

University Honors Program News

January 27, 2017

Georgia Southern University

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A Glimpse of Graduate School

January 27, 2017

For international studies majors, travel is important, even when it is limited to the United States' borders. While Charlotte McDonald (international studies and German '17) has been to Germany twice, she recently found herself exploring new territory in Minneapolis, Minnesota as one of fifteen students selected for the University of Minnesota's Graduate School Experience for Advanced Undergraduates in German Studies.

Sponsored by Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), also known as the German Academic Exchange Service, this selective program draws from applicants all across the United States and Canada. Applicants must first be nominated by a professor, and McDonald received her nomination, as well as lots of encouragement, from her German professor, Dr. Horst Kurz.

"I didn't really get the option of whether I wanted to go or not," McDonald joked. "He told me, you *need* to go."



Charlotte McDonald at the University of Minnesota.

Dr. Kurz said, "Charlotte has an excellent academic record, and she has participated twice in our Study Abroad program. She has various post-graduation options, and while she may lean towards pursuing a graduate program related to International Studies along with a continued study of German, it was desirable that she at least be exposed to what grad schools in the field of German as such have to offer in order to make the right decision."

The University of Minnesota's workshop gives talented undergraduates a glimpse of life in graduate school through two days of seminars, panels, and meetings with professors. This year's theme was "German Studies in the 21st Century: History, Text, Image" and covered a variety of unique topics. Examples of lectures given include "Remediating German-Jewish Text and Culture" and "Portrayals of Foreignness in Recent Graphic Novels on Migration."

For McDonald, one of the most helpful parts of the experience was discussing research interests with faculty, as well as meeting current graduate students.

"It was a lot of fun to meet current students and to see their various interests in German studies. The professors were also really informative," McDonald said.

While she has not decided on where she wants to attend graduate school yet, the University of Minnesota is at least now a contender.

"The campus was absolutely beautiful," McDonald said. "And it snowed, which was really cool."

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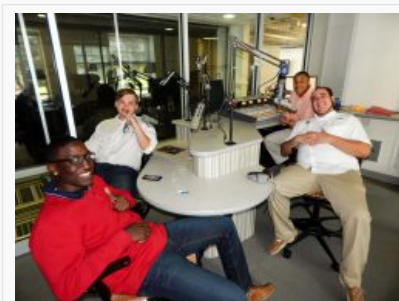
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Live Mic: Honors Students On the Air

January 27, 2017



Modern Political Debate. L – R: Dantrell Maeweather, Bryce Colvin, Jarvis Steele, and Matthew Taylor.

Finding informed and accurate perspective on politics has lately been difficult. From poorly-researched clickbait articles to television pundits pushing their networks' agendas, the mass of misinformation sometimes feels nearly impossible to sort through. However, five honors students have found a way to contribute meaningfully to our country's ongoing political conversation by creating and hosting their own radio show, Modern Political Debate (MPD), on the Georgia Southern radio station.

Taking inspiration from his Honors First-Year Experience seminar of the same name, Jarvis Steele (political science and philosophy '19) founded the show last year when he was only a freshman.

"I got the idea from my professor, Dr. Chris Caplinger. In class, we debated modern political issues, and I thought a radio

show would be an appropriate and interesting way to build on those discussions."

Steele enlisted several other honors students to co-host, building a cast that currently includes students with ideas and outlooks that span the entire political spectrum: Bryce Colvin (political science '19) represents the left, Dantrell Maeweather (history '20) and Steele provide moderate perspectives, and Matthew "Big" Taylor (mechanical engineering '19) speaks from the right. Surjania Awer (psychology & pre-med '18), rather than lending her voice to the radio show, works as a staff writer on MPD's website. With a cast and crew full of diverse viewpoints and academic backgrounds, MPD is able to maintain a sense of neutrality while providing perspectives that cross party lines, an aspect of the show they consider extremely important.

"Being on the show opened me up to different opinions, made me do more research, and helped me overcome my own biases," Taylor said. "We may not always agree, but that's what keeps it interesting."

Colvin agreed. "Having a conversation with someone like Matthew with such radically different views than mine has helped me grow as a political analyst."

Steele described the show as "format-less," a guided conversation that allows for organic discussion rather than following a rigid script. Even without a script, several hours of work go into planning the show, primarily in the form of researching the issues they plan to discuss.

"If that means reading a ten page article CNN posted at 3:00 in the morning, that's something we just have to do," Maeweather said.

