

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Newsroom

University Communications and Marketing

12-13-2022

Newsroom

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom>

This news article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Communications and Marketing at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Newsroom by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

A graduate of firsts: Honors College double major and Navy intelligence analyst Emma Williams crosses new frontiers

December 13, 2022



Emma Williams will cross Georgia Southern University's commencement stage on Dec. 13 as a graduate of the Honors College with dual degrees in political science and philosophy. Also an intelligence analyst for the Navy, Williams represents a number of firsts within her family.

She's the first to graduate from college. The first to join the Navy, and the first to dream of becoming a lawyer.

In high school, Williams was a competitive swimmer with full-ride athletic offers from two other universities, but she chose to focus on academics. Georgia Southern's Honors College and its research opportunities caught her attention.

"Ultimately, I chose Georgia Southern because it offered undergraduate research," said Williams. "I knew that I wanted to major in political science, but I didn't really know what

research looked like in political science. I just knew that I wanted to do something that was more like higher-level academics than just going to class like any other college."

In a unanimous vote of support, her parents moved from their small hometown of Hazlehurst, Georgia, to Statesboro with her.

As a new student, Williams' advisor curated a schedule, which included the honors "Introduction to Philosophy" class, taught by Dan Larkin, Ph.D. She was both intrigued and uneasy about the new teachings that would challenge her personal beliefs.

"I grew up really religious, so I'd never studied philosophy in school or anything like that," she said. "I was really nervous because I was like, 'It's going to question everything that I've based my life on.'

"I took the class and I fell in love with philosophy. I love questioning why we think the way we think and the morality and ethics behind decisions we make."



During that same time, Williams interviewed for and won a coveted spot on the University’s Model United Nations delegation, which has earned international recognition for more than a decade. She competed for three years, representing Greece, Ireland and Afghanistan, for whom she served on the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

“It opened up my eyes to being a developing country, and going into a simulation and trying to represent your country when you have basically no resources,” she said. “And then that was vastly different than Greece that also has a refugee crisis. But they’re a European Union nation, so they have a lot more resources available to them. So it’s interesting to see the backdrop between a developing nation and our developed nation.”

Notably, the experience, which included her role as an assistant advisor this year, taught her about public speaking, writing and diplomacy on an international stage, she said.

During Williams’ second semester of college, she joined the Navy, just before the pandemic gripped the world. Classes moved online and that summer she attended boot camp at the Recruit Training Command Great Lakes in Illinois. Following that, she was directed to intelligence school at the Information Warfare Training Command Virginia Beach, and then stationed in Jacksonville. Her unit supports the Naval Central Command in Manama, Bahrain, and she traveled to Bahrain to complete a 30-day tour that included intelligence work.

Initially, Williams enlisted to find the camaraderie that she enjoyed as a swimmer in high school and as a means to pay for law school, but she “fell in love with public service and military service,” and is stimulated by the analytical work.

Both her professors and the military offered the support she needed to balance the workload. She thrived in naval settings, enhanced by the critical thinking skills she developed in Georgia Southern's classrooms.

"I think it adds to a lot of military decisions," Williams said. "One thing that really helped me was being able to see other people's perspectives and look at the academic literature and see how a conflict starts. What are some things that lead to extremism or terrorism? And look at the factors and see academically what writers and scholars see in the data."

Maureen Stobb, Ph.D., a former immigration attorney-turned-political science professor, also greatly influenced Williams. She served as her mentor for her honors thesis, which was presented at the Fall 2022 Honors Research Symposium, in which Williams presented a comparison case on antitrust laws in the U.S. and the European Union. Stobb helped Williams cinch her decision to pursue law school by running her classes like modern courtrooms with realistic scenarios.

When Williams' crosses the commencement stage on Dec. 13 in Statesboro there will be a lot of emotion.

"I'm super excited," she said. "I'm a first-generation college student. My mom and dad are also really excited because they've never been to a college commencement."

