



THE ROUND TABLE

THE HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER



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Engaging our Communities:

HONORS STUDENTS LEAD HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROJECTS FOR LOCAL YOUTH

In addition to maintaining stellar academics, Honors students are also leaders in their communities. Rising Seniors Haley Menees, Hannah Menees, and Jami Nakan have each developed long-term service projects that meet the needs of their respective counties. Read on to see how Honors students are making a difference:

Project: Optimizing School Garden Strategies **Student: Jami Nakan**

What got you interested in this project?

I became interested in this project through the local clinic. There is a great need for low-cost, organic produce and nutrition education in rural communities, so I wanted to develop a garden model for schools to teach students that may not have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. The teachers and students at the local elementary school have helped a lot with planting a radish garden and the garden education plan.

I began this project as a part of the STEM Lab. The STEM Lab professors and my research mentor, Dr. Patterson, helped me construct my research topic freshman year into optimizing garden techniques. As I developed this model, Dr. Hartsfield, Honors Assistant Director in Dahlonga, helped with forming it into a proposed part of the GA K-12 education curriculum.



How does this project fit into your long-term goals?

I hope to take some of the nutrition and agriculture education concepts I learned through this project and apply them to a career in Rural Pediatrics. In the future, I hope to link medicine to sustainability.

Project: Anti-Vaping Education in Hall County **Students: Hannah and Haley Menees**

What got you interested in this project?

During high school, we saw friends become addicted to e-cigarettes, leading us to realize how dangerous vaping products were. Limited health information motivated us to join the Vaping-Attention to Prevention (VA2P) organization and educate our peers on the dangers of vaping. In college, we founded a UNG VA2P chapter to spread anti-vaping initiatives and improve e-cigarette regulations at UNG and state levels. This project also serves as our Honors Enrichment Long-term Volunteer project.

How does this project fit into your long-term goals?

Haley: I plan to obtain an M.D./Ph.D. with a Ph.D. in Neuroscience focused on investigating the neurological mechanisms underlying addiction to advance rural patient and population health equity. This project geared my scientific efforts to my outreach initiatives, allowing me to grow my research and advocacy work as a unit and preparing me for my future work in policy engagement and scientific research.

Hannah: My primary objective is to obtain my M.D. and become a primary care physician in Georgia. The culmination of the public health work and investigation of vaping has motivated me to continue advocacy into my professional career and provide future health care to our community.

How does your upcoming study abroad trip intersect with your advocacy?

During our workshops, Spanish-speaking middle school students often express their struggles with quitting vaping due to language barriers and lack of access to health facilities. These stories exemplify the role of social inequalities in accessing effective drug abuse treatment. By pursuing a Spanish minor and studying abroad in Spain, we will gain the cultural and linguistic skills to improve treatment access and ensure up-to-date information is equally shared with rural and Hispanic populations.



Tackling Climate Change. Interdisciplinarily

JOHN DEES, '15

For John Dees '15, approaching knowledge from an interdisciplinary standpoint has led him across the country and helped him take on one of the planet's thorniest problems: climate change. Dees, who earned a PhD in 2022 from University of California, Berkeley, serves as a Senior Decarbonization Scientist at Carbon Direct, a startup that began by offering 3rd party scientific verification of decarbonization approaches to prevent things greenwashing. The group now offers end to end carbon management for major corporations.

Dees states his interdisciplinary background has helped him navigate this exciting industry, and he credits the Honors program with laying a foundation for success. "Honors 1101 changed my life," he said. "Professor Peggy Strickland took notice of me and encouraged me to keep going." She introduced John to Dr. Eric Skipper, then Dean of the Honors program, who also helped him develop a geographic and environmental reading of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, for which he won Best Humanities Essay at GCHC 2013. Dees says, "Honors was more focused on analytical thinking – there were no clear answers. This taught me how to think critically." It also prepared him to enter an interdisciplinary graduate program focused not only on the environment, but also economics, engineering, and policy.

