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Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2020). *Newsroom*. 1923.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/1923>

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Mechanical engineering graduate is ready for duty

December 17, 2020



Camille Phillips

Camille Phillips has an aptitude for math, especially calculus. She first discovered her passion for complex applications when she was in high school. Encouraged by her high school calculus teacher to study engineering in college, Phillips gave it a try. This week, she will walk across the commencement stage at Georgia Southern University for her bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

"I am fascinated with all that I can do with my major," Phillips said. "Mechanical engineering in particular can be applied to so many different types of jobs, from the aerospace industry to manufacturing, to vehicle design, to the nuclear sector. I love all of the applications of this discipline."

Phillips, a University Honors College student, credits her success in the engineering program to her mentor, Professor Valentin Soloiu, Ph.D., the Allen E. Paulson Distinguished Chair of Renewable Energy.

"He has propelled me to where I am today," said Phillips, who is from Savannah. "He has given me so many opportunities to excel in my field, from helping me apply for summer research experiences and scholarships, to facilitating contacts with professors and outside companies. The skills and knowledge that he has shared with me over the past two years have been indispensable in my growth as a student."

As a junior, Phillips became a lead researcher in Soloiu's Aerospace and Combustion Laboratory in the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing. She considers her involvement in Soloiu's research lab to be her most rewarding experience at Georgia Southern, not only for the friendships she forged but also for the fun she had doing cool experiments.

"I knew I wanted to work in Dr. Valentin Soloiu's research lab because he equips all of his researchers with the knowledge and skills for the workforce," she said. "The research conducted there excited me but it was very intimidating at the start due to the high expectations of working there. When I was named a lead researcher, I was so thankful to be recognized for the work that I had done."

With a 3.9 GPA, Phillips distinguished herself as a standout student in her four-and-a-half years at Georgia Southern. Although she focused on academics, she didn't overlook opportunities offered outside the classroom. She joined the Society of Women Engineers and Pi Tau Sigma, the international honor society for mechanical engineers, and served a term as treasurer of both Women in Technology and Catholic Eagles. During an Alternative Break trip to El Salvador, she was a volunteer at local schools and a community center. However, the engineering major emphasized one experience stands out above the rest.

"My favorite experience at Georgia Southern was participating in an exchange program to Canada as a resident advisor," she explained. "I lived in Waterloo, Canada, and attended Wilfrid Laurier University. I had the best time there. Through my work in residence there, I met some amazing people and experienced a whole new educational environment that allowed me to expand my worldview in different ways."

Now that she is preparing to leave Georgia Southern, Phillips is grateful for the impact the University has had on her life.

“Georgia Southern has pushed me to step out of my comfort zone and by doing so, I have been able to explore my interests and skills to learn more about what I want to do in my life,” she said. “Georgia Southern has taught me to never stop learning and to always be open to trying something new.”

As for what’s next, the Georgia Southern scholar will soon report for military duty. After graduation, Phillips will be commissioned as an officer in the U.S. Navy to serve as a nuclear prototype instructor. As for now, she is focused on celebrating her graduation with parents and family.

“I think they will be proud of me,” she said. “My father was in the U.S. Air Force and I think that because I am also going into military service, there will be some bittersweet but immensely proud feelings as well.”

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[Georgia Southern professor receives University System of Georgia Hall of Fame Faculty Award](#)

December 17, 2020

Associate Professor of Inorganic Chemistry, Arpita Saha, Ph.D., was chosen unanimously as the winner of the 2021 Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award for the University System of Georgia.



*Associate Professor of Inorganic Chemistry,
Arpita Saha, Ph.D.*

“As a professor, mentor and chemist, I feel overwhelmingly proud to achieve this honor,” Saha said. “I would like to sincerely thank Georgia Southern University for providing me the resources and support. To me, the true meaning of teaching is the ability to touch lives, nurturing possibilities, guiding creative minds and make every student feel that they belong in my classroom and research lab. I must acknowledge my wonderful and talented colleagues from whom I have learned a great deal of leadership in mentoring.”

Saha will be recognized at the annual Regents’ Scholarship Gala next September by the Chancellor, the regents, the presidents and her peers.

“When the pandemic brought much to a standstill, Dr. Saha demonstrated resolve in supporting her students through innovations with instructional technology,” Executive Vice Chancellor of the University System of Georgia, Tristan Denley, said in a letter to Saha. “At the college level, she mentored new programs through the curricular process, developing new environmental chemistry courses with a new curriculum.”

Along with the award, Saha will receive a \$5000 prize at the gala.

“This recognition not only reassures my passion for mentoring but also reminds me that teaching is a privilege and responsibility,” Saha said. “My teaching strategy involves engaging students in enjoyable, informative, hands-on and interactive activities for making the subject more tangible and connecting chemistry to everyday life. I find teaching is liberating and exhilarating as it enables me to create pathways of success for my students through scientific literacy, research and scholarly activities.”

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