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# From apartheid to academia, Georgia Southern graduate student beats odds to earn degree on Friday

December 10, 2019



*Debra Maskeo Runge*

When Debra Maskeo Runge was born, she was so small that she could fit into a shoebox.

Runge was born several weeks premature in Johannesburg, South Africa, and her 16-year-old mother claimed she was unaware of the pregnancy. Being black in South Africa during apartheid, a system of institutionalized racial segregation in the country, Runge was born in a designated black hospital that was not equipped with proper equipment such as incubators to allow her lungs to finish developing in the hospital. With a low chance of survival, it was determined that the baby's grandmother would take her to her place of employment in the suburbs where she served as a live-in maid for a prominent white woman.

The first few weeks of Runge's life were critical, and both her grandmother and her grandmother's employer, Doreen Benyamin, kept her wrapped in blankets.

"Miraculously, I survived," Runge said.

Benyamin expressed to Runge's grandmother that she would like to help raise the baby girl, and she remained in the suburbs. Because of apartheid, however, there were no nearby public schools that would allow Runge to attend, requiring her to attend a private school. She enrolled in Roedean School, a prestigious, all-girls school in Johannesburg, from elementary through the first two years of high school.

"At some point I started to become aware of my background," Runge said. "All of the students came from very wealthy families. They had the latest gadgets and fancy homes and their parents had nice cars. My mother was a maid, so we couldn't afford much of anything. Doreen paid my school fees, but I had to rely on other parents to get me home as she worked until late. My mother would take me to school in a minibus taxi, a form of transport used by the low-income population. So I would insist on leaving early so no one would see me getting out of a taxi."

At the start of the eighth grade, Runge was faced with another challenge. Benyamin was moving to Cape Town, but she offered to take Runge with her. However, her grandmother would not be going with them. The decision meant that Runge would either stay in Johannesburg and have to attend the closest boarding school, requiring residency on the school grounds, or move away from the only mother she had ever known to live with Benyamin and continue attending private schools.

"Either way, I was not going to get to see my mother," Runge said. "So I chose to move with Doreen because she was like family to me, and it was the best choice academically."

Although the decision was a difficult one, Runge found great success in her new private school and went on to attend Rhodes University nearly 900 miles away from anyone she knew. After completing a bachelor's degree in political science and sociology as well as an honors degree in social development, Runge decided to continue exploring the world. To fund her travels, she taught English as a second language (ESL) in Europe and South Korea. In South Korea Runge met her husband, Scott Jacob, a national guardsman from Savannah, Georgia, who was also teaching English. In 2016, Jacob and Runge moved to Savannah where they were married and recently had their first child, Savannah Jane.



*Runge with ESL students in South Korea*

Since being in the Lowcountry, Runge became an ESL instructor at Savannah Technical College. Her desire to grow and advance in this career path along with encouragement from the then-dean of adult education at the college led Runge to pursue a master's in adult education at Georgia Southern University on the Armstrong Campus.

"The program has given me a more in-depth view into teaching adults," she said. "I have been able to introduce new materials and instructional techniques to my classroom with the insight gained in the master's of adult education program at Georgia Southern."

Having taught middle schoolers during her time in South Korea, Runge enjoyed the challenge and opportunity to work with adults.

"English as a second language adults want to learn," Runge said. "Because if they can't speak English, they can't participate in basic communication, and it becomes frustrating. They cannot talk to their children's teachers or doctors. I relate to this from my three years in South Korea.

"My students come every day ready and eager to learn," she added. "They are appreciative and thankful, and I can see how I am helping them every day. We are one big happy family."

Looking back at her life, Runge says that she owes her success to her grandmother and Benjamin.

"On the day I was born, I lost a biological mother but gained two mothers who raised me, and I credit as being my 'parents,'" she said. "Both of them are strong-willed women. This is where my drive comes from."

When Rudge walks across the stage at the Savannah ceremony of the Georgia Southern Fall 2019 Commencement, she will have once again beat the odds. In South Africa, nearly half of school-aged children

do not attend educational institutions. Only nine percent of black South African students have received post-secondary education, according to the national statistical service of South Africa.

Rudge plans to continue to work with ESL students and hopes that she can one day become an administrator who develops curriculum and programs for students working to learn English.

“Between my mom and Doreen, they gave me the right tools and guidance to succeed,” Rudge said. “The biggest changes and challenges in my life have enhanced my development, and I plan to continue to learn more and challenge myself.”

Posted in [Alumni Highlights](#), [Student Highlights](#)

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## [Students exchange experiences with the University of South Bohemia](#)

December 10, 2019



Two students from the University of South Bohemia (USB) in České Budějovice, Czech Republic, visited Georgia Southern University for five weeks this fall as a part of a long-standing international collaboration between the two universities.

USB's first interest in Georgia Southern was its tick collection, however, the two institutions have continued relationships throughout the years in various capacities.

*University of South Bohemia graduate students Tomas Hermann and David Marko are pictured on left with current graduate students Taryn Williams and Mary Hart at a Georgia Southern football game.*

Within the last year, the College of Education (COE) has sent seven representatives to visit the USB campus during three different visits thanks to Erasmus+ grants, which allows European countries to work with western professionals for faculty and professional development for all participants.

The visit of two students from the USB was the first of what both universities hope will be a continued experience. Tomas Hermann and David Marko, physical education and sports graduate students at USB, came to Georgia Southern during the months of August and September to explore the health and physical education program offered at the university.