After graduating from UNG's Gainesville campus with a degree in Environmental and Spatial Analysis, John accepted a full-ride offer to enroll in Berkeley's Energy and Resources Group. John's [research](#) has focused on innovative uses of biomass feedstocks for industrial purposes to reduce climate impact, ranging from fuels to chemicals, polymers, and building materials. As a non-traditional student, John initially struggled with imposter syndrome.

However, he credits building a community with his fellow students and focusing on networking and knowledge -- not grades -- as keys to success. John noted, "Grad school is as much or more about personal growth than academic. At least for me, that's true. It shaped me as a person."

To other Honors students looking to embark in grad school or large businesses, John's advice is simple: "Get what you need, not what other people expect. Remind yourself that you belong there." He also encourages them to take care of themselves – "get out in nature and look around; don't study all the time."



RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: CHLOÉ ALLEN

Fall 2022 graduate Chloé Allen began researching toad physiology her first year at UNG, mostly as a way to gain experience for med school. However, she quickly became intrigued with the project on human disturbance and toad health. As she compared toad populations between 2019 and 2021, she was surprised to find decreased disease and stress in the toads between those years. Her research team theorized that improved water quality and reduced construction (due to the pandemic) contributed to this increase in toad health.

Chloé's excellence in research led her across the country to an NSF-funded REU at the California Academy of Sciences. "It was phenomenal," Chloé said. "I was struggling with deciding whether to go to medical school or follow my passion for amphibians and conservation of our earth. This experience showed me I could turn these passions into a life career."

Now, Chloé is embarking on her next challenge - a PhD in Ecology at the University of Texas at Austin, as both an NSF Graduate Fellowship winner and a UT Fellow. There, she will build on the skills she gained in honors. "Being in Honors, and especially on the leadership board, provided me with the skills necessary to be a confident leader, scientist, and overall person. Overall, this allowed me to have the courage to pursue such aspirations as I am now."

Though she's leaving UNG, Chloé notes she'll always hold the "simple moments" spent visiting professors as highlights of her career. She added "My trips to Sapelo Island with Dr. Dalman helped me learn to balance fun with science and always remain curious." She also credits the support of her mother and mentors with helping her reach her goals.



"To anyone struggling to find their path, reach out to staff, even if they aren't professors. You'll be surprised at how they can help you!"

An Academic Odyssey:

ALI LEONARD'S PATH FROM MOLECULAR BIOPHYSICS TO A NEW NOVEL

Ali Leonard arrived at the University of North Georgia in fall 2003, and immediately stood out for her desire to learn as much as she could as fast as she could. As an English major minoring in Physics, Ali balanced serving as president of the Shotokan Karate club with writing for the school newspaper and serving as a Teaching Assistant for Physics. She graduated in just 3 years from UNG and embarked on a career teaching AP Physics while raising her family of three kids, Gideon, Lily, and David.

However, Ali still wanted to learn more. "I was teaching college level classes without a degree in Physics, and I wanted more information." So, she finished a PhD in Biophysics from the University of Maryland and earned a competitive 3-year post-doc position with the National Institutes of Health (NIH). "Working at NIH was really cool – the work was fast-paced and surprisingly masculine. I was often the only female in the research group." Ali then went on to complete another post-doc at University of Delaware [studying lipids forcefields](#).

When the COVID pandemic hit, she returned to her first love, teaching. "Teaching is a natural ability I've always had; I enjoy connecting with students." Ali draws on her interdisciplinary background by connecting writing and speaking with Physics.



"We have a lot of debates that give students a solid theoretical understanding of what they are learning." Ali credits the Honors program with giving her a sense of the broad array of things one can do with education. Honors professors also helped her understand what academia is, which was beneficial to her as the first PhD in her family.

The pandemic also gave Ali time to finish her first novel, *It is Written*, that she describes as a "Tweenie Fantasy Adventure where children have the power to manipulate nature to stop war." [You can read about and order her new novel here](#). When asked what's next for her: "You never know! Maybe a dystopian novel for adults?" We look forward to reading more!

NATHANAEL HINES EARNS GRANT TO RESEARCH RHETORIC IN RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

As an outstanding member of Model UN and a previous student of Dr. Bibek Chand's, Nathanael was an obvious choice to join his research project focused on analyzing rhetoric in the Russia - Ukraine War. Though excited for the opportunity, Hines said "When Dr. Chand first asked, I thought 'I don't know how we do it? Don't you need a PhD?'"

