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Georgia Southern school psychology students work with special needs children in Ecuador, experience is life-changing

August 20, 2019



Ed.S. School Psychology candidates (l-r) Brittany Fahey, Shanice Murphy and Raven Patterson in Ecuador

Over the summer, three Georgia Southern University students traveled to Quito, Ecuador, to participate in the Ecuador Professional Preparation Program (EPPP), an 18-day cultural immersion program for psychology graduate students and mental health professionals. Brittany Fahey, Shanice Murphy and Raven Patterson, all students in the College of Education's Education Specialist (Ed.S.) in School Psychology program were three of 30 students from around the world selected to participate in the experience that they described as nothing short of life-changing.

EPPP invites participants to contribute to the organization's mission of advancing the fields of psychology and mental health in Ecuador while gaining knowledge of the country's psychological and educational practices, as well its culture.

"This experience helped me to develop both personally and professionally," said Murphy. "I was able to receive first-hand experience immersed in the culture of Ecuador that I could not have received from just reading a textbook or completing an internet search."

However, she admitted, the trip was not always easy.

“There were times when I became frustrated due to the language barrier and adjusting to cultural norms,” Murphy said. “In return, these challenges opened my eyes to the lives English-Language Learner students live every single day in the United States.”

Each participant in the program was housed with a local host family, mentored in an educational or mental health work environment and received one-on-one Spanish tutoring.

“I experienced what it was like to be an adult in a foreign country and struggled tremendously,” said Fahey. “I have a newfound respect for children and their families living in the United States whose second language is English.”

Murphy and Fahey volunteered at El Jardín, a preschool with children ranging in age from six months to five-years-old.

“Special education is not a common service offered in most Ecuadorian cities,” Murphy explained. “Most children with disabilities are placed in classrooms with the general population and have little to no services offered for them. There are a few schools for children with disabilities available in some areas that offer such services, but for some families, it can be hard to enroll their children depending on where they are located and if there is space available.”

Patterson was placed at NeuroLogic International, a treatment center for neurological and mental diseases, where she was able to learn about the history of mental health in Ecuador and the plans to improve mental health stigma in the country.

“NeuroLogic International plans to expand and educate their communities on mental health practices and therapies to treat mental illnesses,” said Patterson. “Many of the Ecuadorian citizens are hesitant to use mental health services because of the stigma in their communities, and the country faces a lack of resources for mental health.”

All three students agreed that the program enhanced their understanding of culturally diverse students and will impact their future roles as school psychologists.

“Cultural competence is a necessary component when communicating needs and wants in an educational setting,” said Patterson. “As a graduate student in the school psychology program, I want to remain competent and empathetic to the unique individual needs of students.”

Fahey walked away with a new outlook on life.

“I’ve gotten something out of this that I will carry with me forever as a school psychologist,” Fahey said. “The experience was not fun. It was challenging. It was frustrating and scary at times, but it pushed me in ways I would never have been pushed if I was not there.”

The Ed.S. in School Psychology at Georgia Southern requires students to complete field experiences in a school setting under the supervision of a certified school psychologist in their practicum course and in professional internship experiences. Fahey, Murphy and Patterson completed this program as an additional experience to shape and inform their studies while at the University and as future school psychologists.

Posted in [Student Highlights](#)

Tags: [Brittany Fahey](#), [Raven Hamilton](#), [School Psychology](#), [Shanice Murphy](#)

Georgia Southern's i2STEMe receives 2019 Inspiring Programs in STEM Award from INSIGHT Into Diversity

August 20, 2019



Georgia Southern University's Institute for Interdisciplinary STEM Education (i²STEM^e) received the 2019 Inspiring Programs in STEM Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity*, a diversity and inclusion publication in higher education. The Inspiring Programs in STEM Award honors colleges and universities that encourage and assist students from underrepresented groups to enter the fields of STEM.

Award winners were selected by *INSIGHT Into Diversity* based on their efforts to inspire and encourage a new generation of young people to consider careers in STEM through mentoring, teaching, research, and successful programs and initiatives.

