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Elementary education students join second grade class to meet creator of Pete the Cat

March 9, 2021



James Dean shown discussing the origins of “Pete the Cat” on Zoom with second grade class

James Dean, creator and illustrator of the children’s book character Pete the Cat, visited College of Education (COE) alumna Whitley “Whit” King’s (’15) online second grade class at Sally D. Meadows Elementary School in Vidalia, Georgia, via Google Meet on Feb. 26.

King reached out to former mentor Kathleen Crawford, Ed.D., assistant professor of elementary literacy education, to invite her and a select group of students to join the special event. Crawford extended an open invitation to her ELEM 3233: Elementary Language Arts Methods classes and several teacher candidates joined King’s second graders to meet Dean.

“During the virtual class, King’s second graders shared letters they wrote to Mr. Dean and asked questions,” said Crawford. “This experience was an ideal representation of Writing about Reading, a literacy practice coined by Fountas & Pinnell (2017) where teachers have students expand and share their thinking about texts through thoughtful conversation, writing and drawing. My elementary education teacher candidates have been learning about this practice in our language arts methods class this semester and, through this experience, were able to see this literacy strategy in practice with children.

“It was so much fun listening to what students had written for James Dean but even better to have him respond personally to each child,” said junior elementary education major Grace Jenkins. “One thing Georgia Southern University College of Education is teaching me is to be personal with students. This part of the Google Meet was so personal to the students and exemplified how much it engages student learning when a teacher goes the extra mile for their

students. I was grateful to be invited to this Google Meet because I learned so much about ways to be a great teacher and how to engage my students in the future.”

Dean spent nearly an hour sharing how Pete the Cat was brought to life, transforming from a realistic depiction of one of his own cats into a blue minimalist representation of what we see featured in Dean’s books today.

He also held a how-to session on drawing Pete. Following, the students shared their work and prompted a creative session in which students and Dean shared ideas for new adventures for Pete the Cat.



James Dean (left) and Whitley King

“You may see some of your ideas come to life,”

Dean told the class. “You have such good ideas (and are) such talented writers!”

Dean ended the meeting with a top-secret sneak peek at a future Pete the Cat book cover.

“It was so exciting to engage in this virtual meeting with Mr. Dean, my current students, my former student and her second graders,” said Crawford. “I am so proud of the teacher Whit has become, and her success is evident in the meaningful experiences she plans for her students. She served as an outstanding model for my current ELA students, and I am confident they learned an incredible amount from this experience. Whit is the type of teacher that we, as faculty, strive to develop in our elementary program, and I look forward to being able to follow her teaching journey.”

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

Tags: [Elementary Education](#), [Grace Jenkins](#), [Kitty Crawford](#), [Whitley King](#)

Scholarship honoring Bonds family announced for students pursuing degree in education

March 9, 2021



Dr. Charles and Dr. Lella Bonds

The Dr. Charles and Dr. Lella Bonds Scholarship, created in honor of two exceptional Georgia Southern University alumni and former members of the College of Education (COE), is available to students pursuing degrees in education.

“What distinguishes a college beyond the caliber of the faculty who teach the courses and the rigor of the curriculum are its alumni,” said COE Interim Dean Amy Heaston, Ed.D. “Dr. Charles and Dr. Lella Bonds had extraordinary careers serving students from elementary schoolers to college students.”

Charles, a two-time graduate of the COE in reading education, was the first Black faculty member at Georgia Southern when he joined the University in 1972 as an instructor for the Right to Read program. He left to pursue his doctorate and returned to Georgia Southern to teach graduate-level reading education courses.

Affectionately known by his students as the Reading Professor, Charles was also the first Black faculty member to earn tenure at Georgia Southern and retired with Emeritus distinction in 1996. He also served on the Bulloch County Board of Education for 16 years.

Lella earned an Education Specialist in Early Childhood Education degree at Georgia Southern and served as a demonstration teacher at the University’s Marvin Pittman Laboratory School where student teachers interned at the on-site lab school. She served as a mentor for early childhood pre-service teachers while also educating students of Bulloch County.

During their time as faculty members at the University, the Bonds served as advisors to student organizations including the Black Student Alliance and Greek chapters for minority students. They also wrote books and researched and documented historical aspects of Bulloch County.

Today, they continue to serve the community's youth through their efforts with local organizations including the Original First African Baptist Church.

In honor of their contributions, members of the COE and the Bulloch County community donated funds to endow an undergraduate education scholarship in their name.

