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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Department of History News" (2019). *History News*. 50.
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Georgia Southern maritime archaeology class conducting field work around Savannah

March 11, 2019

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Kurt Knoerl, Ph.D., right, helps a student at an archaeological site.

Georgia Southern University history students are engaging their survey and mapping skills by conducting field work at various locations around Savannah. The work is part of a maritime archaeology class taught by Kurt Knoerl, Ph.D., R.P.A., on the Armstrong Campus.

“It’s one thing to talk about a shipwreck’s skeletal remains, but it’s another to wade through marsh, mud and grass to discover them for yourself,” Knoerl said. “Field experience makes the historical profession seem less stodgy and more real than just reading about the discoveries that other people make.”

Throughout this semester Knoerl and the students will visit Savannah Ogeechee Canal park, Wormsloe Historic Site, Pinpoint Heritage Museum, Old Fort Jackson, Fort Pulaski and Russo’s Seafood. Aside from the students’ survey and mapping experience, the site visits provide exposure to historic places they haven’t been to and allow them to explore each site’s maritime connections.

Knoerl said the site work will give the students experience and skills employers in multiple fields are looking for.

“From my years working as an underwater archaeologist for cultural resource management companies and the state of South Carolina, I know that employers want people who have field experience and who don’t mind literally getting their feet wet,” Knoerl said. “We are using techniques and concepts used in anthropology, math, geology and chemistry, which doesn’t happen often in other areas of historical research.”

The work the students will complete will be given to the historic sites’ caretakers, such as the Savannah Ogeechee Canal Society. The students will also contribute their own research on maritime related sites to the online Maritime Savannah Trail that will be hosted by the Museum of Underwater Archaeology, an online nonprofit which proposes and works toward creating new online resources for research and idea sharing.

Knoerl said publicizing the work will continue with the fall 2019 maritime public outreach class.

“The next maritime archaeology class would potentially pick up where this one left off if there is more work to do at some of the sites or contribute new information to the online trail,” he said. “Hopefully all of these classes will raise awareness of Savannah’s maritime history which, considering our location on the Savannah River and proximity to the Atlantic Ocean, is underappreciated in the community.”

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