

# University Honors Program News

October 31, 2018

Georgia Southern University

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# Curating Experiences

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A museum takes its visitor on a journey, exploring art from across the world and time. The visitor wanders, overcome with both the simplicity and the detail of the surroundings. The artwork stuns and moves the onlooker. These aspects describe only the surface of what a museum provides to the public. Many do not realize the inner workings behind a museum's public image. This summer, two University Honors students, Brady Gwynn (English and French '19) and Emily Coats (art history and French, Spring 2019), discovered first-hand how an art museum is run during their internships at the St. Louis Art Museum and The Columbus Museum.

Both women wanted to be challenged by and involved in many aspects of the behind the scenes work of the museum. Gwynn wanted to find an internship where she could gain professional experience in the workforce. "I knew that I wanted to use my time this summer to push myself professionally. I thought a museum internship would allow me to implement skills gained in my undergraduate classes into the workplace," she said.

Throughout their summer internships, both women worked in various parts of their museums doing a wide variety of tasks, from replacing faded labels on pieces to preparing photography exhibits and even leading public tours. Some of these things proved challenging and pushed the interns to become more confident in themselves and in their work.

This newfound confidence gained through her experiences allowed Gwynn to overcome the daunting task of working and discussing ideas with scholars and professionals and allowed her voice to be heard as an equal among her summer colleagues. By the end of the summer, Gwynn had gained enough experience and confidence in her new field to suggest a new public tour at the museum, *Woman as Both Muse and Artist*.

Coats had previous experience working at the Center for Arts and Theatre on campus, and was used to handling the artifacts and artwork as the exhibits were being installed. However, during her internship, liability concerns prevented interns from touching or moving any of the pieces. As a result, she faced a few new challenges as she was helping to create exhibits.

While every new task, job or internship comes with its fair number of challenges and difficulties, it also can be very rewarding. For both Coats and Gwynn, the rewards far outweighed the challenges. Gwynn loved seeing all of the behind the scenes work come together to form the beautiful exhibits.



Left: The Columbus Museum; Right: St. Louis Art Museum

"As a visitor, I enjoy the exhibits and learn about different artists and forms, but as an employee I see the conservation team working on a new acquisition. I see the engineers maintaining the structure and temperature of the museum. I see the learning and engagement teams organizing school groups and art activities. I see the curators dedicating countless hours to research for a new exhibition. This internship gave me a greater appreciation for all the work done behind-the-scenes," Gwynn said.

Coats shared a similar sentiment. "By interning in a museum, I learned that there are many more positions needed to run a museum than the general public is aware of, such as the design team that I worked with as well as the collections managers," she said.

This newfound appreciation of the small details that all come together to form a final product will remain with Gwynn and Coats far beyond their summer internships. Even though the work they did could seem minute or unimportant, all of their work contributed to the effectiveness of each exhibit. "It was very rewarding to help with a project and then see that completed label or updated text panel hanging up in a gallery and knowing that I played a role in something that will educate people on the history of our world through art and artifacts," Coats said.

These skills not only helped these women to succeed during their summers, but they are also continuing to help them in their academics here at Georgia Southern. Since returning to school this fall, Gwynn has been able to incorporate her professional work into her classes. She gave a presentation on museums to her Nineteenth Century British Literature Class and related her museum experiences to the topics they had been discussing throughout the class.

Coats was able to get a better look into her desired career and gain some hands-on experience that will benefit her for the rest of both her academic and professional careers. Because of these benefits, both women highly recommend a summer internship to all students

“Internships are a wonderful opportunity to learn more about yourself,” Gwynn says. “You can discover what work environments you succeed in. You can dip your toe in the water and gain firsthand experience in a field of interest. If you put yourself out there, you can discover new passions and gain valuable professional relationships.”

Coats agrees saying that, “having the opportunity to intern is a life changing experience. Nothing can compare to working with an established organization that could be similar to your future career. It is so valuable to be able to ask professionals questions.”