"They have given and continue to give their time freely to volunteer efforts that strengthen our dynamic and diverse society," said Heaston. "It is an honor to be a part of the efforts to bring a lasting legacy to this education duo that will serve to provide for students who would like to walk the very same path the Bonds did years ago."

The Dr. Charles and Dr. Lella Bonds Scholarship is accepting applications at this time via the MyScholarships portal accessible from [My.GeorgiaSouthern.edu](https://www.gasou.edu/my-scholarships).

Posted in [Alumni Highlights](#), [Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#), [Faculty Highlights](#)

Georgia Southern named No. 2 on master's in higher education administration rankings

March 9, 2021

Georgia Southern University's M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration was ranked No. 2 in the country by [BestValueSchools.org](https://www.bestvalueschools.org), an organization that examines online educational opportunities and resources for potential students.

Rankings were determined by examining yearly tuition rates, graduation rates, faculty experience, student feedback, student resources, job placement and total enrollment.

"To be ranked as No. 2 on this list of excellent schools from around the country is an honor," said Daniel Calhoun, Ph.D., Higher Education Administration Program director. "More importantly, being recognized as a best value institution is important when considering graduate programs and student loans. Knowing that a quality program exists at a reasonable cost could be a deciding factor for potential students who may be facing economic challenges, and our dedicated faculty are ready to serve them should they make that decision."

The master's in higher education administration at Georgia Southern is a 36 credit-hour program that includes coursework and practicum experience in the higher education setting. The hybrid program offers online classes and in-person experiences to meet the needs of diverse learners. With asynchronous online courses, the program is flexible and can be completed on either a full-

time or part-time basis. Admission to the M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration program is accepted year-round.

For more information, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/edld/higher-education/>.

Posted in [Degree Programs](#)

Tags: [Daniel Calhoun](#), [Higher Education Administration](#)

Three members of the COE community honored at Black Women Empowerment celebration

March 9, 2021



L-r: Kayla Griffin, Chelda Smith, Ph.D., Talmeshia Parker, Laquandra Bundrage, Tobe Frierson

On Feb. 27, five women were honored at Georgia Southern University’s 3rd Annual “Shine, Black Girl, Shine” Black Women Empowerment Awards. Three of the awardees are representative of the College of Education (COE).

Laquandra Bundrage, current education major; Talmeshia Parker, education alumna; and Chelda Smith, Ph.D., a COE faculty member, were honored at the event alongside Kayla Griffin and Tobe Frierson.



Bundrage is a graduating senior elementary education major on the Armstrong Campus at Georgia Southern. Originally from Warrenton, Ga., Bundrage wanted to go to a “small college to feel right at home.” She is an active student on the Armstrong Campus, serving as the chapter president for the Iota Tau Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., and the president of the Multicultural Greek Council. Bundrage also serves as the vice president of a new organization on campus, Sisters with Purpose and is employed with the Academic Success Center as a peer mentor. After graduating in May, she plans to stay in Savannah and work in the public school system.

“I’ve wanted to be a teacher ever since I was in elementary school,” said Bundrage. “I love seeing children grow academically and socially. I also want to be a voice for students who may not have an advocate of their own.”

Bundrage plans to return to Georgia Southern and pursue a graduate degree in school psychology.



Parker is a 9th grade literature and composition teacher at her high school alma mater—Statesboro High. She completed a bachelor’s in English from Valdosta State University and traveled to Ulsan, South Korea where she worked as a native English teacher for two years under the Ulsan Ministry of Education. When she returned to Statesboro, she began working at Langston Chapel Middle School (LCMS) as an 8th grade English teacher. At LCMS, Parker served as the English Department Chair, cheerleading coach, leadership team member and honors committee member. In 2016, Parker graduated from the Georgia Southern with a master’s in secondary education (concentration English) and was named LCMS’ Teacher of Year. In 2017, Georgia Southern in conjunction with Synovus Bank awarded Parker the “Teacher of the Game” as a part of the #HeresToTeachers campaign during the Georgia Southern Eagles football game on Nov. 4.



Smith is an associate professor of elementary education at Georgia Southern where she has been a part of the College of Education since 2014. Smith was instrumental in co-designing the Master of Arts in Teaching Elementary Education degree to provide a fully online delivery format with a consistent theme of cultures and communities, and she serves as the director of the degree program. Smith's research interests and scholarship center culturally relevant pedagogy including the intersections of race, culture and gender as well as preparation of teacher candidates for diverse student populations. Smith was also recently named the first-ever recipient of the COE's Commitment to Diversity Award.

