadium with mentor and friend Amanda Floyd.

During Georgia Southern University's Spring 2019 Commencement, held at Paulson Stadium in Statesboro, Georgia, Kasey Hayes not only became the first student to successfully complete the university's EAGLE Academy program and participate in commencement alongside Eagle Nation graduates, but she also overcame a lifetime of adversity.

"I was very emotional at graduation," said Hayes. "I was picked on in high school and middle school. People would put me down. They told me I wouldn't be able to make it in college or that I wouldn't even be able to go to college."

With the help of EAGLE Academy, an inclusive post-secondary education program, offering Equal Access to Gainful Learning and Employment (EAGLE) to students with mild intellectual disabilities, Hayes was able to prove them wrong.

Hayes was one of the first students to enroll in the program when it began in fall 2017. At the time, she was interested in childcare. Through the Academy program requirements, Hayes completed two internships that provide students with experience and preparation in the workforce. Her first placement was with the First United Methodist Preschool.

“I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do when I first started the program,” she said. “I realized that while I love kids, I didn’t want that to be my career.”

Hayes redirected her passion for helping others and obtained an internship with Willow Pond Senior Care in Statesboro.

“I fell in love with it,” Hayes said. “Since I was young, I have enjoyed taking care of others. I have now realized that I want to work with the elderly.”

Having a clear vision has motivated Hayes further. She is enrolled in the practical nursing program at Ogeechee Technical College for the fall semester with the goal of one day obtaining a nursing license.

None of this would be possible, Hayes explained, without Georgia Southern and EAGLE Academy.

“I don’t think I would be the person I am now if I had not gone to Georgia Southern,” she said. “EAGLE Academy has made me a more sociable person. They taught me about finances and helped me learn how to be independent and responsible.”

According to Hayes, she worked harder in her college classes than she has ever worked before.



EAGLE Academy hosted a completion ceremony for Kasey Hayes in May. Pictured (l-r): Special Education faculty members Stephanie Devine, Ph.D., and Catherine Howerter, Ph.D., Senator Jack Hill, Kasey Hayes, and Associate Dean for Educational Outreach, Partnership and Diversity Cynthia Bolton, Ph.D.

“My mentor, Amanda Floyd, would push me to study and work hard,” said Hayes. “With time, I wanted to do it for myself. I knew that Amanda would be a good mentor. We clicked like sisters right away.”

Floyd and Hayes participated in the university commencement ceremony together, as Floyd completed a bachelor's in special education.

"Not only did I graduate, but I also got engaged that day," said Hayes. "At one time, I didn't think I would ever get married or graduate. So to have both become a reality in one day overwhelmed me with emotion."

Hayes says that today, she is no longer the shy, self-critical girl she once was.

"Just because I have a disability doesn't mean I cannot do what you can do."

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# College of Education's Aslihan Unal co-authors paper, wins national and state awards

June 11, 2019



Aslihan Unal, Ph.D.

Georgia Southern University College of Education faculty member **Aslihan Unal, Ph.D.**, now holds two awards as co-author of the publication, "An examination of K-12 Teachers' Assessment Beliefs and Practices in Relation to Years of Teaching Experience."

Recently, Unal's work was recognized by the American Educational Research Association as a top research paper for the year. Prior to that, she was named the recipient of the Distinguished Paper Award during the Georgia Educational Research Association (GERA) state conference.

An associate professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education, Unal's research focuses on assessment of teaching and learning, technology in education, classroom management and parental involvement.

"The major part of my teaching and research focus is on assessment in classrooms," said Unal. "Assessment is a critical step in the learning process. It determines whether or not the learning objectives have been met. It also affects many facets of education, including student grades, placement and advancement as well as curriculum, instructional needs and school funding."

In the paper, the authors detail a study in which they compare the beliefs and practices of K-12 teachers in relation to their years of teaching experience.

Data collected from 87 public school educators suggested that as teachers' years of experience increase, the value they place in assessment increases as well. Experienced teachers hold a stronger belief that the assessment process impacts and improves students' learning through determining students' strengths and weaknesses, providing feedback and helping teachers modify ongoing teaching of students.

While they found that both beginning and experienced teachers use assessment practices in their classrooms, beginning teachers opt for more practical, easy-to-use assessment tools such as short answers and fill-in-the-blank type of quizzes. Teachers with more experience tend to prefer more original, teacher-created assessment practices such as individual student works, real-world tasks, group work and projects.

"The results of this study suggest that it is vital to have multiple lectures integrated into courses or a specific classroom assessment course or seminars and workshops to help the preservice teachers expand their knowledge on how to effectively use classroom assessment techniques," said Unal. "I am pleased that my work has been recognized for contribution to the literature. It became another source of motivation to achieve my research goals. Of course, these are all possible thanks to my university, college and my colleagues."

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# Barrow and McBrayer awarded research assistants for 2019-2020

June 11, 2019



Juliann Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D.



Betsy Barrow, Ed.D.

Georgia Southern University College of Education hosted a competition in spring to award two faculty members research assistants for the 2019-2020 academic year.



The College recently announced the winners of the competition as **Elizabeth “Betsy” Barrow, Ed.D.**, assistant professor in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education, and **Juliann Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D.**, assistant professor in the Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development.

Barrow’s current research project includes analyzing data from Georgia Southern College of Education’s [International Study Opportunity \(ISO\)](#) over the past three years. The ISO provides students with a four-week student teaching experience currently completed with partner schools in England. Barrow also plans to examine the influence this opportunity may or may not have on participants over long term experiences in the classroom.

Within the project’s scope, Barrow intends to examine both international opportunities as well as social studies education. First, the research will examine how the ISO experience influences teacher candidates in helping students to gain intercultural competence as well as filling the gaps in the literature on international teaching and study abroad. Barrow also plans to review individual case studies of students who have declared a specialization in social studies education in order to research the specific influence of the ISO experience on social studies teachers. The research assistant will have several main tasks including conducting interviews, running focus groups and coding data.