Nathanael credits the Honors program and his Honors 1000 peers' research projects with shifting his perspective: "It was good to look at each other's work and give feedback on what we were doing." Through the course, he saw the important role of perspective again. "I really found it good to hear from students' perspective as well as faculty perspective."

Nathanael and research partner Jess Case earned a 2022 CURCA student-faculty collaborative mini grant for their project "Analyzing Political Rhetoric during War: A Case Study of the Conflict in Ukraine."



"The Honors program really helped in terms of making research seem more realistic."

Together, they have pulled speeches from the heads of state of eight different countries to find trends in the rhetoric used to describe the same events. Nathanael found the application process helpful: "Applying for the mini-grant definitely helped me understand what we were researching - it allowed us to concentrate our ideas." He added, "If you're gonna do research, I would apply for [the grant]."

Nathanael and Jess look forward to presenting their project next year. In the meantime, he is preparing to spend the summer abroad in Ireland studying the global institutions that have stabilized the West since World War II. Longer term, he plans to attend law school. He sees his current research as a clear foundation for his future work. "This research project allows me to practice analyzing different perspectives of a single event. Whereas each leader may intend to be truthful and just in their comments or responses, the actions taken by the parties in the conflict may be viewed differently depending on whether the leader is an ally or adversary of the party taking the action."

HONORS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Update

This year, the Honors Advisory Council has worked to support honors students through fundraising and career preparation.

Through our fundraisers, at Gold Rush in the fall and via online auction this spring, we have provided financial support for scholarships, research, and study abroad opportunities.

Additionally, we strive to connect students with professionals in their chosen field through our survey, which we encourage all alumni to complete. Please click the QR code to the left to support and/or mentor a current Honors student or recent graduate.

We plan to continue this work in the upcoming year and appreciate the support we have received from volunteers and donors.

