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Hart's heart for helping others

May 6, 2019



Family of Christine Elizabeth Johnson, Ph.D., presented the scholarship to health and physical education major Mary Hart during a Georgia Southern Eagles baseball game. Pictured (l-r) are: Sara Johnson, Mary Hart, Kelsey Johnson Sears and Scott Sears.

Like many 16 and 17 year olds trying to determine the next steps of their lives after high school, Mary Hart said thinking about her future was overwhelming. At that time, she knew she wanted to attend college but wasn't sure which path to take.

"I tried to consider things I was passionate about and interested in and blend them together into an ideal job," she said.

Her passion for helping others and her interests in holistic health led her to the undergraduate health and physical education program at Georgia Southern University.

"When we talk about being healthy, we have to think about being mentally, emotionally, spiritually, socially and physically healthy," Hart explained. "That is what I want to teach others — how to be healthy in every way possible."

While Hart says the curriculum at Georgia Southern has provided her with a solid foundation in healthful living, her professors have also encouraged her to explore additional areas of interest in holistic health while studying to complete her bachelor's degree.

“During my junior year, I was teaching health in a school for the first time, and I was able to take some of the things I am passionate about and implement those into the classroom lessons,” she said. “The professors have allowed me to put my own personal touch into my lesson plans, and they have really helped me to do what I feel like is my purpose on this earth.”

In the classroom, she approached a typical middle school lesson on alcohol and drugs holistically, discussing the physical effects of substance abuse on the body, as well as its impact on mental health and the students’ social lives. She also felt it was important to discuss resources for addiction and emphasize healthy ways to avoid drug and alcohol abuse.

Her first classroom experiences helped assure Hart she was on the right path, but that didn’t mean the road to complete her degree has always been easy.

In fall 2018, Hart worked three jobs while commuting to campus every day from Toombs County, Georgia, and maintained one of the highest grade point averages of all current students in the health and physical education program at Georgia Southern. For her hard work and dedication during her time in the B.S.Ed. Health and Physical Education program, Hart was awarded the Dr. Christine Elizabeth Johnson Scholarship.

“It is not easy,” she said. “A lot of people think health and PE will be easy A’s, but it’s definitely not. I didn’t want to go through an easy program. I wanted to get a degree where I learned the best ways to teach students utilizing the latest research.”

Hart says Georgia Southern is known for preparing exceptional educators for the classroom.

“I have learned from the personal experiences of my faculty,” she said. “Their classes and lessons are refreshing because they give you words of wisdom from experience versus just words out of a textbook. That means so much to me.”

Hart will graduate in May and immediately begin her studies in the Master of Science in Kinesiology program at Georgia Southern.

“If I can help just one student look in the mirror and be satisfied with what they see — it was all worth it,” she said.

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Read Woke creator, Georgia Southern alumna recognized as Mover & Shaker

May 6, 2019



Cicely Lewis

Named a *Library Journal* 2019 Mover & Shaker, Gwinnett County Public Schools' 2019 Library Media Specialist of the Year, and the 2019 Metro Georgia Library Media Specialist of the Year, Cicely Lewis is making a name for herself as an innovator in the field of education.

After more than 15 years of experience as a high school language arts and Spanish teacher, Lewis decided to make a career change to pursue a passion her colleagues and students continuously praised her for.

"I would host these huge events in my classrooms like poetry cafes and Harlem Renaissance celebrations, and other students in the school would come by and say, 'I wish I could be in your class so I could participate,'" Lewis recalled.

With a talent for instructional technology and innovative reading curriculum, Lewis sought a school library media certificate from Georgia Southern University College of Education to make the transition from the classroom to media specialist.

“I selected Georgia Southern because the program was completely online and the university has an impressive reputation among educators,” Lewis said. “I learned so much from the school library program at Georgia Southern. The program was very challenging. Many times I didn’t think I could complete all of the work, but I persevered.”

Lewis says that the school library media certificate program required her to create social media accounts and participate in activities via the social channels. At first, she was hesitant.

“I was so apprehensive, but that was the best decision that I ever made,” she said. “Because of social media, I have reached so many people and learned so much. I also made my first screencast, and I was introduced to various educational tools that have greatly improved my instruction. Every assignment and project that I completed in this program was directly beneficial for my school media center.”

Lewis’ social media presence has also helped create a platform for her now worldwide effort to get students to read. The program, Read Woke, began in September 2017 as a reading challenge for students to explore literature that challenged social norms. Lewis was inspired by current events and social injustices and wanted to do her part to make a difference.

She created a reading list of books for Read Woke that fit a criteria of challenging a social norm, giving a voice to the voiceless, providing information about a group that has been disenfranchised or having a protagonist from an underrepresented or oppressed group. Lewis felt these books would help students to learn about themselves and other groups while also engaging in serious dialogue.

In less than two years, Read Woke has grown into a movement Lewis calls Read WOKE across America.

“The program has spread like wildfire,” Lewis said. “I have changed it to allow students to bring a book to me and justify why it is Read Woke, and they can use it. The program has grown to include several media specialists from Gwinnett County high schools. I have also expanded it to include picture books for elementary students.”

As such, Lewis was honored with the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* Top Teacher of 2018 award and as a 2018 Dollar General Teen Read Week grant recipient.

“I am so humbled by all of the awards, and I am greatly appreciative,” Lewis said. “Although the awards have my name on them, they are for librarians everywhere. These awards are for the school librarian whose position has been eliminated because of budget cuts, for the school librarian who has been told they are not a real teacher, for the school librarian who has been told they don’t deserve a raise, for the school librarian who has been told no one reads anymore, for the school librarian who has been given so many other duties that they cannot successfully run their program.”

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Georgia Southern and Haven Elementary partner for educator program

May 6, 2019



Jackie Kim, Ed.D.

Georgia Southern University and Haven Elementary School are partnering to offer teachers a Gratifying Problem-Solving (GPS) program, which will provide educators unique monthly professional development based on the school's current need for improved mathematics instruction.

The College of Education's Jackie Kim, Ed.D., associate professor of [elementary and special education](#), serves as director for the project, totaling \$74,976, which is funded by a [Community Partnership Grant](#) from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

The GPS program uses a bottom-up approach, allowing the participants at Haven Elementary to help shape its development, workshop activities and directive.

"We go to find out what their inquiries and needs are and create a workshop based on the assessment," said Kim. "We want to start with what they are currently doing in the classroom and change their practice to make instruction stronger yet doable."

The project is set to begin this month, with observations conducted by Kim to collect data on current practices used in mathematics instruction from grades three through five. Later in the year, nine classroom teachers and four instructional coaches and technologists will participate in the GPS project, conducting monthly meetings that will include both technology integration for their curriculum and classrooms as well as mathematical practices and teaching activities.

The grant will purchase laptops for classrooms and software and other resources for innovative mathematics instruction. Participants in the GPS project will also receive stipends and meals during meetings.

“We are asking Haven Elementary teachers to work with us for over a year adding something extra to their normal workload, so we wanted to make sure we could maintain their participation throughout the program,” explained Kim.

Kim, who has 11 years of teaching in a K-12 classroom and 13 years teaching higher education, says that this project provides the opportunity to utilize all areas of her expertise while giving back to the community.

“I have worked with Teacher Quality Partnership Grant Program for the past five years, but I have never worked with Savannah-Chatham Schools because they are not included in the qualifications for those grants,” said Kim. “I am excited to have the opportunity to work with Savannah-Chatham Schools because we have the experience and expertise to share to make a difference right here in our community.”

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