Williams is nearly packed for a yearlong, voluntary deployment. She looks forward to further honing her job skills in the military and later applying to law school.

"To graduate is bittersweet because Georgia Southern taught me a lot," she said. "But I think I'm ready for the next steps."

"College completely changed the way that I thought about the world. It completely changed my personal ethos, the way I live. It's made me more conscious about what other people think."

Posted in [Press Releases](#), [University Homepage](#)

‘Instead of retiring, I’m refiring,’ says public health advocate who earns Georgia Southern doctoral degree this week

December 13, 2022



This week, Lisa Ariellah Ward will earn a Doctor of Public Health from Georgia Southern University, a merited title for the grandmother of seven and mother of four.

Her return to academics after a 20-year hiatus has been rewarding, if not staggering.

“I quickly learned that academia was vastly different from the professional arena and I found myself having to learn what I felt was a completely new language in a completely different world,” said Ward. “The enormous changes in academia, technology and the entire learning environment posed significant challenges for me with each semester’s coursework. I had to start anew not just with the coursework but with everything.”

The degree in Public Health Leadership, Health Policy and Community Health was all consuming during the last four years of Ward’s life while she served part time as a consultant for the University of Florida, both onsite and remotely from her home in Kingsland, Georgia.

Lofty challenges are not unique to Ward, who holds a bachelor’s in biology and genetics from Cornell University and a Master of Arts in health promotion from the University of Alabama. She worked in public health and healthcare for more than two decades while raising a family of teenagers as a single mother and caring for an ailing mother.

Her foray into public health began in the late 90s as a tobacco cessation coordinator for the public health department in Marietta, Georgia. With a \$1 million grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ward was tasked with setting up a tobacco cessation program for employees and creating a smoke-free campus. Many of the directors were smokers. Tobacco companies were aggressively anti-public health, and she faced a major uphill battle as she kicked off the indoor, clean-air initiatives and started two new smoke-free coalitions in Douglas County and Cobb County. Ward was “archenemy No. 1” in her first year on the job, she said.

From a family of smokers, Ward’s father died from tobacco-related complications and her mother had a debilitating stroke from smoking. Her work goals crossed personal lines.

“That’s why I cherished the challenge,” she said. “If it’s only one person who quits smoking, it is one of the greatest accomplishments I could ever share.”

Ward became more creative with her job, and started focus groups that included her directors, and began coaching them directly. In line with the Great American Smokeout event, her ‘cold turkey’ campaign awarded nonsmokers with “you guessed it — a cold turkey.”

“It was a lot of fun,” said Ward, smiling. “I love challenges. I mean, just tell me something can’t be done and I will find a way to find a solution.”

Many of the directors quit smoking and she appointed passionate advocates to move the needle further just before she began entrepreneurial efforts in corporate wellness where she served as a health coach for Fortune 500 groups. She also acted as a clinical consultant for the David Grant Medical Center, the Air Force’s largest medical center, located in California.

At another clinic in Jacksonville she helped build a new corporate wellness program for more than 5,000 employees, provided training for stress management, tobacco cessation and nutrition for the janitorial and custodial staff, physicians and chief executives.

“I like being on the ground floor for new program development,” she said. “That’s really my passion. I love planning, implementing and developing programs and then seeing them all come to life.”

Her latest chapter at Georgia Southern was a dream decades in the making.

“After successfully raising children, all of whom are now accomplished professionals, I made the life-changing decision to return to school,” said Ward.

The last time she was in a university setting, classes were in person or available on CDs or DVDs.

Initially, she felt new technology contributed to the digital divide for underserved populations, but in time she turned the technology she once disdained into fodder for research. She based her dissertation on the effectiveness of telemedicine and diabetes management in an urban, medically underserved population area.

Her conclusion soundly backs telemedicine as an alternative healthcare service and its effectiveness in managing diabetes for underserved populations who were previously impacted by systemic barriers.

