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Taking Honors Research on the Road

November 30, 2018

Megan Prangley (international studies, Spanish, and Chinese '19) and Anna Kwiatkowski (political science '19) recently travelled to Richmond, Virginia to present research based on their honors theses at the International Studies Association Conference. Both students received valuable feedback from scholars in their field and found out firsthand what it is like to join the conversation in their academic field.

Prangley's presentation analyzes the efforts of non-governmental organizations (NGO) to lower the rate of sex trafficking. She said, "My paper, 'Coordination Sensation: When NGOs Strike Down Sex Trafficking,' argues that NGOs are effective in decreasing sex trafficking in the long-term if they coordinate the totality of their efforts. My research sample is sex trafficking NGOs in Savannah, Georgia."

She was inspired to delve into the subject of sex trafficking after completing an international studies course on the Statesboro campus. "After taking Dr. Courtney Burn's International Human Rights course, I asked her to be my mentor for the Honors Thesis. This course briefly highlighted and sparked my interest towards sex trafficking being an international injustice to human rights everywhere," she said.

Prangley's directly works with organizations based in Savannah, helping her gain qualitative and quantitative data for her thesis. "I am in the process of interviewing sex trafficking NGOs in Savannah. Also, I will obtain data on the number of sex trafficking victims in Savannah to determine the company's effectiveness," she said.

This experience gave Prangley the opportunity to connect with graduate students and professors from other schools who were interested in her research. The International Studies Association conference exposed her to other thought-provoking research which added to her experience as a first-time presenter. "This was a very growing experience for me, because this was my first conference that I attended and presented at. I worked diligently to prepare my presentation. I enhanced my writing skills and gained much constructive feedback on my project. The feedback I received has improved my research upon my return," she said. "Additionally, I was exposed to many topics that piqued my interest while at this conference. I attended a women's breakfast caucus, listened to a keynote speaker at lunch, and engaged in an assortment of panels that expanded my mind to all that the field of international studies encompasses."

Kwiatkowski also had the opportunity to present her research on restrictive immigration policies. "My Honors Thesis, 'Immigration Policy Reform: International Students and Higher Education,' looks at how the high influx of immigrants in states in the Global North such as the United Kingdom have led to restrictive immigration policies and its effects on international students," she said.

This conference was Kwiatkowski's second time presenting her research in a professional setting. In spring 2018, she travelled with the University Honors Program to Washington, D.C. and presented at the Southern Regional Honors Conference. She also recently had the opportunity to present her research at the Georgia Political Science Association Conference in Savannah, Georgia.

These conferences are vital for undergraduates pursuing research because they give students the opportunity to grow and to converse with professionals. Prangley recommends attending these events to all students looking to extend their education beyond the classroom. "Attending this conference not only furthered my research, but prompted personal development and networking. Even if a student is in the process of completing their research, presenting at a conference is a safe environment constructed for shared perspectives that can solidify one's focus and further guide their project," she said.



Megan Prangley, left, and Anna Kwiatkowski at the International Studies Association Conference.

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Honors in Action: Protecting the Endangered

November 30, 2018



Bailey Yarbrough, right, at St. Catherines Island.

While the beach is commonly seen as a place for vacation, sun bathing, and jet skis, we often tend to forget that we are entering a wildlife habitat. Bailey Yarbrough (biology '21), however, sees the environmental aspects of beaches first and foremost. Last summer, Yarbrough volunteered with the Georgia Southern University Sea Turtle Program at St. Catherines Island for ten days.

Each volunteer had a specific duty for each day, Yarbrough said. "Depending on the tides, we would get up as early as possible, around 5 AM, to sweep the beach. We looked for new sea turtle tracks and checked on marked nests to see if they were attacked by predators, such as ghost crabs and armadillos," she said. "We also monitored the nests in relation to the ocean, checking if they were washed over by the tides. If a new nest was laid and it was below the high tide line, we would relocate it. We shoveled through sand and transported the eggs, by bucket, to another site. We dug a new hole similar in shape and depth to the original. Each nest had a number and was identified by a stake. To insure the nests' safety, we used wired screens to deter predators."

