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December graduate finds support through Georgia Southern community

December 19, 2022



Taylor Pledger

Graduating senior Taylor Pledger moved four hours from home with her best friend to start college as a first-generation college student at Georgia Southern University. Inspired by her mom, Pledger originally planned to go into health care management, but realized that she could have a more significant impact by playing to her strengths and completed her degree in information systems.

The journey to her degree was not an easy one for Pledger. As the first in her family to attend college, everything was new to her and she was far from family. Pledger struggled with not being able to be there for her mother when she was ill.

“My mom has been in and out of hospitals a lot,” Pledger said. “We moved around a lot and it was a pretty unstable childhood, but my mom and I developed a very dependent relationship. So coming here was difficult for both of us because I am her only child. It’s been hard to know that I can’t be there when she gets sick, but it’s been a learning experience and was something I needed.”

Pledger found support in the community she had at Georgia Southern.

“I felt very deprived and lost when I first got here,” Pledger said. “As a first-gen student I couldn’t understand other people’s struggles and they couldn’t really understand mine. I started to join a lot of group meetings and that got my foot in the door. I met some friends and we went to church together. It was comforting to find people who could relate to you on that level. As someone with strong faith, I depended on God a lot when I felt discouraged and it was comforting to have people who connected with that.”

In her final semester at Georgia Southern, Pledger reached out to the Counseling Center. They helped guide her to a counselor who supported her through the final stretch of her journey.

“It was amazing to see how schools really do pour into mental health,” Pledger said. “I needed help trying to get a better understanding of how to balance everything. I needed someone to talk to who would understand what I’d been going through and it was incredibly beneficial. The only thing I wish I’d done differently was to reach out to them sooner.”

Pledger joined and eventually became president of the Women in Business group in Georgia Southern’s Parker College of Business. This experience helped her gain leadership skills and network with professionals in the corporate world.

“We were new, but grew to roughly 150 members,” Pledger said. “Being president definitely put things in perspective for how to manage different people at different levels. We were able to bring in people from Target, J.B. Hunt and other companies to speak with our members, and we reached out to all majors so that it was as inclusive as possible and didn’t just focus on one thing. It’s an experience that I can really take into the professional world.”

She also gained professional experience through her off-campus job at Tractor Supply Company. While she started as a cashier, she has spent the last seven months working in the field of information systems within the company.

“I moved up to assistant manager pretty quickly and that meant I was regularly speaking with upper-level employees,” Pledger said. “Just in conversations, we would talk about what I was going to school for. They remembered that and it opened the door to an internship with them on the information systems side of the company. I started that in the summer and, even though the internship ended, they decided not to let me go. I’m excited to start digging deeper into this job and this field.”

Pledger graduated on Dec. 13 and wants current and incoming students to remember one thing as they go through college.

“Don’t forget the fun part of being a student,” Pledger said. “It’s easy to get lost in the work and in comparing yourself to what others do or how they handle themselves, but everyone handles things differently. Make social connections. Take the initiative to participate on campus. That’s what it’s supposed to be about: making connections. You’ll meet people from all over the world. So be social and let that be part of your experience.”

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