There were times Ward questioned her choice of trying to attain this degree, but when she dug deep, there wasn’t any confusion.

“The primary thing on my mind was the people that I hope to serve,” said Ward. “My passion is to help people to achieve a better quality of life. I’ve seen many who have had lifelong struggles win their battles over tobacco addiction and difficulties with weight and obesity, sleep and stress.

I am praying that this degree will lead to greater opportunities to influence and serve the public on a national scale.”

Her classmates, children, friends and professors, including Gulzar Shah, Ph.D., department chair of Health Policy and Community Health at Georgia Southern’s Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health, provided lifelines when she needed the most support, including during her dissertation committee review.

“After the defense, when my committee congratulated me as Dr. Ward in unison, it was really emotional,” she said. “There with tears from me and my chair Dr. Shah. This is certainly a dream realized for me, and I’m overjoyed.”

While she’s looking in various directions, she’s interested in potentially working with national organizations that train leaders who work with underserved populations.

The future is limitless.

“I do not want to waste anything that I’ve learned in my academic, professional and lived experiences,” she said. “Public health is a fascinating field that you can really delve into and make influential changes for the betterment of society.

“I feel like this is a new beginning and there’s more I want to do. I’ll never want to retire,” Ward said. “Instead of retiring, I’m refiring.”

Posted in [Press Releases](#)

From Georgia Southern to Aerojet Rocketdyne: December graduate finds her wings

December 13, 2022



Graduating senior Lydia Poole began her college career as a first-generation student on Georgia Southern University's Armstrong Campus in Savannah. Originally seeking a mathematics degree, Poole changed her major to mechanical engineering right before classes started.

"I love mathematics," Poole said. "But I changed to mechanical engineering because I wanted a program

that would challenge me. It still incorporates the STEM topics that I love, but I knew going into this program would grow me in ways I couldn't even imagine, and it has."

For Poole, the Armstrong Campus felt like a second home when she started college. She was minutes away from her family and enjoyed a personal relationship with both her fellow students and her professors.

"I love the tight-knit nature of the Armstrong Campus," Poole said. "The professors really take the time to get to know you and your interests, and help you pursue research and internships that match that. It's nice to feel noticed, and all of the engineering students knew each other. One of my favorite memories was during my sophomore year. We had a little Friendsgiving in the Engineering Learning Center. We played card games and ate good food and just had a good time. I loved having that community around me."

When she transitioned to the Statesboro Campus to finish her degree, the friends she had made in her program made the jump with her.

"It was a really great support system because we were all in the same boat," Poole said. "I had a friend group of six or seven who all moved out to Statesboro at the same time and we all had each other's backs, which was really nice. It was comforting to know that we were all doing this together."

After her commencement ceremony on Dec. 13, Poole plans to move to Alabama where she has accepted a job with Aerojet Rocketdyne, an American manufacturer of rocket, hypersonic, and electric propulsive systems for space, defense, civil and commercial applications. She partially credits this new role to the experience she earned through her co-ops.

“I did two co-op rotations,” Poole said. “In the spring and fall of 2021, I worked with Heatcraft Worldwide Refrigeration and in the summer of 2022 I worked with Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation. It’s different than working in a classroom. Being in the classroom gets you in the right mindset, but actually working is a whole other world. These experiences make you more competitive when looking for a job, too, and I was really grateful for them.”

Poole also gained leadership experience through her time as vice president for Georgia Southern’s chapter of Pi Tau Sigma, an international honor society for mechanical engineers, and as president of Georgia Southern’s chapter of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE). She will continue her role as president of SWE in the spring while planning her June wedding.

“I met my fiancé on the Armstrong Campus,” Poole said. “He was a mechanical engineering major and graduated in May. He has been an amazing support. He was one of our group that made the jump to Statesboro together and having that support with me during the transition was great. Now, with moving to Alabama, even though I’m leaving home, I still have it with me because he is my home now.”

