

University Honors Program News

December 11, 2018

Georgia Southern University

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Carolynn Nixon is Named a Rangel Fellow

December 11, 2018



Carolynn Nixon (political science) graduated from Georgia Southern University in 2017, but she still keeps in contact with her peers and mentors. This fall, those networks helped in her successful pursuit of a Charles B. Rangel Fellowship, which will provide funding for a master's degree program in international affairs and placement in internships with the United States Department of State. Upon completion of the two-year degree, Rangel Fellows work for the government for five years.

Honors Program alumnus Tony Hudson (international studies, '17), one of Nixon's peers, received this award in 2017. Hudson inspired Nixon to look into the program and eventually apply. Nixon's support from her peers as well as her professors gave her the push she needed to pursue this opportunity.

Dr. Jamie Scalera, a professor with the Department of Political Science and International Studies, was an important figure for Nixon during the application process. "She notified me when the application was open, read drafts of my purpose statement, wrote me a letter of recommendation, and made sure I was in contact with other students who had applied. All of my professors in the department have always been supportive and encouraging. They continued to look out for my best interests even after I graduated," she said.

Nixon was chosen as one of 60 finalists from a pool of over 800 applicants. Many of the 60 finalists, including Nixon, were flown to Washington D.C. for an in-person interview. Finally, in early November, Nixon was notified of her

achievement.

She will hold the title of a Rangel Fellow for seven years. Her fellowship provides her with financial support to attend graduate school. After earning her degree, she will serve as a Foreign Service Officer for five years. "After my time with Foreign Services, I hope to continue my post at the United States Department of State," Nixon said.

During her time at graduate school, Nixon will also undertake a ten-week internship on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. as well as a ten-week internship at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

Patricia Scroggs, Director of Diplomatic Fellowships, worked directly with Nixon during the application process and will continue to work with her during her fellowship. "We are thrilled that Carolynn will join us as a 2019 Rangel Fellow. The selection panel was impressed by her intelligence, professionalism, and commitment to promoting positive change in the world," she said. "I am confident that her experience at Georgia Southern University helped prepare her to succeed. I am looking forward to working with her and to seeing all that she will accomplish as a U.S. diplomat."

While a student at Georgia Southern University, Nixon was an active member of the Honors Program. Her relationships with her fellow students allowed her to thrive in this academic environment. She pushed herself both socially and academically.

"I love the people I met at Georgia Southern. I created a community of support, empowerment, and family at Georgia Southern University, and I really miss that closeness. My professors, coworkers, and fellow students really provided an amazing experience for me over those four years," Nixon said. "Presenting my research at the Annual International Studies Association Conference in Baltimore and the GPSA Conference in Savannah was also really exciting and rewarding."

The University Honors Program promotes a critical sense of inquiry, a spirit of creativity, civic responsibility, and a global perspective. Nixon excelled in each category, determined to take advantage of the opportunities presented to her.

"From the time I first arrived on campus for orientation and in my first semester, it was always about taking advantage of opportunities. The flexible course requirements gave me a lot of freedom to choose the classes I wanted to take and that made my education more enriching because it was my choice," she said. "My degree was in political science, but I took courses in international studies, human rights, and the global south. Studying abroad through Georgia Southern University was my first international experience and really excited me about being a part of the world beyond our borders. My education at this university is what I learned in the classroom as well as through life experiences."

Coffee, Beignets, and Conference Conversations

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New Orleans, Louisiana is an eccentric, vibrant city that is as unique as its people, and a few University Honors Program students experienced that city's unique culture and history while they presented research at the Popular Culture Association of the South (PCAS).

Dra. Leticia McGrath led the students on this trip, and as a member of PCAS, she tries to attend this conference each year and to take students with her. "I take students because it allows them the opportunity to present their research in a professional setting where they can receive feedback and participate in discussions that will help them in future research," she said.

Emily Pressler (Spanish and French '19), who has gone to several conferences with Dra. McGrath, agrees. "This was a great opportunity to present my preliminary thesis research findings," she said.

The students received support and enthusiasm from scholars in their field. Cassia Mugge (communications studies '21) said, "It was my first conference, and I thought it would be super nerve-wracking, but everyone was so attentive and encouraging that presenting was honestly much more enjoyable than in-class presentations."

During the conference, the students conversed with professors from other universities and shared ideas about their research. Pressler presented her ongoing thesis work, which examines Hispanic stereotypes in films like *La Casa de Mi Padre* and *Spanglish*, among others. She said, "I was lucky

enough to talk to some people about my research and generate ideas for both of our current research." Among these individuals was a professor who suggested several films for Pressler's research.

After Bodie Fox's presentation on *Vine* and its influence on pop culture, a professor asked him about continuing the research together for an article. These experiences provide students with insight on the world of research beyond the classroom.

The students also took advantage of their setting and explored the city. They visited all of the world famous New Orleans sites, shuffling down Bourbon Street, visiting St. Louis Cathedral, eating beignets at Cafe Du Monde, and trekking to Frenchman Street—the "cooler, lesser known Bourbon Street," as Pressler described.

Dr. McGrath said, "I particularly enjoyed taking time to browse the local art galleries as well as many of the open-air art booths surrounding Jackson Square." Although, it was Mugge that summed it up best, "New Orleans is a unique and beautiful city, and I am thankful for the opportunity to have visited it."

Conferences are a wonderful tool for undergraduate students to gain experience and advice from other scholars. Dr. McGrath emphasized the need to seek out these opportunities. "It is important for students to be able to realize their goals in their research by providing them venues, such as this conference, where there is an open atmosphere of inspiration and encouragement," she said.

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