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Georgia Southern Department of Communication Arts assistant professor selected as fellow for Southern Producers Lab

April 27, 2020



Abbey Hoekzema

Abbey Hoekzema, Georgia Southern assistant professor of multimedia film and production, was one of 10 fellows selected for the 2020 Southern Producers Lab.

Produced and presented by the New Orleans Film Society, the program is designed to bring new producers from around the South together for intensive workshops, discussion panels, mentoring sessions and community building. They meet with industry leaders and established producers to discuss funding and finance, story development, festival strategy and other aspects of producing.

“The program allows us to get critical feedback on our specific films as we continue to develop the projects,” said Hoekzema.

Hoekzema is a documentary producer and the director of DOC Savannah, which is an organization that serves nonfiction filmmakers and the communities of the coastal empire and the low country in Georgia and South Carolina through documentary film.

This year, due to COVID-19, the first meeting for Southern Producers Lab was a virtual gathering held mid-April.

“In the age of COVID, having a support network like this is important for navigating uncharted waters,” said Hoekzema. “Every project in the lab has been affected by current events and we can talk with each other about challenges we’re facing with our work.”

Selected fellows will receive travel support, for planned trips to New Orleans and New York. They also receive a \$2,000 project support grant. The other fellows are from all across the southern United States, from Texas to Kentucky.

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April 27, 2020



Tendai Haggins with Georgia Southern Health and Physical Education Lecturer Kellie Penix, Ed.D.

At 16 years old, Tendai Haggins ('93) lost his 36-year-old mother, who had long put her health issues to the side as she took care of her family.

From then on, health and physical fitness became an integral part of Haggins' life in Portal, Georgia, a small town located in northwest Bulloch County. In high school, he played any sport he could, including baseball, basketball, football and track.

“It not only kept me in good shape, it kept me busy and out of trouble,” said Haggins. “I had so much energy and always wanted to be busy.”

Initially, Haggins didn't consider going to college. However, his teachers and coaches challenged him to think otherwise.

He watched them in their jobs, noting that they had fun and got paid to do it. Haggins thought, "I can do that."

After applying for and earning numerous college scholarships, Haggins chose Georgia Southern University to pursue a degree in health and physical education.

"I was at home at Georgia Southern," he said.

Haggins walked onto the University's baseball team where he played one season before stepping down to focus on grades and finances for college. When he successfully completed his teaching degree, Haggins returned to Portal to do what he always wanted to do — teach and inspire kids to be healthy and reach their fitness goals.

"I love seeing these kids doing something they never thought they could do," said Haggins. "I want them to believe in themselves."

For students who don't want to tackle sports and fitness, Haggins encourages them to be active by participating in class.

"I workout with them, play with them," he said. "They keep me young."

Haggins also works with students on their personal goals.

"If it's about losing weight or gaining muscle or just living a more healthy lifestyle, we work on that together," said Haggins.

Since schools across the country have moved to virtual platforms for the remainder of the K-12 school year, Haggins said it is more important than ever to keep students engaged, active and thinking about nutrition.

"I post challenges for them, and I am still getting calls and texts from students about their fitness goals," he said. "I have explained to them that 30 minutes a day will make a big difference, and I am encouraging them to challenge their family members to do the exercises with them. When we return to school, we will be accountable for this time. We have to keep our goals in mind and keep working toward them."

Haggins also encourages students to keep a food journal. Looking at the research and science of food, they log how they are feeling, correlating their energy levels and emotions with the food they eat.

"It's easier if you can make a family commitment," said Haggins. "Cook healthier meals and take walks together, especially during this time. I had a mom approach me in the grocery store who jokingly told me that she now has to get in shape because of me. Her daughter wants her to complete the challenges with her. That's what it is all about."

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