Georgia Southern University awarded its first doctorate in clinical psychology (Psy.D.) during the Dec. 14 commencement ceremony. Forrest Rackham, of Findlay, Ohio, entered the program in Fall 2007 as part of the University's first cohort of four Psy.D. students.

“This is a momentous accomplishment for Forrest and the Psy.D. program,” said Dr. Michael Nielsen, chair of the Department of Psychology. “Forrest has worked hard in the classroom and in his clinical experiences to become an excellent therapist, and is well on his way to professional licensure.”

Georgia Southern offers the only Psy.D. in the University System of Georgia, and the program was developed in 2006 with the intention of offering mental health services to rural Georgians. The Psy.D. program is an applied doctorate that prepares professional psychologists to work directly with individuals and groups. Through the state-funded Psy.D. program – one of the few of its kind in the nation – most students in the program receive a stipend and graduate assistantship, which allows them to graduate from the program with much less debt than they would incur at a private institution.

PsD. students complete four years of course work, including summer courses, and learn and use clinical skills at practicum sites during their second through fourth years in the program. The practicum experience provides the students an opportunity to develop their clinical abilities and is supervised by licensed psychologists. During their final year, students complete an internship, in which they work full-time delivering psychological services.

Now that the Psy.D. program has reached its fifth year and has had its first graduate, it will soon become eligible for accreditation from the American Psychological Association.

“With students at every level of the program, we are seeking program accreditation. We now are putting the finishing touches on our accreditation documents,” Nielsen said.