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Georgia Southern student from Nigeria passionate about community service in new home

October 12, 2020



Tolulope “Tolu” Ojo, a biology graduate student at Georgia Southern University, poses for a photo at a camp she volunteers at. Tolu is hoping to get back to volunteering at the camp after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tolulope “Tolu” Ojo, a biology graduate student at Georgia Southern University, has found her home away from home in Statesboro. Because of her personal belief that community service begins at home, Tolu is a frequent participant in community service events sponsored by the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement (OLCE).

“The Office of Leadership and Community Engagement provides opportunities that address hunger, health, clothing and housing needs,” Tolu said. “I have been to most of these trips, and I am addicted to serving through this medium. I have served alongside other students with similar passions, and I have also interacted with different people from the community and learned so much from these trips.”

Tolu wrote an essay about her community service experience that she sent to OLCE staff members to express her love for volunteering through the office. OLCE Community Engagement Coordinator Jordan Wilburn said the essay was eye opening.

“Tolulope’s essay is heartwarming and offers a new perspective about the importance of community engagement,” Wilburn said. “She has volunteered on dozens of our service trips, if not hundreds, and she is a dedicated servant of this community.”

In the essay, Tolu explained she didn’t realize people in the U.S. often suffered from similar issues as people in her native Nigeria. In Nigeria, she didn’t have structures like OLCE in place for her to give back to her community.

“I always wished I could do something to help those around me in whatever capacity, but I couldn’t contribute much toward these issues back home,” Tolu said. “Coming to Georgia Southern and stumbling upon the opportunities provided by the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement, I felt like Alice in Wonderland.”

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Tolu hasn’t been able to do as much community service, although she still volunteers on the weekends when she can.

“I have really missed these trips,” she said. “Although I still enjoy serving, I miss the interactions and camaraderie with other students on the trips, and I miss going on other trips that have been canceled because of COVID-19. I also volunteer at a summer camp for foster children between the ages of 12 and 15. We couldn’t do camp this year because of COVID-19, which was disappointing.”

Although she doesn’t have a definite plan, Tolu wants to pursue a career in molecular and biological research after she graduates. She said she will use her service experience in her future workplace.

“I am happy that OLCE gives me a medium to explore other areas where I can help people,” Tolu said. “I really can’t say I have a definite plan for the future on how to use these experiences, so for now I intend to show up and do the little I can do to help others wherever I am.”

For more information on OLCE or to sign up for community service, visit <https://students.georgiasouthern.edu/LeadServe/>.

Tags: [COVID-19](#), [Office of Leadership and Community Engagement](#)

Georgia Southern Department of Sociology and Anthropology helps close digital divide in Bulloch County

October 12, 2020



From left to right, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Heidi Altman, Ph.D., and students, Angelique Jennings, Miranda Hazelwood, Mpume Hlophe, Michaela Guilfoyle and Ahmauri Williams-Alford pose for a picture before the COVID-19 pandemic. Altman and her students have volunteered at the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center for several years.

The Georgia Southern University Department of Sociology and Anthropology is partnering with the Willow Hill Heritage and Renaissance Center (WHHRC) in Portal, Georgia, to help families in Bulloch County get access to technology and the internet. Participants who need to access the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic will check out and use equipment at an outdoor facility with tables, electricity and fans.

Associate Professor of Anthropology, Heidi Altman, Ph.D., said student volunteers will assist with checking laptops in and out, greeting families and facility users, and assisting users with signing in to the Wi-Fi, among other responsibilities.

“Families in Bulloch County have the choice of face-to-face or virtual school, but that choice is not a real choice for families who do not have access to the internet,” Altman said. “If the family is living in the digital divide, they may not have adequate access to the internet at the speeds needed to participate in virtual learning. If families have to share a device, especially if that device is a smartphone or tablet, their access is further limited.”

WHHRC's initiative to expand internet access and technology is being funded by a \$109,420 CARES Act grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services. The grant requires documentation of user data in order to make sure the program is sustainable.

"Our anthropology students will collect the anonymous user data, compile and analyze it and provide a report back to the WHHRC board for inclusion in the grant reporting," Altman said. "In addition to providing necessary data for the grant, this is an opportunity for our students to gain hands-on experience working with actual data from an applied anthropology project."

The Department of Sociology and Anthropology has worked with WHHRC before helping digitize archives, taking inventory of collections and volunteering at events. Altman said she's happy to continue the partnership with the important task of getting underserved people the technology they need.

"Without adequate internet access, it is hard for adults to seek employment, to conduct banking business or to stay up to date with information about their children's school," she said. "In an era where the internet has come to be seen as a necessary element of life, many of our neighbors are being left out."

For more information or to volunteer, email Altman at haltman@georgiasouthern.edu.

Tags: [College of Behavioral and Social Sciences](#), [COVID-19](#), [Department of Sociology and Anthropology](#)

Georgia Southern lands contract to help launch U.S. Naval Community College

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Georgia Southern University has won the opportunity for a future contract with the U.S. Navy to help expand educational opportunities for active-duty sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen. The University is among 119 colleges from across the country that were selected to provide distance and online learning curriculum and courses to the military members.

“I see this as a wonderful opportunity for Georgia Southern, a military friendly institution with campuses located next to Fort Stewart,” said retired Col. George Fredrick, Georgia Southern’s director of Military and Veteran Services. “The Marine Corps Parris Island training base is 82 miles from the Armstrong Campus, and about 60 miles from Statesboro is the United States Army Cyber Center of Excellence and the Army’s Signal Center of Excellence at Fort Gordon.” I just think that this is another testament to what kind of military friendly institution we are.”

The partnership with the newly formed United States Naval Community College (USNCC) stems from the U.S. Navy’s broader Education for Seapower Strategy, aimed at enhancing the enlisted force’s ability to master new and emerging technologies. The Navy is heavily invested in the STEM fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, Fredrick said.

“At Georgia Southern University, we have strong programs in each of these areas,” he added. “I am confident that our strong educational capabilities and continued expansion of delivery modes assisted in earning this opportunity with the Navy.”

Fredrick also noted that the partnership with the USNCC could mean “a potential increase in enrollment of Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen.” Students will enroll through the USNCC and to selected institutions for delivery of courses and programs. The USNCC will launch the initiative in January 2021 with a pilot group of approximately 500 sailors and Marines. The program is expected to grow each year reaching full-scale operations of up to 25,000 students in January 2023 and eventually to 50,000 Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen attending institutions across the nation.

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.