*Honors Alumni
Career Support
Survey*

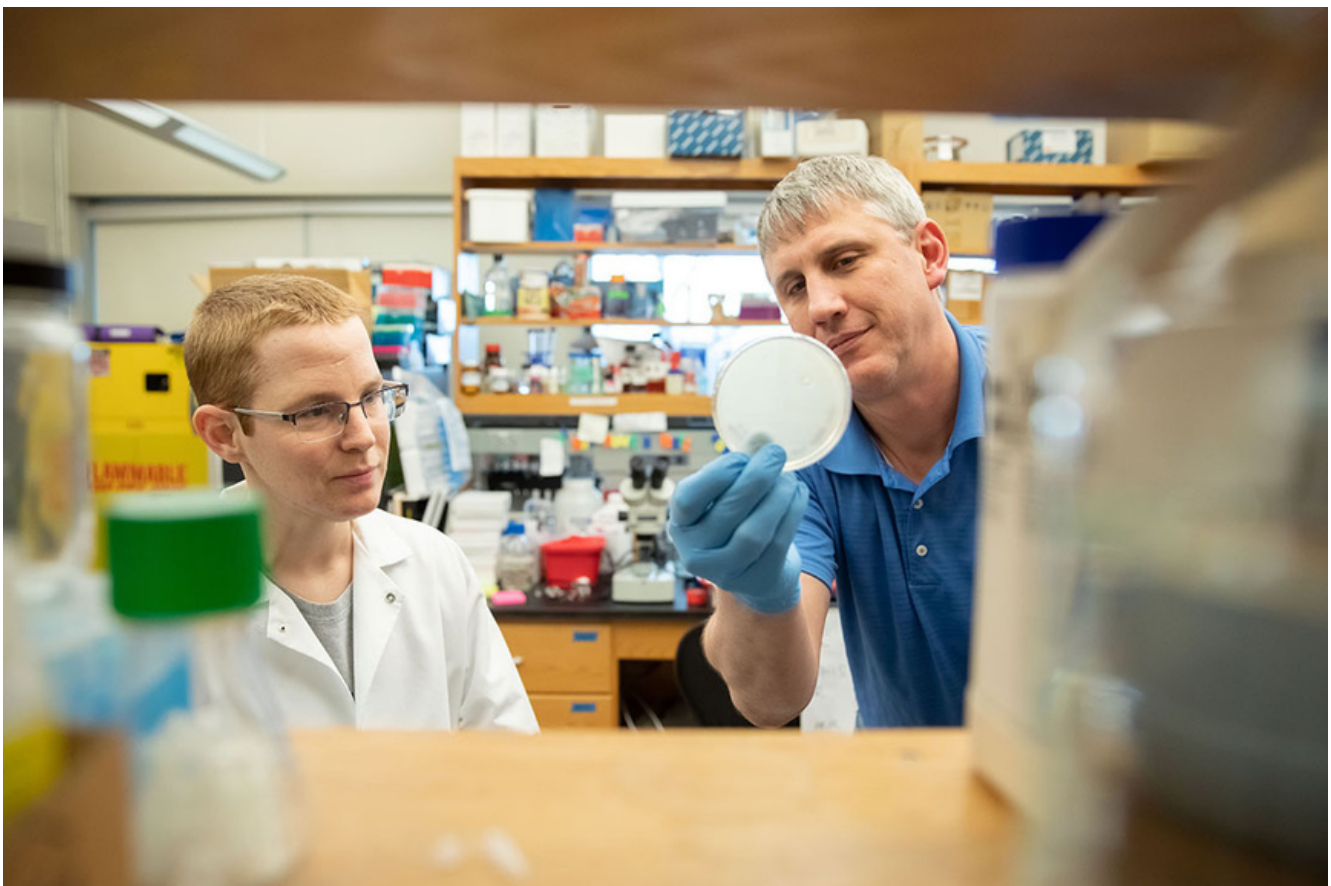


If you have any questions about the HAC, about our work, or are interested in getting involved, please contact the HAC president Amy Burger by email:

amybburger@gmail.com.

Want to make a difference?

Donate to the UNG Honors Program



Your donation supports Honors students in completing and presenting their research at conferences across the country. Consider supporting current and future Honors students today!

[UNGgive.org/oneung](https://unggive.org/oneung)

Congrats, Steve!

2023 DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR OF THE YEAR

For 30 years, Steve Smith has been a fixture on the Dahlonega campus. This spring, he was recognized by the Alumni Association as the campus Distinguished Professor of the Year.

As Honors director for 19 years, many of you reading this likely worked with Steve. To celebrate his well-deserved honor, we sat down with Steve to hear about his honors career. Read on to hear about some of Steve's best memories from his tenure as Director.

One of Steve's first Honors Psych courses coincided with his first time fully integrating WebCT discussion posts into his course. This technology was fairly new – not many classes had begun using online discussion. Though skeptical at first, he found the Honors students learned more from the discussion board than from the class. "I love that you can give Honors students reading homework and then come into a lively discussion that spills over past class."



#AchieveForSteve

Another treasured memory is hosting the Georgia Collegiate Honors Council conference on the Dahlonega campus in 2012. Steve began the tradition of offering student awards. He also showed the rest of the state the hospitality UNG is known for by offering students the ability to go hiking, compete at trivia, and even go gold panning.

For Steve, some of the most meaningful moments each year were surprising a single deserving Honors student with the Rachel Ford Springer Award. Rachel, who was diagnosed with cancer right after graduation, was one of Steve's advisees. After fighting the disease for 7 years, we sadly lost Rachel in 2006 at the age of 29. Steve enjoys celebrating her life by honoring a current student, but notes "you should always have a box of Kleenex on hand." Steve also loves seeing alumni "come home" to work at UNG, and is especially proud to have Catrina, Kaylee, Rachel, Alyssa, and Jared back in the fold.

"Field trips were always memorable," Steve shared. One he recalled was rafting on the Ocoee River. A student on the trip was a bit hydrophobic and almost had a panic attack when the boat flipped. Steve was able to swim against the current, calm her down, and help her get back to the riverbank. That memory is matched by the 2016 trip to SRHC in Orlando, Florida. The hotel was directly across from universal, and every student walked away with a Harry Potter wand. But, the drive down was the most memorable: 8-9 students had crowded into the a van borrowed from Cadet Recruiting, and they rode all the way to Florida with the check engine light on while struggling up hills.