Hosted by the University's Office of Multicultural Affairs, the Black Women Empowerment Awards program highlights the positive contributions of black women at Georgia Southern. Honorees include students, alumni, faculty and staff. Criteria for selection include philanthropy and community service mentoring,

academic excellence, and diversity, inclusion and fairness efforts at the University. Each year, the awards ceremony includes performance and art in celebration of the black culture and community at Georgia Southern.

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

Tags: [Chelda Smith](#), [Laquandra Bundrage](#), [Talmeshia Parker](#)

[Georgia Southern College of Education, Chatham County public school system partnership earns state honor](#)

March 9, 2021

A strategic partnership between Georgia Southern University's College of Education and the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System (SCCPSS) has earned a top state accolade.

The Georgia Association of School Personnel Administrators (GASPA) annually recognizes successes in state school districts with the Best in Class recognition program. SCCPSS received the 2020 Platinum Award of Excellence in the area of strategic partnerships, documenting its collaboration with the University on the paid residency program and the urban education training initiative.

The Urban Education Endorsement program allows SCCPSS teachers to earn Professional Learning Units (PLUs) instead of graduate course credit.

“Since SCCPSS hires many teachers each year who may not have experience living, working or teaching in urban contexts, this partnership provides an opportunity to develop education strategies and understandings relevant to urban schools,” said Alisa Leckie, Ph.D., assistant dean for partnerships and outreach in Georgia Southern’s COE.

Consisting of three online courses, the Urban Education Endorsement provides exposure to foundational and emergent scholarship in culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies; field experiences engaging with youth and families within urban community contexts; and experiences in designing curriculum for culturally and linguistically diverse learners in urban settings.

The paid residency program began in fall 2020 and provides the opportunity for highly qualified teacher candidates in the final year of their teacher preparation program to be hired by SCCPSS as full-time teachers or teacher residents. The goals of the program are to develop a pipeline of exceptional teachers for the district and enhance teacher retention. The teacher residents earn a salary of \$19,000 and receive benefits and retirement credit while also fulfilling their course requirements at Georgia Southern.

Two teacher residents are working at Pulaski Elementary School and two are working at Hubert Middle School during this pilot year of the program. They each fill a vacant teaching position. A classroom teacher who has demonstrated exemplary performance in teaching and mentoring other teachers has moved out of the classroom at each school and serves as a full-time mentor teacher to the two teacher residents.

“We are proud to be recognized by GASPA for the innovative strategies we have implemented and the partnerships we have strengthened to have the best teachers for our students in SCCPSS,” said Heather Bilton, Ed.D., director of employment for SCCPSS.

Posted in [Community Outreach & Partnership](#)

Tags: [Alisa Leckie](#), [Partnership Council](#), [SCCPSS](#)

Middle grades education students connect with peers across the nation during book study

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Sixteen Georgia Southern University students majoring in middle grades education participated in a book study with fellow middle grades education students from colleges and universities around the country.

Amanda Wall, Ph.D., associate professor of middle grades education, is teaching the MGED 3131: Nature and Curriculum Needs of the Middle Grades Learner course this semester and assigned students to participate in the study hosted by the Collegiate Middle Level Association, an affiliate of the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE).

“These juniors are teacher candidates just starting the middle grades program,” said Wall. “This national book study was a unique opportunity for candidates to gain a substantial introduction to middle-level education and interaction with their peers across the nation.”

Students read the AMLE’s program guide, “The Successful Middle School: This We Believe,” and met for five sessions to discuss topics from the book with AMLE faculty and fellow students.

“This assignment was different from a normal class assignment,” said Morgan Spires, junior in the middle grades education program. “I interacted with students from across the nation and learned from varied perspectives.”

Approximately 60 students from teacher preparation programs in numerous states are participating in the study.

“This was beneficial to our learning because we accumulated knowledge from different perspectives,” said Nadia Lewis, middle grades education junior. “Our groups changed weekly, so we continued our learning with different individuals. I found it interesting to learn the way that everyone thinks about different things.”

Students will receive a Successful Middle School Ready credential from AMLE for completing the study.

“I enjoyed this assignment,” added Spires. “It brought our course textbook to life and broke down the information found within it, while also connecting strategies and practices we can use in the future. It worked to build communication and collaboration skills with others, which is important for teachers.”

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Tags: [Amanda Wall](#), [Middle Grades Education](#), [Morgan Spires](#), [Nadia Lewis](#)