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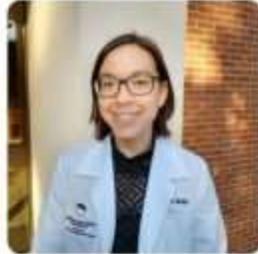
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# 11 Georgia Southern students earn more than \$16,000 in scholarships from Savannah American Business Club

May 26, 2021



Rachel Pelzek



Miriam Gritis



Mary Carpenter



Kevin White



Kendra Harris



Kelsey Lewis



Isaac Milliken



Corbette Soltysiak



Alex Perry



Catherine Sailor



Colleen Guetherman



Eleven students in Georgia Southern University's Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program were awarded scholarships totaling more than \$16,000 from the Savannah American Business Club (AMBUCS) for volunteer work with the organization.

Each year, AMBUCS awards scholarships to students pursuing careers in the allied health professions who volunteer with the organization. The DPT students volunteer with AMBUCS at events such as a League of Exceptional Bowlers, which the organization has hosted for more than 50 years. Though the organization had to place AMBUCS events on hold in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, AMBUCS was able to resume events this past fall.

DPT students Miriam Gritis, Isaac Milliken, Mary Carpenter, Kevin White, Alexandra Perry, Corbette Soltysiak, Colleen Guetherman, Rachel Pelzek, Kendra Harris, Catherine Sailor and Kelsey Lewis received scholarships.

By volunteering, DPT students have the opportunity to interact with different members of the community and assist bowlers with physical and intellectual disabilities to promote an inclusive and competitive environment.

DPT student and second-year scholarship recipient Gritis has been volunteering with AMBUCS for two years.

“Volunteering has given me a broader perspective and made me more aware of how fortunate I am,” said Gritis. “Working with differently abled or underserved populations has helped me to be more grateful for things that I used to take for granted.”

Additionally, volunteering has taught Gritis to be more considerate of others.

“Having a sense of accountability to the friends I have made through AMBUCS, I now understand the choices I make that seem inconsequential to me can actually really impact another person,” Gritis said.

Gritis, who plans to work in a variety of physical therapy settings after graduation, plans to use the scholarship funds toward her tuition.

“I appreciate this scholarship more than I can express because it removes a significant burden,” she said. “I will be able to spend more of my energy focusing on my education and experiencing more of the resources Georgia Southern and its invaluable faculty offer to students.”

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## Graduate finds confidence, community at Georgia Southern

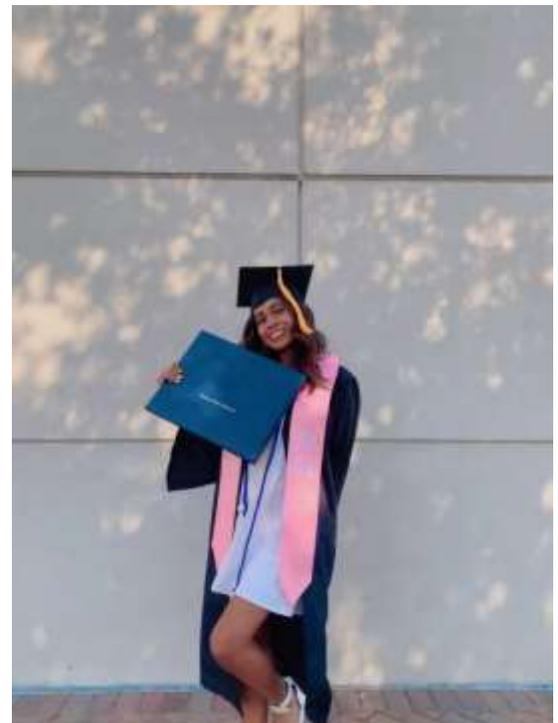
May 26, 2021

When Savannah native Brenda Rodriguez graduated this May from the Waters College of Health Professions at Georgia Southern University, not only had she wrapped up her college career with a degree in radiologic sciences, but she also had increased confidence and a job secured in her field.

Ready for her career in sonography, Rodriguez is heading confidently into her job in Tennessee where she will work full time in a facility she is already familiar with thanks to her clinical experience.

“I will start my new job as an ultrasound technician at a hospital in Tennessee,” Rodriguez said. “It is such a relieving feeling to have been able to line up a job before graduation. My job is actually at one of my previous rotation sites and so happened to be at my favorite one.”

Admittedly, Rodriguez wasn’t always confident about her potential as a professional, but thanks to professors and the friendships she developed during her time as a student, she began to believe in herself.



*Brenda Rodriguez*

“During my time in the program, I had to learn to overcome my own insecurities,” she said. “I was always comparing myself to other classmates’ grades and performance subconsciously, which at times was very difficult. But once I started clinicals, I felt my confidence in myself slowly build up. I started by examining single organs and worked my way up to doing whole exams all by myself.”

Rodriguez also credits her involvement in Greek life for her success.