For Steve, the best part of UNG Honors is "Helping students find the spark themselves." Though he had been set on a strong research trajectory, he was happy to move his focus to students. "The greatest thing I've ever done is make a tiny impact on a student's trajectory."

Congratulations, Steve, on your long and impactful career. We are grateful for your service!

"The process of doing research, learning how to read articles, has made students better community members and citizens."

-Dr. Steve Smith



KUDOS & CONFERENCES

National & State Awards:

- **Anna Møller** - Rhodes Global Finalist
- **Anna Cronan** - Canada Fulbright-Mitacs Globalink Program Scholar; Udall Honorable Mention
- **Justin Heintz** - Boren Scholar
- **Jared Oenick** - Scientist.com STEM Research NIL Award
- **Haley Menees** - Goldwater Scholar, NIH UGSP Semi-finalist, Gilman Scholar
- **Hannah Menees** - Gilman Scholar
- **Chloé Allen** - NSF Graduate Research Fellowship
- **Brooke Tate Smith** - NSF Graduate Research Fellowship
- **Haley Shea Barfield** - NSF Graduate Research Fellowship
- **Nathanael Hines** - Ty Cobb Scholarship

UNG Campus-Wide Awards

- **Jared Oenick** - Rachel Ford Springer Award
- **Anna Møller** - Nighthawk Nine Inductee, Women Student Leadership Award, Sp of Excellence Senior Award
- **Kate Monheim** - 1st Place Annual Research Pitch
- **Jessica Cisneros-Lerma** - Best Poster Presentation, UNG Annual Research Conference; Gainesville Campus Outstanding Honors Program Student Honors Program Student
- **Scott Fitz Gerald** - Alumni Association Endowed Scholarship
- **Lillie Hayes** - Dot Strother Alumni Scholarship, Nighthawk Nine Inductee
- **Haley Menees** - UNG Academic Recognition Day Scholar
- **Andrew BeMent** - Nighthawk Nine Inductee
- **Sara Gonzalez** - Nighthawk Nine Inductee

Summer Internships & Paid Research

- **Eric Lopez** - NSF REU at University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- **Ashleigh Carroll** - NSF REU at Clemson University
- **Haley Menees** - Agmen Scholars Program (declined)

KUDOS & CONFERENCES



Georgia Collegiate Honors Conference:

- **Jami Nakan** - "Optimal School Garden Model Strategies to Combat Food Insecurity in Lumpkin County"
- **Eli Powell** - "Analysis Of CWW Implementation in a University Setting"
- **Isabella Fordham Neuwirth** - "Finding and Characterizing Phage "OsoDePeluche" According to Plaque Morphology"
- **Autumn Cleymans, Zach Furbush, and Sheila Ganley** - "The Booze Business: A review of Moonshine's Evolution in Appalachia"
- **Lydia Whitted and Brooke Tatum** - "Low Extremity Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention Among Collgiage Athletes and Cadets"
- **Lily Chuhran** - "Discovery and Analysis of Vulpecula"
- **Payton Murray** - "Gobelin De Terre Discovery and Analysis"
- **Claire Bicknell**- "The Discovery and Analysis of SoloMonstro"
- **Brianna Litz, Sarah Gonzalez, and Emma Wilson** - "Effects of Food Insecurity on Adolescent's Quality of Life"



2022-2023 Graduates



2022-2023 GRADUATES: NEXT STEPS

Chloé Allen, Biology w/ minor in Psychology

Chloe will begin her PhD in Ecology at the University of Texas, Austin, fully funded by the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship.

Abigail Buben, Psychology w/ minor in Neuroscience

Abigail will take a gap year before applying to Clinical Psychology or Counseling graduate programs

Jessica Cisneros-Lerma, Psychology w/minor in Biology

Jessica plans to apply to UGA for a graduate degree in Health Psychology

Anna Møller, Psychology w/minor in Organizational Leadership

Will be starting Physical Therapy school at Københavns Professionshøjskole, Denmark, in January 2024.

