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# Georgia Southern alumna harnesses the power of children's literature in her college classrooms

September 22, 2020



For children's literature expert and educator Katy Basch ('17), picture books transcend elementary classrooms, and have found a home in her college classroom.

"Children's literature is a powerful tool," said Basch. "You can pull from the wealth of knowledge in books. Everything you need to teach has a correlating book."

Basch has taught literacy education to college students for 18 years. Prior to that, she began her teaching career in a second grade classroom.

"I loved delivering that instruction to my second graders and now sharing that passion and knowledge with college students," she said.

In 2015, Basch pursued an Ed.S. in reading education from Georgia Southern University that allowed her to continue to work with students while enriching her classroom approach and deepening her theoretical knowledge.

"The reading education program is practice-based," said Basch. "And it provided me with great tools and models for creating more engaging learning experiences for my students."

A senior lecturer at Kennesaw State University (KSU), Basch searched for an effective way to engage her students and instill best practices for literacy education. She has taught content literacy courses for all age groups, but her area of focus is ages 3 to 5. It occurred to her that perhaps she could incorporate literature for elementary age students into her college classroom setting for demonstrative learning. She was pleasantly surprised with the results.

"When you select a text to study, that text can align to situational context," she explained. "For example, if your student needs help with a certain strategy, you can find children's literature that will support your instruction to teach that strategy. I read children's books to the class, and we work through the strategies as though they are the elementary students. This is practical experience."

When Basch began this practice, she was concerned students may feel like it was silly or childish, but she said it has been well received by all her classes.

As classes shifted to fully online delivery as a result of COVID-19, Basch continued her methodology of reading to her students.

"My classes have been delivered in virtual, synchronous format," she said. "So I still read to them and share my screen and write on it to keep them engaged. They miss the personal touch of in-person classes, and I do too, but we are definitely making it work."

Basch said having completed the fully online specialist reading program at Georgia Southern assisted with her online instruction.

“Validation of practice is good, but this program provided me with some new insights to instruction and technology in both in-person and distance learning,” she said.

While Basch has always thought she would remain at KSU indefinitely, she said this degree has opened her opportunities to do something that would bring her back to the K-12 realm as a reading coach, curriculum specialist or literacy-based position.

“I really enjoy working with university students,” she said. “But I also miss working with young children. It’s nice to know I have options.”

Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers 141 degree programs serving more than 26,000 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](https://GeorgiaSouthern.edu).

## [New master’s program at Georgia Southern inspires alumnus for work, doctoral program](#)

September 22, 2020



Growing up in Douglas, Georgia, Jerry Oliver didn’t know if he’d attend college. However, after high school he became the first in his family to make the leap.

Staying close to home, he completed an associate’s degree in psychology and was hooked on learning. He went on to complete a bachelor’s in psychology from Augusta University and a master’s in higher education administration from Georgia Southern University.

Serving as the student success and learning skills coordinator at Augusta University for the last 6 years, Oliver jumped at the chance to be a part of the Georgia Southern College of Education’s first cohort of students into the newly formed M.Ed. Evaluation, Assessment, Research and Learning (EARL).

“The M.Ed. EARL program was intriguing to me,” he said. “In my current role as a learning skills coordinator and also as the director of the African-American Male Initiative, I saw many opportunities where this program would directly benefit what I am doing on a daily basis.”

Once in the program, Oliver knew he had made the right choice.

“I enjoyed this program so much,” he said. “It was almost an escape for me. There were challenges, but the faculty were particularly great. I cannot say enough about Dr. Zinske. I never even met her in person, and yet she is very approachable and helpful.”

The program has been especially helpful in strengthening his writing and research skills.

“I now have more confidence in my writing ability, and the program taught me everything I needed to know about research — how to read it, understand it and do it,” he said.

With an interest for researching the impact of elementary education for African-American male students, Oliver realized that the M.Ed. EARL program also prepared him for a doctoral program.

“A lot of that thanks to the great faculty and especially Dr. Zinskie,” said Oliver. “She gave us what we needed to succeed, and I put a great deal of stock in her opinion because I have so much respect for her.”

Between Cordelia Zinskie, Ed.D., professor in the Department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading, and Oliver’s parents, he received the encouragement and support to continue his studies and pursue a doctorate degree. Oliver applied to three educational doctorate programs across the country and was accepted to all three. He chose Georgia Southern and began this fall.

“In doing my research on doctoral programs, the Ed.D. programs at Georgia Southern have helped launch the careers of some really great people,” Oliver said.

During his studies in the M.Ed. EARL program, Oliver says he found his purpose.

“I am going to continue my research, and one day I hope to work in policy, as true change cannot happen without policy change.”

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# [Georgia Southern biology professor awarded grant to support minority students](#)

September 22, 2020

Georgia Southern University Professor of Biology J. Checo Colón-Gaud, Ph.D., is part of a team of researchers awarded a \$2 million grant from the National Science Foundation to support training and experiences for underrepresented minority students and early career scientists in the field of freshwater science. Funds for the project called “Emerge” will be distributed over the next five years.



*J. Checo Colón-Gaud*

“Diversity in the scientific workforce is critical to tackling the world’s most pressing challenges, including effective conservation of freshwater resources,” said Colón-Gaud, who is also associate dean of the Jack N. Averitt College of Graduate Studies. “Diversity of freshwater scientists in the U.S. is low in all dimensions, relative to the broader population. This lack of diversity may limit opportunities to engage the general public in equitable strategies to manage freshwater ecosystems.”

Over the course of the five-year project, “Emerge” will deliver more than 700 experiences to minority participants and create a roadmap that institutions and organizations can use to build a more diverse and inclusive STEM workforce. Colón-Gaud said the goal is to provide opportunities to cohorts of about 30 participants each year, which will include undergraduates, graduates and early career professionals.

“Emerge” will connect students and young scientists to experts from the extensive network of professionals that are part of the Society for Freshwater Science (SFS), a professional scientific society with more than 1,800 members. The project will be an extension of Instars, an SFS program that 16 Georgia Southern students have been a part of in the past.

“Universities play a foundational role when training students in STEM areas, but underrepresented minorities still face unique challenges in pursuing STEM careers beyond college,” Colón-Gaud said. “Scientific societies can help fill these STEM training gaps. Societies publish scientific findings, host technical conferences and sustain broad professional networks. Thus, they are central to the collective pace of scientific progress, as well as the success of individual scientists.”

The lead principal investigator for the project is from the University of Georgia (UGA) and the total award of \$2,006,746 will be divided among UGA, Georgia Southern, UC-Berkeley and Virginia Commonwealth University.

Tags: [College of Science and Mathematics](#), [Department of Biology](#)