“I would tell anyone thinking about doing an internship to jump on the opportunity. Be proactive and don’t be afraid to ask too many questions. There is so much to learn and there is no better way than to dive in and try new things,” Coats said.

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# Working with Nanoparticles not a Small Experience

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Tyler Wagner (chemistry '19) spent the summer in close proximity to Miami Beach, working in a lab on the campus of the University of Miami researching the photocatalytic activity of SrTiO<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles and their toxicity effects on *C. elegans*. Wagner participated in research at the Interface of Chemistry and Biological Sciences under the leadership of Dr. Marc Knecht (Dept. of Chemistry) and Dr. Kevin Collins (Dept. of Biology).

Wagner was able to incorporate his multifaceted interests into this summer research project and became interested in Dr. Knecht's research on Photocatalytic activity of SrTiO<sub>3</sub> nanoparticles because it applied chemistry to biology.

"I was particularly interested in this program because it was an interdisciplinary program that combined and applied chemistry to biology. As a result, I was able to gain experience working in a biology research lab, which I previously had not done," he said

During his summer, Wagner was able to form valuable friendships with his peers as well culminate ten weeks of research into a presentation. "Preparing for these presentations allowed me to compile all the research I had performed during the 10 week program into a document which represents my hard work and dedication to the research during the summer program," he said. "In addition, I will receive funding from the University of Miami to present my summer research at a conference of my choice during the next academic school year."

This opportunity was funded by the National Science Foundation Summer Research Experiences for Undergraduates which gives students a chance to meet new people in their field and gain a new network of connections. Wagner says, "The daily hustle and workload of working in the research lab was the most challenging part of the research program experience. At times, I worked up to 11 hours in the lab per day, depending on what tasks I had to complete. Overall, this opportunity was a great way to step out of my comfort zone and explore new things, both in the lab and out of the lab, while living in a new city," Wagner said.

Wagner was able to challenge himself with his daily workload, the hustle of the lab, and learning all of the skills necessary to design, to organize, and to analyze successful research. "This program is great for anyone interested in pursuing graduate school in a science related field, medical school, or anyone who currently does chemistry and/or biology research here at Georgia Southern University," he said.

His memorable experiences, new friendships, lasting connections, and transferable knowledge will help him to perform better in his work here at Georgia Southern and better prepare him for future research, including his honors thesis.

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*Tyler Wagner in the laboratory.*

# Honors in Action: Treasure Savannah

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Treasure Savannah has been a hallmark opportunity for Armstrong students to give back to their community for over a decade. This fall's edition of Treasure Savannah was no different—except it was the first one for the newly consolidated Georgia Southern University. In line with the value of Civic Responsibility, one of the four foundations of the Honors Program, Honors students at the Armstrong campus continued to maintain their record of highest voluntary participation for a campus organization.

Treasure Savannah is affiliated with several corporations, providing students with several options. This year, the activities focused on aiding the homeless, cleaning the campus and local community, and volunteering at an animal assisted therapy organization. Some Honors students served as site leaders, managing and allocating work to their group of students.

This event gives all students the opportunity to volunteer and engage with their peers in a new environment, which sets it apart from the typical, individualized approach to volunteering that many students take.

“It was better to go with a group of people. It felt like we were more motivated to get involved when we had each other around,” Jacquelyn Zipperer (physics '22) said. “It felt that there was a sense of solidarity, as you were not under someone, but working together.” In fact, Zipperer even made a new “volunteering buddy” who she plans on volunteering with in the future.

Another advantage for students provided by Treasure Savannah is the ease with which students can volunteer. Senior Carly Mathis (communication sciences and disorders '18) explained, “My other volunteer services I had to go find, while Treasure Savannah was brought to me.”

