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This summer was bananas for Eagle athletic training students

August 2, 2022



Caitlyn Shoffer, center, sits in the Savannah Bananas' dugout surrounded by players. Shoffer and six other Georgia Southern athletic training graduate students assisted the team this season.

Over the summer, seven Georgia Southern athletic training graduate students have been helping the hometown Savannah Bananas. In addition to acquiring hands-on experiences with the local ball club, students are having the most fun summer with the most fun team in baseball.

“I have definitely been using it for bragging rights,” said Caitlyn Shoffer, one of the training students. “I’ll tell people I got to work with the Bananas and everyone immediately knows what I’m talking about, and they’re always so amazed and excited.”

Shoffer grew up in a sports family. Both of her parents were heavily involved in athletics, and that was passed on to Caitlyn, who was a high school cheerleader. However, she needed to have surgery following an injury during her senior year of high school.

While the injury ended her cheering career, she describes it as a “blessing in disguise.” The experience opened her eyes to a path that allowed her to stay in sports and help athletes avoid making the same injuries.

After graduating from Georgia Southern University with a degree in kinesiology, she returned to her alma mater to pursue a master's degree in athletic training. That is how she connected with the Savannah Bananas.



Steve Patterson, Ed.D., is the athletic training program director for Georgia Southern University. He is also an athletic trainer for the Bananas and offered his students the opportunity to shadow him on the field.

“I can teach them all kinds of different scenarios in class, but I can’t recreate how students respond to emergencies,” said Patterson. “I value the fact that we put such an emphasis on it so that the students come out and they’re ready to handle pretty much any situation.”

Shoffer, who’s heading into her first year in the master’s program, said this impactful experience wasn’t just a fun way to get to see a popular baseball team but it also boosted her confidence in her skills and choices.

After observing the respect the players and organization have for Patterson, Shoffer said she’s looking for more opportunities for baseball clubs down the road.

“I never really had considered working baseball, honestly,” she said. “But I loved seeing how the baseball guys interacted with each other and how much they cared about the game and they cared about everyone around them. Getting to actually meet the guys and being a part of baseball made me really consider that maybe this is what I want to do now.”

The athletic training program is continuing to grow, which also helps it expand its impact on the community. In addition to working with the Bananas, students are also assisting local school districts and will be working with the newly formed ECHL hockey team, The Savannah Ghost Pirates.

The master’s program is intentionally designed to accommodate students with different majors, including [exercise science](#) and [rehabilitation sciences](#). It’s structured in a way where students have already fulfilled many of the prerequisites before entering the program. Those prerequisites and [more information about joining the program can be found here](#).

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New accelerated program debuts this fall, allows students to complete special education advanced degree in less time

August 2, 2022



Georgia Southern University special education faculty created an Accelerated Bachelor's to Master's (ABM) program to assist undergraduate special education students with earning an advanced degree in special education in less time.

The team, including the College of Education's Eric Landers, Ph.D., Cynthia Massey, Ph.D., Stephanie Devine, Ph.D., Kathryn Haughney, Ph.D., Caitlin Criss, Ph.D., and Karin Fisher, Ph.D., received approval for the new ABM to

begin this fall, encouraging special education undergraduates at Georgia Southern to complete a M.Ed. in Special Education.

“Creating ABM options for prospective teachers provides a career path that results in a master's degree and a higher salary than those without,” explained Landers. “Through this route, students will save both time and money toward a degree in this field.”

The ABM in BSEd to M.Ed. Special Education allows special education undergraduate students to take courses (up to nine credit hours) in their junior and senior years that will transfer as credit in the University's M.Ed in Special Education program.

“Students completing this track will complete both the initial and an advanced teaching certificate in special education in fewer hours than if they had done the programs separately, and it allows them to enter the field at a higher salary,” said Landers.

All efforts from the special education team aim to help address the statewide and national shortage of certified teachers, specifically in special education, which was recently named one of the three highest-need subject areas by the Georgia Department of Education.

“The void clearly impacts states' abilities to meet the needs of students with disabilities, as research shows that students with disabilities have greater academic success when supported by teachers certified in special education,” explained Landers. “As educators of and advocates for special education, we will continue to strive to help meet the needs of students with disabilities in our state and nation in any way that we can.”

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