While tending to sea turtle nests, Yarbrough also participated in research. She focused on documenting sand temperatures effects on turtles arriving to nest. "My partner and I were looking at the sand

temperature and resistance, the dense or soft texture of sand, on the crawlways of turtles. We were interested to find out if there was any consistency in the sand temperature or resistance in turtles who nested or who had a false crawl. A false crawl happens when a turtles comes to land but does not nest," she said.

Unfortunately, Yarbrough did not find any correlation. However, this experiment was limited to St. Catherines Island. On a larger scale, Yarbrough would be able to find more evidence.

During this experience Yarbrough saw gopher tortoises, diamond back terrapin hatchlings, and lemurs. "I helped to deliver loggerhead hatchlings who did not successfully crawl out of the nest, so we carried them down to the water and let them crawl in," she said.

This experience gave Yarbrough an entire new set of skills which she can implement during her round of research, an approach that might define all future trips to the beach whether for research or vacation. She said, "I now know how to properly identify sea turtle crawls and nests. I can easily find the egg chamber, as well as relocate the nests when necessary."

Yarbrough stresses the importance of reaching out to local communities and programs to find experiences to add to your undergraduate career. "Be active in looking for opportunities, there are a lot of amazing opportunities available through Georgia Southern and in the surrounding areas! Talk to your advisor too, they may know specific professors or programs you would be interested in! You just have to be proactive," she said.

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Honors in Action: FYE at the Boys & Girls Club

November 30, 2018

One integral part of the Honors experience at Georgia Southern is experiential learning. This is a component of an Honors education that encourages students to become active in their learning and engage with their communities. At the Armstrong Campus, First-Year students were recipients of a unique opportunity to fulfill those requirements: volunteering at the local Boys & Girls Club of Savannah.

As part of the First-Year course Brain Games, students were able to engage with course content by playing games with the children at the club. For many, this was a very enriching experience. In the case of Cameron Swanson (history education '22), the opportunity was particularly influential.

"This experience was particularly helpful to me as an only child in getting experience with kids, given that I want to teach them someday. I got to learn about their attention spans and about their lives," Swanson said. "The experience is helpful for the children, too, because they get to hang out with older kids."

Many of the students agreed that the opportunity to be a positive influence on the children at the club was a highlight of their experiences.

Student Evan Page (economics '22) shared a prime example of the students' impact on the club: "The first time I went] this kid was really interested in learning how to play chess, so I taught him how to play chess. The next time I came back, he gave me a hug and said, 'Yay, you came back!' His words hit me right in the feels."

From a line for hugs to being readily willing to walk away from a computer to play a game of Otrio (the new go-to game for the Honors Program), the students have had the pleasure of making connections with children in their community and helping foster those brain-game skills, like strategy, structure, and teamwork.

The Georgia Southern students have learned from this experience, too. Isaac Smith (electrical engineering '22) said, "What I like about experiential learning is that I feel like my education extends beyond what I just learned in the classroom. It teaches me things beyond what I can read in a book or what a teacher can show me in a PowerPoint."

Similar sentiments were shared by Gillian Sneve (elementary education '22), who said that the experience allowed her to interact "with a wide variety of kids from a different background than me." Furthermore, it helped solidify her chosen career path. Like most college students, she doubted her major, but she shared that, through her time with the children, she "grew more comfortable."

Incorporating this volunteer experience into the course design not only impacted the students and the children of the Boys & Girls club, but the Honors program as a whole. Brain games are being routinely featured in Honors events, such as games nights and Coffee Chats, an event where students get to share a donut and cup of coffee with their Honors professors — and maybe play a round of Otrio. The program hopes to continue its partnership with the Boys & Girls Club in future semesters and continues to emphasize the importance of the experiential learning component in its students' educations.



Jonathan Roberts, Associate Director and Armstrong Campus Lead for Honors, at the Boys & Girls Club in Savannah playing Brain Games.

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