Fellow CSDS major Sara Dietrich (communication sciences and disorders '20) agreed. “There are a lot of people who participate in Treasure Savannah who don't normally volunteer,” she said

For most students, the most valuable part of the experience is not that they receive hours of community service, but that they get to engage in aspects of their community in which they would not normally. This semester, the Honors Program attendees were able to visit Hoofs 4 Healing, a local equestrian therapeutic riding center for children with disabilities. While donating their time, students learned about the programs offered at Hoofs 4 Healing, such as therapeutic riding. A regular volunteer, who was participating during this event shared her personal experiences with therapeutic riding. Mathis enjoyed hearing the stories of others. “Her story helped us see the impact of service that the organization was providing first-hand,” she said.

In addition to the hours and the engagement, some students gained leadership experience, like Jacquelyn Zipperer, who is in the Nick Mamalakis Emerging Leaders Program and was one of the site leaders for Treasure Savannah. Although this experience put her in a position of leadership, Zipperer insists that “it was not about being a leader, but rather being available to people when they needed me.” Site leaders are responsible for answering questions and making sure students get where they need to be and do what they need to do. In many ways, site leaders are providing their own form of service to the volunteers in addition to the locations at which they served.

Out of all the students asked, all reported that they were looking forward to participating in this event again next semester. Some students suggested more locations so as to avoid over-populating some service sites, but the future for Treasure Savannah looks bright on the Armstrong Campus, and the Honors Program looks forward to continuing its strong show of support for community service.



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# A Busy Summer Researching Bees

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News of declining bee populations has been reported for the last several years, worrying scientists and farmers alike because of their importance in ecosystems and in helping grow the food we eat. Second-year student Katherine Barrs (biology and mathematics '21) is one of those scientists who examined bees' organizational behavior when she was part of a research team in the Social Insect Lab at University of North Carolina-Greensboro.

The lab, led by lead primary investigator Dr. Olav Rueppell, hosted Barrs, and other undergraduate students, through the National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates. Barrs spent many of her days dressed in a beekeeper suit outside in the summer heat observing the division of labor in beehives. The research she and her team conducted is part of a larger project to prevent the rapid deterioration of bee colonies.

"I learned to work with insects that can and will sting you, while wearing a beekeeping suit. Bees have a daily schedule, and I had to learn it to perform my best work and still always be prepared for something to unexpectedly go wrong and recover from it," Barrs said. "I conducted behavioral analysis on our experimental results. This process is very challenging because measuring behavior is very difficult and requires elements of defining and categorizing behavior to be common between all researchers involved. This process also involved watching hours of videos to collect data."

Barrs found out about this opportunity from Georgia Southern's Biological Honors Society's (Tri-Beta) spring presentation on Summer Research Experience for Undergraduates and looked further into a project that would best suit her interests.

While working in such a unique and stimulating environment, Barrs really enjoyed the diverse group of colleagues she worked with in her research. "The diversity made for a rich learning environment and inspired our research efforts," she said. "The experience was unique because all of us were dedicated to our project and working on it 24/7. We were actively learning from each other and contributing different elements to the project based on our diverse backgrounds."

Barrs's experience this summer helped her discover research ideas as well as skills that she wants to strengthen during her undergraduate career. "This summer gave me ideas for other classes I should take, helped me define my strengths and weaknesses, and demonstrated scientific skills that I should build up and work on in my undergraduate years like gaining computer science and coding experience," she said.

She also had the opportunity to culminate her summer with a group presentation on the research and data obtained over a ten week period. "Looking back, it is crazy to realize that I began with little to no experience with my research project. Now, we have publishable results by the end of the program. I am looking forward to my research group submitting a research article for publication and traveling to present at other conferences throughout the year," Barrs said.

The entire experience for Barrs from practice in a lab to learning all of the skills necessary to design, organize, and analyze successful research was very rewarding. The memorable experiences, new friendships, lasting connections, and transferable knowledge that she gained during her summer in Greensboro will help her as she moves forward with her own research.

"This experience shows participants what is available in their scientific field," Barrs said. "And it enables you to discover what you like and what you don't like within that scientific field."



*Katherine Barrs (r) with her research partners, Mohamad Omar Ani and Kimberlyn Eversman.*

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