“Being a member of Phi Mu Kappa Omicron chapter changed my student experience for the better,” Rodriguez said. “Through them I was able to meet so many women that motivated and encouraged me all throughout the hardest moments of my college experience. I gained confidence in venturing out of my comfort zone. Phi Mu provided me with a support system of strong, motivated women.”

Rodriguez will always be grateful for her time at Georgia Southern because of the personal and professional growth she experienced.

“My time at Georgia Southern has shown me that with perseverance, anything is possible,” Rodriguez said. “It also taught me to enjoy the little victories along the way. From freshman year not knowing my way around campus to senior year walking across the stage, I have grown a lot as a person, and Georgia Southern was the place that inspired that growth. I learned to work hard and to keep going and to lean on the people around me for support.”

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## [From athlete to engineer, family lessons guide first-generation college graduate](#)

May 26, 2021



Matthew Johns

Matthew Johns is a first-generation college graduate who almost didn't attend college. It was the encouragement from his grandfather that drove him to pursue a manufacturing engineering degree from Georgia Southern University.

Johns, who comes from a rural town in southeast Georgia, was one of around 80 graduates from his high school, where he mainly focused on sports.

“I played baseball, basketball and football,” Johns said. “We won two state championships in baseball and I never really thought about my life outside of sports. Going into sports was my original hope and dream.”

Johns' relationship with his grandfather, who suffered lifelong hardships as a professional tradesman, was a motivating force when it came to his decision to think beyond athletics and attend college.

“Growing up with my pops is what led me to pursue engineering,” Johns said. “My grandpa lived next door and he was a millwright. We worked on cars together, and that was where I caught the bug for mechanical work. He would always say ‘If you’re going to do something, you need to be an engineer.’”

Johns felt that his education at a small school program put him at a disadvantage initially.

“I came from a big education gap,” Johns said. “It was a little overwhelming to me when I first got here. Most of the guys in my class came from STEM programs. My school was so small we didn’t have anything like that.”

It was the support of his professors and classmates that helped him through the challenges.

“It took me a few times of failing to figure it out,” Johns said. “I started talking to my peers and I think at some point it just clicked for me. You either fail and get better, or you fail and get worse, so I developed study habits by looking at my peers who came from STEM programs.”

Because of the positive impact his mentors had on his college success, Johns spent much of his time sharing his own experiences with younger students.

“I have become somewhat of an advisor for a lot of people,” Johns said. “I tell them about my experience, what worked for me and what set me back, so that they can be better for themselves.”

Johns felt that his time at Georgia Southern allowed him to expand not only academically, but socially as well. Through his experiences on campus he has become more open to a variety of individuals and ideas.

“It’s a melting pot of people,” Johns said. “I feel like I used to be very small-minded, but learning how to interact with people in my program helped me. I understand that people come from different cultures and have different political beliefs. I like to try to talk to people about it and understand their situation and their way of doing things.”

Johns graduated on May 12, and he is now preparing for a move to Connecticut in July where he will begin a new role as an operations supervisor at General Dynamics Electric Boat where he’ll train and eventually lead a team.

“With my background, I feel like I can relate to people more and be more accepting,” he said. “I know not everybody has the same personality and not everyone is motivated in the same ways.”

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# Civil engineering graduate thrived through engagement

May 26, 2021



*Myla Kelly Credit: Daniel Brewster*

For as long as she can remember, Myla Kelly has been enthralled by architecture. It was this fascination which led her to pursue a degree in civil engineering.

With support from her instructors in the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing, who helped to embolden her through the challenges, Kelly realized her dream as she crossed the commencement stage with a degree in civil engineering and a minor in finance from Georgia Southern University.

“They were definitely there to help and to give me the hands-on learning experience that I needed to go into the real world and into engineering. I owe a great deal to

them,” she said.

Finding her voice helped her to overcome the initial challenge of joining a traditionally male-dominated field.

“You have to create your own seat at the table,” Kelly said. “Especially because there were some classes where I would be the only girl in the class, you have to have a voice in the room and show why you deserve to be there. It’s challenging at times, but it’s definitely doable for any woman who’s interested in being in the engineering industry or any male-dominated field. You just have to be ready to go through the obstacles.”

Kelly was able to overcome those obstacles not only with academic support, but also with the encouragement of her family support network. She hoped to honor the memory of her late father through her success.

“My dad passed away in 2013,” Kelly said. “That was a major motivating factor for me going through college. My mom has also been a huge support system for me. She really is like my therapist and best friend all wrapped up in one. She helped to push me through college, especially with being so busy and having to make big decisions.”

Outside of the classroom, Kelly dove into all aspects of life at Georgia Southern by becoming a SOAR leader for the Office of Admissions, a weekly trip leader for the Office of Leadership and Community Engagement, and a residential advisor at Centennial Place residence hall on the Statesboro Campus.

“I used to be super shy,” she said. “It was a leap of faith for me to apply to be a SOAR leader, but it was something that I always wanted to do. I used it as a way to get out of my shell. We were constantly talking to people, so it really helped. It gave me the opportunity to build connections.”

