

Newsroom

September 5, 2012

Georgia Southern University

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Georgia Southern University

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GEORGIA SOUTHERN

Georgia Southern University has been named the recipient of an Innovation Fund Grant by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal. The science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) grant, which is estimated at approximately \$700,000 during two years, will fund a unique partnership between the University, seven area research institutes and six school districts covering 27 counties in southern Georgia.

Georgia Southern will utilize the grant to fund the partnership known as "Real STEM." The project, which will be run through the University's new Institute for Interdisciplinary STEM Education, will develop hands-on STEM learning modules related to the environmental concerns of Georgia's coastal region. This is the first Innovation Fund Grant that has been awarded to the University.

The Real STEM service region of the lower coastal plain is a rural geographic region which includes low social economic status counties in southeast Georgia with a high number of minorities. The population served includes 44 high schools, of which 26 are classified as "needs improvement" by the Georgia Department of Education's 2011 Adequate Yearly Progress Detailed School Reports.

The partnership will develop problem-based modules for high school career pathways courses mandated by State House Bill 186. The 150 students in the first year of the project and 300 in the second year will apply STEM to real-world, place-based problems arising from research conducted on the coastal plain. The students will be mentored by scientists and taught by teachers working in professional learning communities in collaboration with scientists.

As part of the grant, the team will work with research partners at Georgia Southern, the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography, the UGA Marine Institute at Sapelo Island, Gray's Reef Marine Sanctuary, Marine Education Center and Aquarium, Southeastern Natural Sciences Academy and the Ossabaw Island Education Alliance. The team will also work with the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, the team will work with six school districts including Bulloch County, Burke County, Camden County, Jenkins County, Treutlen County and Ware County.

"Our goal is to reignite the interest of students in science, technology, engineering and math by engaging them in applied learning through real-world challenges of environment and energy that are impacting their local communities," said Robert Mayes, Ph.D., director of the Interdisciplinary Stem Institute at Georgia Southern. "Ultimately, we hope to improve STEM achievement in Georgia and encourage students to pursue careers in STEM."

About the Race to the Top Innovation Fund Grant

On Sept. 4, 2012, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal announced nine winners of Innovation Fund grants, a \$19.4 million competitive grant program created through Georgia's Race to the Top (RT3) plan. Through the Innovation Fund, the state awards grants to partnerships between local education authorities or charter schools, institutions of higher education, businesses and nonprofit organizations that develop or implement innovative and high-impact programs aimed at producing positive outcomes for students.

Administered by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), the Innovation Fund provides competitive grants for proposals that creatively leverage members' financial, human and intellectual resources to address one or more of the following priorities:

- Raising student achievement through the development and delivery of applied learning opportunities and experiences directly tied to a subject matter, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Raising teacher effectiveness through support for innovative induction programs to bridge the gap between pre-service and career teaching, focusing on providing structured and intensive support to new teachers and leaders.
- Increasing the pipeline of effective educators by developing local capacity through Grow Your Own Teacher programs in rural regions to increase the workforce, especially in high-need subject areas.
- Developing or expanding charter schools with special characteristics and that leverage nontraditional partnerships with industry partners and/or post-secondary institutions throughout the state to provide students with unique learning opportunities.

The grant is the latest for the growing University who has continued to grow its focus on STEM education. In August, Georgia Southern announced the creation of the Institute for Interdisciplinary STEM Education (www.georgiasouthern.edu/STEM), one of the first-of-its-kind in the country. The goal of the Institute is to not only inspire Georgia's best and brightest K-12 students to pursue STEM careers, but to create an environment where Georgia citizens are more STEM literate and can make informed decisions about complex issues. The Institute is already working to create a broad range of partnerships across academia, business, education and research centers in southeast Georgia.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University founded in 1906, offers more than 120 degree programs serving more than 20,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. In 2012, the University was named one of the Top 10 most popular universities in the country by *U.S. News & World Report* and is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars. Georgia Southern is recognized for its student-centered approach to education.

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