Poole’s advice for incoming students is simple: Take every opportunity you can.

“Don’t only take opportunities that are handed to you, but seek them out, “Look for opportunities that would interest you and take them when you get them because they are going to help you grow and make you more competitive when it comes time to enter the workforce. Even if you aren’t getting paid for it, sometimes it helps to have that experience.”

Posted in [Press Releases](#)

Georgia Southern graduate finds career at top cybersecurity consulting firm

December 13, 2022

Before even having her diploma in hand, graduating senior Grace “Gracie” McMillan had secured a position with one of the top cybersecurity consulting firms in the world, Deloitte. On Tuesday, Dec. 13, she will cross the stage at Allen E. Paulson Stadium with a bachelor’s degree

in information technology, a minor in criminal justice and criminology, and a specialization in cybersecurity.



Gracie McMillan

The motivation to go into cybersecurity was simple for McMillan. She loved STEM and wanted to find a career where she could help people.

“One of my biggest passions is helping people,” McMillan said. “But I’m not going to be a nurse. I’m not good with blood. I’m not that kind of person. I found that through cybersecurity, I could protect people in a way that suits my strengths.”

When she began in cybersecurity, she hoped to one day work for the FBI, inspired by the character of Penelope Garcia on the TV series “Criminal Minds.” McMillan did earn an internship at the FBI this past summer with the support of her professors.

“I had a professor who really mentored me through the whole interview process, which was a year long, and is not an easy process,” McMillan said. “Over the summer I got to work in Quantico (FBI Academy in northern Virginia) in the heart of the FBI and I was doing digital forensics, information security and working on real cases. This semester I worked in their Savannah office to maintain my security clearance.”

McMillan believes there is a major reason why she gained the FBI internship. Georgia Southern’s Center for Applied Cyber Education (CACE) holds two important designations. CACE is one of only 14 schools in the country with both a National Security Agency (NSA)/Department of Homeland Security Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education designation and a Center of Digital Forensics Academic Excellence designation from the Department of Defense Cyber Crime Center (DC3). The joint NSA/DC3 designations open the doors to collaborations for students in the program.

“I noticed on my FBI application that there was a question about the NSA and DC3 designations,” McMillan said. “It was a really cool experience to see that little button and be able to say yes to it. I feel like being a part of this school really helped bump me to the top of the interview list.”

Her FBI internship granted her top secret security clearance. This clearance level was a significant factor in receiving a job offer from Deloitte, as was her leadership experience through

Kappa Kappa Gamma. From December 2020 through December 2021, McMillan served as the youngest elected president in her sorority's history.

“My sorority was genuinely one of the best experiences of my life,” McMillan said. “They really pushed me to be the best person I could be and to keep working toward my goals even when things were difficult and I didn't know if I could do it. I became president my sophomore year and it was extremely difficult, but incredibly rewarding. It taught me so many leadership skills and I gained so much because of it.”

McMillan credits her time at Georgia Southern with teaching her the confidence to reach out and fight for her goals.

“I couldn't have done what I'm doing now without Georgia Southern,” McMillan said. “I would never have had the confidence to reach out to someone I didn't know on LinkedIn to talk to them about the company they worked for. That got my foot in the door at Deloitte. And, as difficult as my professors could be, they pushed us to do projects that were going to challenge us and ultimately increase our confidence in our abilities with our work and to go out and get what we want. I wouldn't have been able to get this job without that.”

McMillan believes that every experience she had at Georgia Southern worked together to get her where she is now.

“My professors challenged me and built my confidence,” McMillan said. “I wouldn't have built the leadership skills Deloitte was looking for without my experience with Greek life. Without my FBI internship, I wouldn't have had the right security clearance. It genuinely all feeds straight into it, literally every experience I've had here, and I wouldn't trade it for the world.”

McMillan wants other women looking to go into cybersecurity to know that they should dive in and try.

