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Georgia Southern graduate student turns art into therapy for teachers, receives 2019 national Emerging Professional Development Leadership Award

MARCH 13, 2019

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At the 2019 National Association of Professional Development Schools (PDS) Conference (l-r): Richmond Hill High School (RHHS) Assistant Principal Meredith Tanner; RHHS Counseling Department Director Laine Lynch; Georgia Southern University graduate student Nicholas Wozniak, who holds the Emerging Professional Development Leadership Award; College of Education professor and PDS coordinator Ellen Whitford, Ed.D; and COE Associate Dean Cynthia Bolton-Gary, Ph.D.

Georgia Southern University College of Education graduate student Nick Wozniak, enrolled in the M.Ed. Counselor Education program, recently won the Emerging Professional Development Leadership Award at the 2019 National Association of Professional Development Schools Conference. The award recognized his work with the creation and implementation of an expressive arts workshop for Richmond Hill High School (RHHS) teachers.

With more than 20 years experience as an art educator, Wozniak is studying to become a school counselor. The change in direction largely stems from his time as a teacher in Sarasota, Florida, during the 2018 Parkland High School shooting. His emotions “bubbled over,” leaving him feeling helpless for his students who lost friends during the shooting. This, and years of watching students struggle with mental illness in his classroom, encouraged him to do more.

“I have always been interested in the power of art and its creative and healing abilities,” Wozniak said. “So I started looking at counseling programs all over the country.”

Returning to his roots, Wozniak moved back to Savannah, Georgia, where he had previously earned a BFA in photography from the Savannah College of Art and Design

(SCAD). After attending SCAD, Wozniak enrolled at the Maryland Institute College of Art and earned a master’s in art education. Combining his art background and counseling education, Wozniak hopes to integrate expressive art into his therapy practices.

As a graduate assistant with the Department of Middle Grades and Secondary Education, Wozniak collaborates with RHHS as part of a professional development school partnership with Georgia Southern’s College of Education. While working with RHHS, Wozniak realized a need for emotional support of the teachers.

“We know mental health issues are being addressed for students, but the element that isn’t being addressed is the mental health of the teachers,” he said. “Teachers bear the weight of their own stress as well as that of their

students, yet we aren't giving them enough support."

Wozniak wanted to do something to change that. With the support of the RHHS administration, he prepared a 10-session workshop utilizing the expressive arts to provide support to teachers. On Thursdays after school, the art room is opened up for the high school's faculty to come create 2D and 3D artwork for an hour followed by a time to share and debrief, which Wozniak said has been powerful for those involved.

"The teachers are very appreciative of my time and thankful to use expressive art to create discussions and share their feelings," he said. "I want to do all I can to help support the educators who are teaching our future leaders. I am hopeful that in the end these teachers will be a support system for each other."

Sessions include activities such as creating artwork guided by emotions, personal history or life events. Wozniak explained that in a session titled, "Storms," he asked teachers to create a bubble map of their current life stressors and use oil pastels to turn their stressors into colors and shapes.

"In a small way, I feel like I am making a difference for these teachers," Wozniak said.

For more information about the counselor education program, visit <https://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/coun/programs/>.

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving nearly 26,500 students through nine colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction. A leader in higher education in southeast Georgia, the University provides a diverse student population with expert faculty, world-class scholarship and hands-on learning opportunities. Georgia Southern creates lifelong learners who serve as responsible scholars, leaders and stewards in their communities. Visit GeorgiaSouthern.edu.

Georgia Southern to host free screening of “The School in the Cloud,” Q&A with area experts to follow

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On Wednesday, March 27, Georgia Southern University College of Education (COE) will host a screening of “The School in the Cloud,” a film that explores the potential of self-organized learning. The screening, which is free and open to the public, will begin at 6 p.m. in the Ogeechee Theatre, located in the Student Union on the Armstrong Campus.

The documentary follows a three-year experiment conducted by Sugata Mitra, a professor of educational technology in England, in which unmanned internet kiosks were installed in varying locations from remote villages in West Bengal to a school in northeast England. Mitra’s work demonstrates and examines the ability of children to self-organize their learning.

Mitra’s project began in 1999 with small-scale experiments to garner public attention. His research continued to show that groups of students, if given access to the internet, can learn almost anything on their own. Mitra’s efforts earned him the first-ever \$1 million TED Prize award, which he used to help create the first School in the Cloud lab, where students, regardless of socioeconomic status, could engage and connect with information and mentors online. Located in Killingsworth, England, the lab opened its doors in December 2013, and now seven additional labs have since been pioneered all over the world.

According to Mitra, a Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE) can exist anywhere there is a device with access to the internet and students ready to learn. Through his research, the School in the Cloud website now provides materials and toolkits to assist people across the world with creating a SOLE and running SOLE sessions.

Following the screening, the COE will host a Q & A session with local professionals in the fields of education, instructional technology and child psychology.

This screening is a part of the “Education Exposed Film Series” that is taking place on the Armstrong Campus throughout the Spring 2019 semester. The series is being offered at no charge to students or the community as a result of a Campus Life Enrichment Committee grant written and received by COE faculty members Regina Rahimi, Ed.D., Kathleen Burke-Fabrikant, Ed.D., and David Owens, Ph.D.

The remaining screening in the series will be “Elementary Genocide” on April 16.

For more information on “The School in the Cloud,” visit: www.theschoolinthecloud.org.

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