“I think it is important to mentor students on every aspect of a large scale research project and to scaffold their responsibilities depending on the graduate student’s level of comfort and previous experience,” said Barrow. “I see this relationship as collaborative.”

One of the primary projects for McBrayer in the 2019-2020 academic year includes expansion on her current research about a system-wide, collaborative, purposeful and sustainable distributed leadership plan utilizing teacher leaders to facilitate professional learning communities.

In the next phase of her research, McBrayer plans to establish an Educational Leadership Consortium with educational partners from K-12 school districts and Georgia Southern University to provide formalized training opportunities for local school districts. The consortium will provide research-based practices to advance schools’ professional development and school improvement on a wider scope.

“This work is of particular interest to me as it allows me to actively engage in research, service and professional learning work in the field to stay connected and relevant,” said McBrayer. “I plan to include the research assistant as a co-author and co-presenter on international, national and state-level manuscripts and presentations. I am dedicated to publishing and presenting with my students.”

This is the second year the College of Education has provided competitive research assistantships. Faculty are asked to write proposals reviewed by the College’s Research Committee members as well as Department Chairs and Deans. Proposals are reviewed based on their alignment with the faculty member’s established program of research; ability to provide good mentoring and opportunities to the student; and other resources awarded from the COE in the past. A \$12,000 stipend is provided for each faculty member to hire a research assistant for the following academic year.

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# COE names research symposium award recipients

June 11, 2019

Georgia Southern University College of Education (COE) recently named award recipients for best presentations during the University's 2019 Research Symposium held during the spring semester.

Awards were given for best graduate and undergraduate presentations on both the Armstrong and Statesboro Campuses.

"Research in the field of education has the potential to make an impact on the lives of everyone in the communities in which we live, work and serve," said Tracy Linderholm, Ph.D., associate dean of graduate education and research. "We feel it is vital in the College of Education to encourage and grow a culture of research for both our undergraduate and graduate students. This year, we are honored to recognize these students for their dedication to research and their exceptional presentations."

Armstrong Campus recipients included **Allison Gladin** for best undergraduate presentation and **Robyn Dailey** for best graduate presentation.



Allison Gladin

Gladin, a senior majoring in secondary education, presented "Understanding Freshmen Adjustment to High School." This presentation detailed Gladin's efforts to research perceptions of a high school biology class on the changes they experience upon entering high school in respects to academic, social and home life expectations. Her research revealed a feeling of inadequate support from teachers in making the transition and meeting expectations of high school while also enjoying the additional independence.

"Much study has gone into optimizing the adjustment to college," explained Gladin. "This research aimed to aid educators by presenting practical steps to help freshmen [in high school] adjust and give background into the developmental milestones these students will meet."

Rebecca Wells, Ed.D., assistant professor in the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education, served as the faculty mentor of Gladin's research.



Robyn Daily (right) is pictured with mentor Anne Katz, Ph.D.

Dailey, an Ed.S. Reading Education candidate, presented, “Integrating Culturally Relevant Texts to Build Relationships, Increase Motivation, and Improve Reading Achievement,” which provided actionable data to intentionally increase the usage of culturally relevant texts within literacy frameworks in classrooms. Using a series of interventions, she collaborated with a third-grade classroom during her studies in the master’s of reading program, with a focus on students who represented the cultural classroom minority. Authentic texts that were culturally relevant for the target audience were utilized as an intervention in conjunction with observations and assessments to monitor changes in relationships, behaviors, interests, interactions and reading progression. All students in the classroom participated and received exposure to the culturally relevant texts presented as read alouds.

“The goal,” Dailey explained, “was to raise awareness and promote the usage of cultural texts to foster positive relationships in a productive learning environment, enhancing students’ experiences with literature while developing their reading skills.”

Anne Katz, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading, served as the faculty mentor of Dailey’s research.



Jennifer Syno

Statesboro Campus award recipients included two graduate students **Jennifer Syno** and **John Banter**.

Syno, an Ed.D. Educational Leadership candidate, completed a presentation that focused on her research on collaborations between faculty and staff members in higher education. Based on an article written by Syno, Julann Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D. and Daniel Calhoun, Ph.D., both of the Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development, the presentation reviewed data collected on the faculty and staff perceptions of willingness to collaborate on research and improve student success.

“I utilized this symposium as an opportunity to review what I have done and how I will expand this research for my dissertation,” said Syno. “It was an excellent method of receiving feedback and helping to improve my study.”



L-r: Steven Tolman, Ed.D., John Banter and Juliann Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D.

Banter, who completed an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership in spring, was recognized for his presentation “Leadership Behavior Development of First-Year Students within a Leadership Development Program.”

In his research, Banter investigated the relationship between leadership interventions employed in first-year programming of a formalized student leadership development program and the development of student participants' leadership behaviors.

"The findings produced valuable information for leadership educators and higher education administrators seeking to conduct assessments of their student leadership development programs," said Banter.

Banter's research was completed in collaboration with Juliann Sergi McBrayer, Ed.D., and Steven Tolman, Ed.D., both of the Department of Leadership, Technology and Human Development, as well as Mark Whitesel, Ph.D., Interim Dean of Students at Georgia Southern.

The COE created awards for the University's Research Symposium in 2018 to demonstrate the College's commitment to ongoing student research for both undergraduate and graduate students. Each award recipient receives a \$100 prize.

The Georgia Southern University Research Symposium is held annually as a conference style showcase of student undergraduate and graduate research across all disciplines. For more information about the symposium visit <http://research.georgiasouthern.edu/symposium/>

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