“I want women to know that it's possible and that there is so much room for you,” McMillan said. “Right now one in four people in this field are women. It should be more. It should be filled with women who want to make a difference and help change the world. I want women in this field to know they are not alone. There are women and men already in this field who are fighting for you to be here too. Don't be discouraged and try as hard as you can.”

Posted in [Press Releases](#)

Aspiring lawyer becomes Georgia Southern graduate at 17

December 13, 2022



Adriana Proctor at commencement with her parents

Adriana Proctor not only has big dreams, but has already put in work toward achieving them as she prepares to graduate at 17 years old with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and criminology from Georgia Southern University's College of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Proctor started college through her high school dual enrollment program in her freshman year and was just 14 years old when she graduated. Spending just two years in high school, she started full time at Georgia Southern's Armstrong Campus in Savannah when she was 15. She's done everything with a singular goal in mind – to one day become a lawyer.

"I've always wanted to be a lawyer," Proctor said. "It's my dream job and would allow me to provide meaningful representation and support to communities where I am needed. I would love to make a difference with children in particular through community initiatives, state agencies or even private practice."

Despite being years ahead of her peers, Proctor continues to run into new challenges. Since she hasn't yet reached age 18, she is unable to enter into the same types of agreements as a legal adult.

"Finding work in the criminal justice field has been difficult," Proctor said. "Due to my age, there have been a number of confidentiality concerns, particularly as it relates to the target population that I would like to work with."

Proctor hasn't let these challenges stop her. While she has struggled to find work near her home in Savannah, she continues to work toward her goals.

"I'm working to overcome the age-related issues by looking for work outside of Savannah," Proctor said. "I'm conducting informational interviews, interacting with professionals from a

wide range of fields in order to network and calling businesses and agencies to see if there are any exceptions that can be made for my age.”

This networking has introduced her to new possibilities and opened the door for her introduction to the Bulloch County Public Defender’s Office in Statesboro.

“I partnered with a woman who facilitates a tutoring program for elementary school children,” Proctor said. “She was able to put me in contact with the Statesboro chief of police who connected me with the public defender’s office in Statesboro. I hope to work there, even just as a volunteer, to gain experience working in the legal system.”

Proctor is also working to learn Spanish and found a community in the Hispanic Outreach and Leadership Achievement Program on the Armstrong Campus in Savannah. While this may help her in her future career, it’s importance to her stems from its connection with her heritage.

“I am not completely fluent yet in Spanish, but I have been taking classes since I was in sixth grade,” Proctor said. “Spanish has always been important to me as my father is from Puerto Rico and I was surrounded by it. We made frequent trips there and my paternal grandparents speak both English and Spanish in their home.”

Proctor’s family has been a major source of support during her college years. Both of her parents spent time in the military and her mother has been an inspiration to her.

“My mother has been a significant motivator for me,” Proctor said. “She was able to finish her bachelor’s degree this year and start her master’s in clinical mental health counseling all while taking care of my baby sister.”

Proctor hopes to have a similar impact on those around her.

“I hope to be a source of inspiration for my community,” Proctor said. “I feel drawn to working with children because of their potential, and I feel that at this stage in my life I am perfectly positioned to make a difference in their lives.”

Posted in [Press Releases](#)

‘It’s like something from a movie’ for a pair of graduating Eagle singers

December 13, 2022



Isabella Wallace (left) and Jackson Murray (right) stand for a photo on the Georgia Southern campus in Statesboro. The two sang the National Anthem and alma mater after a decade-long friendship preceding their time as Eagles.

Jackson Murray and Isabella Wallace first met in seventh grade in Summerville, South Carolina. Murray was a soccer player who had recently moved from Washington state. He didn’t have much interest in singing, but did grow up in a family that appreciated the arts.

Wallace, meanwhile, has been singing for her entire life. Her mother is a music instructor, and was even their music teacher for two years of middle school. Over the years the two became close friends, and soon they will finish their college careers worthy of a Hollywood finale.

