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Visiting scholar from China spends longer than expected at Georgia Southern, returns home with wealth of knowledge for students with disabilities

November 11, 2020



Xiaoying Jiang, Ph.D.

In March 2019, Georgia Southern University's College of Education (COE) welcomed a visiting scholar from Southwest University in Chongqing, China. Xiaoying Jiang, Ph.D., an associate professor of special education, partnered with COE's Kymberly Harris, Ph.D., associate professor of special education, to examine educational methodology using children's literature and making those practices accessible to students with disabilities.

While at Georgia Southern, Jiang collaborated in education courses including classroom management, social studies education and reading education. She also visited COE senior special education majors working within regional school placements while completing their internships as teacher candidates. Collaborations were hosted by Harris, special education instructor Courtney Toledo and reading faculty members Sally Brown, Ph.D., and Elizabeth

Prosser, Ph.D.

Jiang's intentions were to study at Georgia Southern for a year and return home to begin using new found practices and research collaborations. However, as the COVID-19 outbreak accelerated by March, Jiang realized she nor her son Leo, who had traveled with her, were going to get to go home as planned.

"I was supposed to return to China at the end of March, but the Chinese government issued a flight restriction policy, and for a long time, I couldn't get a flight back to China," she said.

Over the next six months, Jiang purchased several tickets to fly home, only to receive cancellations every time. Chinese officials announced in September that Jiang could travel home.

After reuniting with her family, Jiang is again focused on her students and plans to continue collaborations with her colleagues at Georgia Southern.

"I have already shared teaching strategies for reading in special education classes in the U.S. with teachers from Beijing," said Jiang. "There are so many things we can learn from reading education at Georgia Southern. I will also work hard with teachers to make a difference for children with special needs."

Harris said that she and Jiang also plan to work on publishing research together.

“This partnership continues to support our longstanding relationship with various universities in China,” said Harris. “An invitation to return to China has been extended to me again for Summer 2021, when Jiang’s university is sponsoring a conference and teaching opportunity for students with disabilities.”

Posted in [Faculty Highlights](#)

Tags: [Courtney Toledo](#), [Elizabeth Prosser](#), [Kymerly Harris](#), [Reading Education](#), [Sally Brown](#), [Special Education](#), [Xiaoying Jiang](#)

[Georgia Southern alumna receives tops honors in state for English Language teachers](#)

November 11, 2020



Claudia Martinez, Ed.D.

Georgia Southern University Double Eagle Claudia Martinez ('13, '16) was recently named the 2020 Teacher of the Year by the Georgia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). As a former English as a Second Language (ESOL) student, Martinez said the award is invaluable.

“This award means so much to me — as a first-generation college student, a woman of color, a previous migrant and an ESOL student,” said Martinez. “It made me reflect on all of the struggles and hardships that I faced and overcame. It encouraged me to keep working hard to make a difference in my community.”

Born in Tamaulipas, Mexico, Martinez was raised in Claxton, Georgia. She received legal residency at age eight but struggled at first to acclimate to an environment that had only a “handful of Spanish-speaking students.” She continued to work hard, and thanks to the motivation of teachers and family, she became the first in her family to graduate from college.

Martinez earned both a bachelor’s and master’s degree in elementary education at Georgia Southern while working at her hometown elementary school, giving back to the community that helped her. Since 2008, Martinez has worked with migrant students at Claxton Elementary, earning a full-time teaching position in 2014. Today she serves as the school’s ESOL teacher.

“I choose to work with ESOL students because I have experienced the English Language Learner (ELL) struggle,” Martinez said. “I know how it feels to come to a new country and having to learn a new language, culture and having to reconceptualize my identity. As an ESOL teacher, one of my goals is to help advocate for my students and help facilitate their academic success and to encourage post-secondary education.”

Martinez was nominated for the award by former teachers, colleagues and Georgia Southern faculty members, all of whom, she said, were instrumental in helping her achieve her goals.

“They helped ignite a passion for culture and linguistic teaching,” said Martinez. “These people believed in me when I did not believe in myself.”

Martinez’s passion for helping ELL students and her desire to grow in her practice led her to pursue an Ed.D. in curriculum studies at Georgia Southern. Recently, she passed her final dissertation defense and will graduate with her doctorate in December.

While Martinez is not certain what exactly is in store for her next, she does know she plans to continue to serve ELL students.

“I declare that my journey is just beginning and that I will be victorious in everything that comes my way,” she said. “I hope that I can acquire a position in which I can continue to help Latinx students to be academically successful and help facilitate post-secondary education.”

All K-12 teachers working with ESOL students in the state of Georgia for at least two years are eligible for the GATESOL Teacher of the Year Award. Awarded annually, GATESOL developed the award to recognize teachers dedicated to working with ELL students and their commitment to improving the practice of teaching students with diverse needs.

As the 2020 recipient, Martinez receives a complimentary one-year membership to GATESOL and will be recognized at the annual Georgia TESOL Conference in November.

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

Tags: [Claudia Martinez](#), [Ed.D. Curriculum Studies](#), [Elementary Education](#), [ESOL](#)

Georgia Southern's inclusive post-secondary education program receives scholarship money thanks to grant written by special education faculty member

November 11, 2020



Georgia Southern University Assistant Professor of Special Education Stephanie Devine was recently awarded a \$32,250 grant from the Georgia Council for Developmental Disabilities (GCDD). Devine, who also serves as the executive director of the College of Education's [EAGLE Academy](#), was excited to announce that the funds would benefit the Academy and more specifically to assist future students with scholarship opportunities.

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Equal Access for Gainful Learning and Employment (EAGLE) Academy offers students with mild intellectual disabilities the opportunity to attend Georgia Southern and earn a certificate of completion based on individual career interests. The non-degree program includes courses and internships that will enhance their

life skills as well as further their career aspirations.

"Thanks to this grant, we were able to distribute \$15,000 in financial assistance to our current students this semester, and we will distribute an additional \$15,000 in Spring 2021," said Devine.

As a Comprehensive Transition Program, students in EAGLE Academy can apply for Federal Financial Aid in the form of Pell Grants. These do help supplement the costs of attending the University, but they are generally small in nature.

"Students in EAGLE Academy do not have access to federal student loans or other university scholarships at this time," said Devine. "Students attend using a variety of funding sources. They can receive some support from Vocational Rehabilitation if they open a case and are approved to attend by that agency. Historically, this funding has been pretty substantial, but recently Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) has made some changes to their funding process for students in Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs like EAGLE Academy. This has led to significantly less funding provided by GVRA."

For students with disabilities looking to advance their education and skills, the GCDD grant will provide an opportunity for them to become a part of the Eagle Nation.

"We are at a critical point for the program," said Devine. "Since EAGLE Academy students pay all the same tuition, room and board, and fees associated with full-time undergraduate attendance, as well as an EAGLE

Academy program fee—the only way we can pay for staff and the program in general—the cost is pretty significant.”

While this grant will assist current students for the next year, Devine said it is important to find additional support to ensure all students who would like to attend can be a part of the Academy at Georgia Southern.

“We have a Foundation account that is set up to help provide student scholarships to the program that we definitely need more donations toward. We want EAGLE Academy to be accessible to ALL students who want to attend!”

Donations to support EAGLE Academy can be made by visiting the University’s [giving portal](#) and designating the donation to “EAGLE Academy.”



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