In addition, Kelly worked with the University Programming Board on numerous campus events, became the treasurer of the Minority Advisement Program, the vice president of Georgia Southern’s chapter of the National

Society of Black Engineers, and president of the Lambda Kappa Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority, Inc., after previously serving as vice president.

“Being the president of AKA was a challenge, but it helped me develop my leadership skills and define my leadership style because I had to quickly identify the way that I wanted to lead this group of girls with different personalities.” Kelly said. “I had to learn how to keep the sorority’s best interest in mind and that you can’t always be a people pleaser because, at the end of the day, responsibilities are on you.”

While Kelly felt that her involvement with so many organizations was the key to her success at Georgia Southern, she acknowledged that it came at a cost.

“What a lot of people don’t know is that being in these organizations looks good and easy from the outside, but it was a lot of sleepless nights and sacrifice, choosing to do something for the organization and then choosing to stay up even later to do your homework,” Kelly said. “You definitely have to prioritize so that you are able to put your best effort into everything.”

Because of her engagement in numerous extracurricular activities and organizations, Kelly learned many life lessons that helped prepare her for the future.

“As I got older and had to focus more on my classes, I had to learn to say no,” Kelly said. “I had to say no to joining some organizations that people really wanted me to be in and to say no to participating in different activities on campus. I had to learn to choose things that were going to be beneficial to me and my career.”

Kelly joined a co-op through Southern Company while at Georgia Southern that provided her with the opportunity to work in her field of study while she was still taking classes. It also opened the door for her to act as a mentor for middle and elementary school students in STEM. Thanks to her four co-op rotations, Kelly secured a job with Georgia Power prior to graduation. She also earned a spot in a graduate program with Duke University.

“Having a job secured already is definitely a weight off of my shoulders,” Kelly said. “Even though I pushed my graduation date back by a year, joining the co-op that led me to this job was definitely the best decision I ever made. It helped me to enjoy my senior year that much more.”

With all of the mentorship that Kelly received and provided during her time at Georgia Southern, she shared her own advice for students following in her footsteps.

“Create a pathway for someone else,” Kelly said. “Set that example for the student that’s coming up behind you. My big thing now and all throughout Georgia Southern was mentorship, sharing my experiences in college with somebody else so that it could be easier on them. Be a role model and set an example for the next group of people coming into Georgia Southern.”

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# Georgia Southern partnering with SALT to give students professional experience, job opportunities

May 26, 2021

Georgia Southern University alumnus Stacey Roach knows the struggle students face when looking to gain professional experience while in college. As Chief Operating Officer of IT company InventureIT, he also knows the difficulty of bringing innovative technology and ideas to the professional world.

In an effort to combat both of these problems, Roach helped create Southern Automated Logistics & Technology (SALT), an innovative, technology-focused organization based in Savannah that partners with industry and academia to bring bleeding-edge technology ideas to market.

To create a link to academia, SALT started an apprenticeship program that offers college computer science and IT students access to mentors and the ability to learn about and solve real-world software development problems for clients.

“The development and software industry is under-resourced and in major demand, which puts inexperienced people in jobs that require significant experience,” Roach said. “We should be able to find a way to embrace what we do at SALT, bring our expertise into the regions we live and work, and also empower the next generation to build their careers here in tandem with Georgia Southern where we can make a large regional impact.”



*Gracie Smith*

SALT partners with Georgia Southern’s Office of Career and Professional Development (OCPD) to help identify potential program candidates from the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing through OCPD’s career management system Handshake. Students are selected for the paid apprenticeship after an extensive interview process and receive structural training, hands-on learning and work on specific projects for customers.

Junior computer science major Gracie Smith serves as SALT apprentice team lead, where she leads eight current or recently graduated Georgia Southern students at the Business Innovation Group City Center hub in downtown Statesboro. She said SALT provides her with both technical and professional experience.

“I continue to learn the processes of software development all while better strengthening my time management, communication and organizational skills,” Smith said. “This experience is a pivotal moment for me as I am granted the opportunity to pursue my passion for program development.”

SALT student apprentices also have many opportunities to build relationships that can further their ability to secure a full time position after graduation, whether within SALT or an organization SALT has worked with.

SALT apprentice and recent Georgia Southern graduate Dimitry Bakalov said the mentorship and the team aspect of SALT gives him a competitive edge in the job search.



*Dmitry Bakalov*

“The agile methodology that SALT is practicing is a great tool to let everyone in the team get involved in the developing process,” Bakalov said. “Everyone has an opportunity to be a part of every aspect of the developing job, which is very valuable on the market. I believe that the experience I have gained while working for SALT is the key major component of my resume and the key skill in my skill set.”

Roach said SALT is working to find a location to call home for Georgia Southern students in Savannah, as well as looking for more companies to work with.

“The next big step for us is to start identifying other partners and other companies that maybe have technology projects that they would like to pursue with SALT,” he said. “As more companies begin a relationship with SALT, more post-graduation opportunities will become available to computer science majors involved in the program.”

To learn more about SALT and the Georgia Southern Office of Career and Professional Development, visit <http://www.georgiasouthern.ocpd.edu>.

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