Despite having vastly different starting points for their musical development, they will walk off campus with the type of curtain call only two friends can share. During Tuesday's commencement ceremony in Statesboro, Georgia, the duo's decade-long friendship will be center stage. Selected for an ultimate honor, they will have their final Georgia Southern performance of the national anthem at their graduation together.

But how did their friendship start in middle school?

The two met in seventh grade. Murray was a soccer player and had little interest in singing. Wallace grew up in a house of musicians.

"I convinced Jackson to join the chorus at a Halloween party," Wallace said. "He came dressed up as a soccer player because he just threw on some soccer gear. My mom and I told him he should join the chorus, and we somehow convinced him and he loved it."

However, he proved to be a tough sell at first. He says he began singing in eighth grade because, like many high school students, he was required to take fine arts classes.

"I hated drawing and I did not want to learn an instrument," he said. "Well, I guess I'll go with the chorus, because they go on trips. I made it a hobby at that point."

But it would soon become much more than a hobby. Murray eventually hung up his cleats to dedicate more time to performance. Throughout his entire high school career, he continued to perform alongside his friend, Wallace.

The duo continued to perform together when they enrolled at Georgia Southern University. They loved the campus and the opportunities within the Eagle fine arts communities, and the tuition waiver for in-state rates cemented their decision to come to Georgia Southern. They received those waiver emails just before taking the stage in their high school performance of *Hairspray*. Wallace said she doesn't remember the performance, but she does remember getting the exciting news with Murray backstage.

When they took their first steps on campus as members of Eagle Nation, they both said the hard work began.

Both Murray and Wallace said it took discussions with friends and reaching breaking points to finally re-examine their commitments. Shortly thereafter, they began to dial back the workload to refocus on the quality of their work and enjoy the experiences. This was an investment worth making.

After taking a new approach to their college experiences, they began taking leadership roles within their choruses and groups. Additionally, they were able to actually experience the places their work had taken them.

During their time with Eagle Nation, their groups won two international singing competitions. The Southern Chorale took two separate trips to Germany over the past four years. The first time,

the students said, was focused on competition. This last time in spring 2022, while still victorious in their respective categories, they were more dedicated to enjoy their time overseas. The students credit their instructors with giving them such worldly adventures.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to know that we have professors that care as much as they do and will go to bat for us and advocate for us as strongly as they do,” Wallace said. “I can’t think of a single professor that I have right now that would not go to bat for me and they treat us in a way that makes you feel like you matter.”

Traditionally, there is only one performer to sing the national anthem and alma mater for commencement. But this year, Georgia Southern will be shaking that up. The faculty members in charge of picking the singers recognized the bond Murray and Wallace have had throughout their careers. To acknowledge this, they elected to have them both sing side by side.

“Honestly, I laughed when I saw that email because it’s like out of a movie,” Wallace said. “It’s fun because we came in together, and we get to leave together.”

Life can be rather cyclical, especially in unlikely ways.

Murray, who originally agreed to join the middle school chorus because of the trips, is now a music teacher himself. He said he found his passion for music as well as instructors who inspired him to be a leader himself.

Both Murray and Wallace named Shannon Jeffreys, DMA, director of choral activities, as their biggest influence during their time at Georgia Southern. She made trips to Summerville to visit them as high school students. These efforts not only helped bring the duo to Statesboro, but it also built a strong connection among the three.

“I would not be the leader I am today without these wonderful examples,” Murray said. “The people at the Office of Admissions and the choral department here are fantastic and professional. They do the things for professional development, not for themselves, but for their students, for their workers and for their employees.”

Two kids from a small town in South Carolina. One of them is into sports and the other is the daughter of a music teacher. For one last time, they showcase their talent Georgia Southern University.

Posted in [Press Releases](#)

Tags: [Fall Commencement](#), [Fred and Dinah Gretsch School of Music](#)