"The Institute for Interdisciplinary STEM Education has developed and partnered on numerous endeavors to ensure that STEM education is reaching rural, diverse, low socioeconomic status and underrepresented youth," said i²STEM^e Coordinator Kania Greer, Ed.D. "We not only partner with regional schools to assist with STEM events, but we also offer a lending service to provide schools with curriculum, materials and equipment for both science and social studies classes, as well as our most recent addition of the Science To-Go mobile unit which allows us to put science in the hands of individuals at any location."

i²STEM^e, which is housed in the College of Education at Georgia Southern, provides professional development, engages in community outreach and seeks external funding to promote STEM teaching and learning in both formal and informal educational settings. The Institute hosts many annual events including summer camps, Science Olympiad, and the annual Interdisciplinary STEM Teaching and Learning Conference.

The Institute was founded in 2012 with the guidance of the College of Education's Robert Mayes, Ph.D., professor of STEM education. Together, Mayes, COE Associate Dean for Administration and Faculty Affairs Tracy Linderholm, Ph.D., and Karin Scarpinato, Ph.D., a former associate dean of the College of Science and Mathematics (COSM), proposed a University-wide program to promote STEM education across campus with

support from former COE Dean Thomas Koballa, Ph.D., and upper administration. All colleges at the University participated in the development and implementation of i2STEMe.

“We know that many STEM programs are not always recognized for their success, dedication and mentorship for underrepresented students,” said Lenore Pearlstein, owner and publisher of *INSIGHT Into Diversity*. “We want to honor the schools and organizations that have created programs that inspire and encourage young people who may currently be in or are interested in a future career in STEM. We are proud to honor these programs as role models to other institutions of higher education and beyond.”

i2STEMe will be featured, along with 49 other recipients, in the September 2019 issue of *INSIGHT Into Diversity*. For more information about the 2019 Inspiring Programs in STEM Award, visit insightintodiversity.com.

Posted in [Faculty Highlights](#)

Tags: [i2STEMe](#), [Kania Greer](#)

[Georgia Southern COE professors mentor students at Boys and Girls Club of Statesboro, enhance STEM literacy with weeklong study](#)

August 20, 2019



Georgia Southern University College of Education (COE) faculty members Shelli Casler-Failing, Ph.D., and Alma Stevenson, Ph.D., worked with students at the Boys and Girls Club of Statesboro this summer to enhance their STEM literacy skills.

From July 8 through 12, Casler-Failing and Stevenson spent four hours daily implementing an in-depth science unit on water quality with rising fourth- through seventh-grade students. Using water samples from Georgia

Southern's Eagle Creek, local fishing ponds and multiple Statesboro-area tap water sources, the COE faculty provided students with opportunities to test water samples, understand the water cycle and discuss the effects of pollution.

"The water samples were from sources they swim in, fish in and drink from," said Casler-Failing. "So they became invested in knowing more."

At the core of the program was culturally responsive instruction, which identifies and nurtures the strengths of each student's cultural uniqueness.

"We designed a literacy in STEM program where the students' cultures and experiential backgrounds were placed at the center of the curriculum," said Stevenson. "Using culturally relevant, enabling literature allows students to make connections with their lives and with positive role models."

At the end of the week, students worked in pairs to create and record a newscast demonstrating their understanding of the water cycle and environmental effects on water quality.

"The students really enjoyed it and were very engaged," said Casler-Failing. "They grew interested in finding out what was inside the surface water, and we felt like it was a successful experience."

The one-week intensive study of water quality stemmed from a previous project that Casler-Failing, Stevenson, and COE colleague Beverly Miller, Ph.D., completed with the Boys and Girls Club in the spring. Funded by a Georgia Southern service grant, the project was a 10-week, after-school program that utilized picture books and graphic novels to bridge students' understandings of scientific and mathematical concepts.

Both Casler-Failing and Stevenson are former classroom educators, so the opportunity to return to working with young students was an easy choice.

"We were always excited about the next day when we would work with the students," said Stevenson. "As a professor preparing the next generation of teachers, this was a learning experience for us. We gained skills and strategies that we can take back to our pre-service teachers."

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