Marko explained that there were several differences they noted right away including the length and curriculum focus of the programs. At USB, undergraduate studies are completed in three years, and the physical education and sport graduate program takes two years, focusing on sports education.

“We wanted to see if there was any difference of how you prepare physical education teachers,” Marko said. “What we learned is to try to focus more on our teaching skills and collect more data on student progress.”

“Your program focuses on how to be a good teacher,” Hermann added. “We [at USB] focus on how to be good at sports.”

To demonstrate the level of sports education that USB physical education and sports students receive, Marko and Hermann shared that their program requires them to pass instructor certificates through coursework that includes cross country skiing, cycling, windsurfing, canoeing, kayaking and snowboarding.

Marko and Hermann also experienced an unfortunate consequence of coastal life as Hurricane Dorian interrupted their visit in early September. However, both students said they still enjoyed their time in Savannah and Statesboro, and would love to visit again.

“We really liked both campuses and the spirit at your university could be felt,” Marko said. “We would love to see Czech people be proud of their universities like you all are.”

Discussions to expand the partnership with USB are in the works with a proposed pilot of an International Study Opportunity (ISO) hosted for the first time in the Czech Republic during spring break of 2020. As a part of the TCLD 4231: Cultural Diversity course, a required class for many undergraduate education majors at Georgia Southern, College of Education’s Deborah Thomas, Ph.D., associate dean for curriculum, instruction and initial educator preparation would like to see students have the opportunity to travel to USB and receive a different cultural view from attending classes, presentations and visiting schools in the České Budějovice area.

“We are collaborating with our colleagues at USB to provide opportunities for our candidates to interact with USB teacher candidates who are learning to teach English,” Thomas explained. “They will also visit classrooms where students are learning English.”

With Czech being the primary language of the Czech Republic, students will find that English is not as commonly spoken in the areas outside of the university campus.

“This will provide a broader cultural view, as they will experience what their students feel like when they don’t speak the primary language of those around them in a culture that is also different,” Thomas said. “For many of our students this will be the first time they have had this experience, and it will make them stronger teachers who consider culturally and linguistically diverse students in their instruction preparation and delivery.”

For more information on the College of Education's International Study Opportunity, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/student-teaching/iso/>.

Posted in [COE Events](#)

Tags: [International Study Opportunity](#), [University of South Bohemia](#)

## [Georgia Southern education professor gives keynote in Nigeria](#)

December 10, 2019

Georgia Southern University Professor and Goizueta Distinguished Chair of Education Alejandro J. Gallard, Ph.D., was a keynote speaker during the second annual Intellectual Fiesta on Africa's Development, held in September in Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Hosted by the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPL), the Intellectual Fiesta focused on the theme of "Emerging Developments in Europe and North America: Lessons for Human Security in Africa." Organizers for the event included the Centre for Human Security and Dialogue (CHSD) in collaboration with the Institute for African Culture and International Understanding (IACIU) and the Africa Progress Group (APG) — all of which are supportive academic pillars of the OOPL.

During his keynote address, Gallard identified five overlapping and emerging themes in the United States, including: education, immigration, technology and trade, politics, and healthcare. For his address, Gallard focused on education, immigration as well as technology and trade and of how they intersect contextually.

"We live in a world of well-intentioned leaders whose desire is to see their respective countries and citizens grow," Gallard said.

"Unfortunately, ideas and efforts inevitably become overwhelmed by explicit and discrete positional inter- and intrasection of contextual mitigating factors. Applying best practices without considering the influence of contextual mitigating factors, such as the absence of a sense of ownership of the earth by a nation's citizens, will only result in a superficial change to policies that advocate environmental stewardship."



*Alejandro Gallard, Ph.D.*

Gallard also spoke to his experiences in education and immigration, explaining that education is often defined and driven by political bureaucracy rather than the needs of today's and tomorrow's youth.

"I suspect that this is not particular to the United States and indeed is a world-wide phenomenon," he said. "The function of education should be, and must be, for all students who, in turn, are able to see that they have a productive place for them tomorrow in society. By productive place I mean social spaces that dignify and not humiliate an individual, that promote the welfare of an individual, and that promote the value of individual social justice. Specifically, human capital should not be to solely advance decreasing the hiring cost of the private sector, nor to only increase an individual's productivity potential but should be understood through the lens of today's youth developing skills to occupy a self-respecting space in the society they inherit."

Gallard recognized, however, efforts being made in the state of Georgia that could be commended and serve as an example of how political policies can help to achieve educational goals.

"It is imperative to create a function of education that is an alliance between the private, public and education sectors," Gallard said. "In the state of Georgia, the state's political leaders led by Governor Brian Kemp have begun to understand that the economic development of Georgia is not solely dependent on attracting investors or that it is acontextual. They realize that the quality of in-state human capital is critical to attract and sustain short and long-term investments. As such, the Governor has prioritized the development of good quality teachers, and universities with teacher education programs have increased their efforts in assisting in-service teachers improve their practice which also stresses the importance of interinstitutional cooperation."

Additionally, Gallard defined a key mitigating factor in the United States as manipulating immigration policy due to the country's tendency to fear "otherness."

"There can be no protection and promotion of tomorrow as well as the diversity of cultural expressions as long as otherness is the motivating force for the exclusion of many individuals and their full participation in the world," he said.

Gallard was invited to APG upon formation in 2018 by the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo as a partner for his expertise in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

The APG is slated to meet again in March 2020 to celebrate President Obasanjo's birthday. Former President George W. Bush and other dignitaries will be in attendance.

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