Kate Monheim, Chemistry

Kate will begin her PhD in medicinal/Organic Chemistry at Texas A&M

Jared Oenick, Biology w/ minor in Neuroscience

Jared will begin an MD/PhD program at the University of Toledo this fall.

Eli Powell, Information Systems

Eli begins a full time job as an IT Consultant with CarvOS on June 12th. Until then, he'll be traveling and tidying up my thesis for publication.

Matthew Soto, Kinesiology

Matthew will continue his education at Augusta University's physical therapy program for the next three years.

Sonrisa Reed, Environmental & Spatial Analysis

Sonrisa plans to earn a Master's in Geography at the University of Georgia

Jessica Wood, Elementary/Special Education

Jessica will be teaching first grade at South Hart Elementary.



Building a Research Community in Honors 1000



ALUMNI UPDATES

2021

Lorelei Silvers, **Psychology/Anthropology**

I got engaged in October of 2022 to my boyfriend of five years who I met in-part thanks to former Honors Director Steve Smith.



Brooke (Tate) Smith, Chemistry

After graduation, I got married to my partner, Austin, in June of 2021. I received two fellowships, the J. Wallace & Katie Dean Graduate Fellowship for being one of the top graduate applicants when I first joined UTK and an NIH T32 interdisciplinary training fellowship to continue working in the biomembranes field. My partner and I have also since adopted 3 kitties, Mr. Meows, Smokey, & Bean and are quickly working towards our goal of visiting all 50 states and all of the national parks!



ALUMNI UPDATES

Shea Barfield, B.S. Interdisciplinary Studies (Mathematics/Technology, Social Sciences, & Humanities), B.A. English Writing & Publication, A.S. Psychological Science, A.A. Media Studies, Minors: Linguistics, Studies in English Language Learning

In Fall 2023, I will enroll at the Georgia Institute of Technology Ph.D. Program in Engineering Psychology with a fellowship from the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

2020

Micaela Tierce, International Relations

I was recently admitted into the Master of Social Work program at the University of Kentucky! I'm currently serving at Montgomery Army Recruiting Battalion where I recently transitioned from Company Executive Officer to BN S-3. I will be transitioning into the Army Reserves in 2024.

Hannah Coltrain, Biology

Since graduating in 2019 with my major in Biology and minor in Criminal Forensics, I have attended graduate school at Wayne State University in Detroit, MI. Having just completed my Master's of Science in the Pathologists' Assistant (PA) Program, I will be working as a Forensic PA at the Dekalb County Medical Examiner's Office in Decatur, GA. I am excited for my future forensic career and to serve the medicolegal death investigative efforts around Atlanta!

2019

Woody Depew, Environmental and Spatial Analysis

Woody Depew has been hired as faculty to start in Fall 2023 at Georgia State University's, School of Film, Media, and Theatre as an Academic Professional: Theatre and Opera Production Manager/Technical Director. He brings 30 years of professional construction experience, design skills, and a Bachelor's in

2018

ALUMNI UPDATES

Woody Depew, con't.

Environmental and Spatial Analysis to GSU to build, manage, and design theatre productions for Atlanta City Theatre and the School of Music's Opera. He will manage the Dalhberg Theatre as well as teach Stagecraft courses. Over the last year, he has established a familiarity with the GSU theatre program, assisting in the theater and building sets for "Sweat" by Lynn Nottage and the Give Back Series, "You are Not Alone."



2018

Rachel Glazer, Psychology

Rachel, her partner, Sam, and their two cats recently made the move to Charlotte, NC for Rachel's new job as the Assistant Director of Youth Education and Engagement at Temple Beth El. As part of her new position, she will also be returning to URJ Camp Coleman in Cleveland, GA this summer as the Assistant Art Director, overseeing arts & crafts, ceramics, metalworking, Jewish cooking, and more.

2017

ALUMNI UPDATES

2017

Mitchell Farris, International Affairs

I'm thrilled to say that I graduated in May 2022 from Georgetown University's Master of Arts in German and European Studies Program. After temporarily working at Georgetown after graduation, I recently accepted a position at the General Services Administration (GSA) through the Presidential Management Fellowship. I am currently living in the Pentagon City area of Arlington, Virginia.