Whenever the show's topic aligns with a GSU faculty member's area of expertise, they invite them onto the show. Past guests have included Dr. Patrick Novotny from the political science department, creative writing professor and political journalist Professor Jared Yates Sexton, and Dr. Caplinger, who expressed pride in the work of his students.

"One of the programmatic goals of FYE 1220 is to help students connect with others who share an interest," he said. "This can lead to friendships and other connections that are lasting. Sometimes, though, students take this a step further, and institutionalize the theme of the seminar into a student group, or in this case, a radio show. Jarvis Steele and his colleagues have used the seminar as a jumping off point to add meaningfully to the Georgia Southern community. They are great examples of what we're seeking to do in FYE."

The show's initial goal was to concentrate specifically on foreign affairs. Taylor explained their original vision: "We wanted to be about foreign matters, which are often ignored. Nobody cares to read, for example, about the

EU breaking up. People are uninformed about what's going on in the world, and my original intention was to combat this."

The election, of course, caused MPD to adjust their focus, a shift that nevertheless turned out to be a good thing. One of the show's highlights was having the rare opportunity to cover election night in conjunction with Sanford Hall Radio, an honor not given to any other show on campus.

"It was awesome to be on live during election night and watch the election unfold," said Colvin. "It gave me an outlet for my frustrations. I also didn't have to go through the grieving process alone because there were other people in the booth with me feeling the same emotions. Instead of sitting and moping at home, I could talk to other educated people and look at the election results from the perspective of a political analyst."

From covering election night to expanding their show from one hour to two, MPD has been steadily gaining momentum and looking for ways to improve their outreach. They've recently launched an opinion column on their website, an effort spearheaded by Awer.

"I reached out to Jarvis [Steele] about joining because I was impressed with the quality of the show, and I wanted to add my voice. Jarvis said he was looking to build on his radio show, so we had a meeting, and it grew from there."

The students at MPD have no plans to slow down. Maeweather hinted at future plans: "I see it going further than just a radio show. I could see it on TV, or as a segment on a YouTube channel. We're going to try to get it on the internet every week, be it in the form of a video or a podcast.

"Ten years from now, if I come back to GSU and walk into Sanford Hall, I want MPD to still be a show," Colvin said. "I want that lasting legacy. I want to build something that's going to become a part of Georgia Southern."

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Honors in Action: Presenting at the National Collegiate Research Conference

January 27, 2017

With original research topics and strong commitment to academics, Georgia Southern's honors students are on par with students from some of the best institutions in the country. Lacey Dennis (athletic training '17), Eva Blais (exercise science '17), Chelsea Rodriguez (exercise science '18), and Kolyse Wagstaff (exercise science '17), proved this by presenting their research at Harvard University's National Collegiate Research Conference, a symposium whose application process is highly competitive and attracts scholars from all over the world.

Dr. Czech, honors coordinator in the School of Health and Kinesiology, urged them to seize this opportunity. "To me, transcultural learning experiences like our trip to Harvard can increase a student's intellect, motivation and of course multicultural mindset," he said. "I asked Kolyse, Lacey, Chelsea and Eva to apply, and I am so proud of them for saying yes and following through."



Eva Blais, Chelsea Rodriguez, Lacey Dennis and Kolyse Wagstaff at the National Collegiate Research Conference.

Blais, Dennis, and Wagstaff's theses are part of a three-part project, mentored by Dr. Li Li, looking at the effects of static stretching on the gastrocnemius muscle, while Rodriguez's thesis, mentored by Dr. Czech, explores how different motivational climates affect the motivational perspectives of different races. In addition to sharing their research, the conference presented them with multiple opportunities for engagement with other like-minded individuals.

"The conference was a wonderful experience for me personally," said Blais. "I was amazed by not only the intellect of others attending the conference but the open-mindedness and friendliness I received as a fellow researcher. I would definitely recommend it to other Georgia Southern students thinking about attending conferences in the future."

Even their down time was full of educational experiences, such as visiting the Spalding National Running Center to see the latest research in Running Science, exploring Boston, and touring a lab at Harvard Medical School.

Rodriguez said, "We got to make connections with students from other renowned universities and participate in public discourse with different keynote speakers, some of whom were Jill Abramson and Harold E. Varmus. We were able to participate in various workshops which included discussions about graduate school, entrepreneurship, ethics in research, and much more. It was incredible getting to hear about all the participants' research. From neuroscience, to research in curing cancer, it's amazing to discover how much new knowledge is out there."

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