2016

Kaylee Todd, Chemistry

I have transitioned to the lab manager of the chemistry department where I fight entropy on a daily basis to ensure that teaching labs run smoothly and supply rooms are stocked. Also this fall, I dove into the world of apples at Aaron Family Orchards in Ellijay - I highly recommend adding it to your fall festivities next year!



Douglas Harden, MAIA

I have been promoted to the position of Export Control Analyst with the Defense Technology Security Administration in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

2015

Joshua McCausland, Biology/Chemistry

In the last update, I was writing my thesis and wrapping up my degree. Since then, I graduated from Hopkins with a PhD in biophysics in July, and now am a postdoctoral research fellow at Stanford studying microbiology. I'm mostly settled in the area now and meeting new people. Research is going very well!

ALUMNI UPDATES

Lacie Warren Laramore, Political Science & French

Moved to San Antonio, Texas and got married in 2021 to husband Andrew Laramore (that dang Aggie). Recently just had our first babies (twins! a boy and a girl, named John and Eleanor), in September 2022. Still working for CACI as a contractor for the Navy supporting engineering and technical service contracts for the Naval Surface Warfare Center Carderock Division and Military Sealift Command.



2015

Jordan Ragland, Middle Grades Ed/Psychology

After 7 years in the 8th grade classroom, I started the 2022-2023 school year as the Librarian/Media Specialist at West Hall High School in Oakwood, GA! I've completed my M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction (2017) and Ed.S. in Instructional Technology (2021). My husband and I will celebrate our 7 year wedding anniversary in October, and we serve in youth ministry at our church.

Jennifer Ward, Biology

I got married on October 1, 2022 to my husband Tyler after 5 years together. We just bought our first house in April!



ALUMNI UPDATES

2014

Katherine Jones, Chinese Language and Literature

Living my dream of being a hermit in the woods as of last June with (currently) two cats and a ball python, plus all the wildlife. Been enjoying working remotely as a web developer for two years now. My partner and I recently celebrated our 4th anniversary.



2012

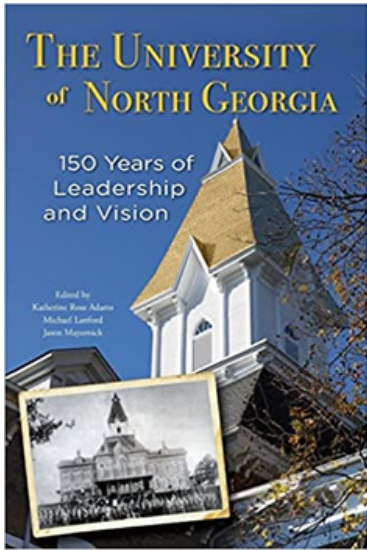
Faith Valentine, ECE/SPED

I am glad to share that I am now working at UNG as the administrative assistant for the Math Department on the Gainesville Campus.

2008

Kelly Reed, English w/Secondary Education, French

I recently accepted a new position as a Senior Staff Attorney with the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings where I provide legal support to approximately 100 administrative law judges and serve as a subject matter expert for the educational law, child abuse and neglect, foreclosure, veteran affairs, and civil rights areas of review. I also conduct special education, patient rights, and foreclosure mediations. We welcomed our son, Declan, this past July, which makes us a happy family of four. Katie Rose is a proud big sister. My husband, Collin, and I celebrated our eighth wedding anniversary this last March. Our goal this year is to take more trips back "home" to Georgia, and hopefully visit Dahlonega soon!



Check out the chapter on the UNG Honors Program in the newly printed *The University of North Georgia: 150 Years of Leadership and Vision*, co-authored by Amy Burger, Royce Dansby-Sparks, Danielle Hartsfield, and Steve Smith

#UNGL*leads*

GEORGIA COLLEGIATE HONORS
CONFERENCE IS COMING TO UNG
FEBRUARY 23-24, 2024



Let's keep in touch!

Did you relocate? Change your email address? Exciting new updates?

We would love to know it all!

Scan the QR code to update your contact information and/or update us on where you are and what you're doing!



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