



THE ROUND TABLE

THE HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

UNG
UNIVERSITY of
NORTH GEORGIA™
HONORS PROGRAM



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UNG Honors Takes Tech: GCHC 2025

Nearly 30 UNG Honors Program students participated in the 2025 Georgia Collegiate Honors Conference (GCHC) at Georgia Tech—the university’s largest delegation to date. First-year through Senior students from both campuses treated GCHC attendees to a range of excellent research from a variety of disciplines.

Among them was Sophomore biology major **Shabnam Rezai**, who highlighted how the experience deepened her understanding of undergraduate research and its real-world impact: “I learned the applications of the work we do during our undergrad, and how it's students like us who continue to push science and the arts forward”. She credited the Honors Program’s strong support in preparing students for success with “consistent support throughout the entire process” and equipped her with “valuable lessons and skills that I will take with me”.

Notably, first-year cybersecurity major **Dagen Shehorn** earned second place in the Engineering and Computer Science Essay Contest for her research, “Cars are Just Computers that Happen to Drive,” which explored cybersecurity vulnerabilities in modern vehicles. Shehorn said “This project combined my passion for cybersecurity with my hobby of car repair.” **Dr. Tyler Harrison**, Director of Honors (DAH), praised Shehorn’s achievement as “a testament to her talent.” After the conference, the students all headed to the Georgia Aquarium to relax and decompress!



“Our Honors students dazzled at this year's GCHC, delivering impactful research projects with enthusiasm and professionalism. I was particularly impressed by their ability to convey discipline-specific projects to general audiences in poster sessions and confidently field difficult questions in panel Q&As.”

Dr. Valerie Surrett,
Assistant Director
GVL

A Walk in the Woods:

GAINESVILLE HONORS STUDENTS PARTNER WITH OUTDOOR PURSUITS

**by *Kaitlyn King*, Honors Program
Leadership Team - Gainesville**

The hike at Amicalola Falls was such a fun and refreshing event, especially since it was something new for the Honors Program. The students who attended had a great time encouraging one another to keep going up the many stairs, and the shared challenge helped us grow closer as a group. It was a great opportunity to spend the day off-campus, relax, and connect with other honors students in a more casual and meaningful way.

Working with Outdoor Pursuits was truly a blessing. As Honors student leaders, we had a clear vision for the event but weren't sure how to bring it to life. Without the support of OP, this hike wouldn't have been possible.

I met with Nic Klinge, the OP director, several times beforehand to discuss the best time and location to maximize student engagement. He also arranged for three staff members to join us on the hike, one of whom had wilderness safety certifications—which was especially reassuring. I highly recommend that anyone at UNG planning an outdoor event reach out to Outdoor Pursuits for guidance and support!



**INTREPID HONORS HIKERS
AT AMICALOLA**



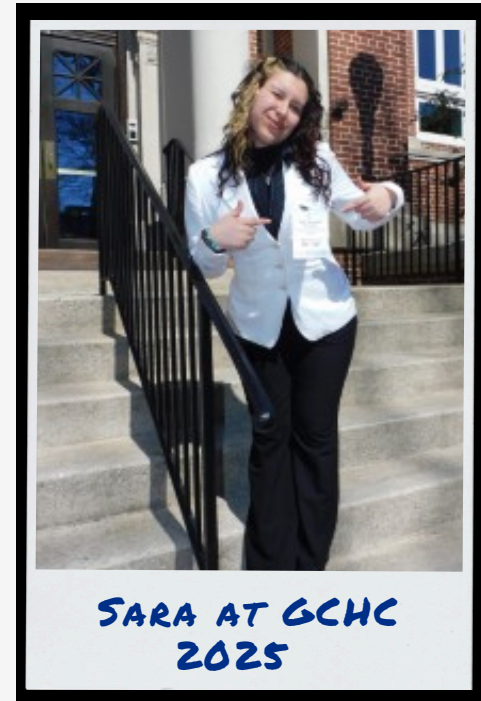
Leading Beyond the Classroom: Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez

Active in the Honors Program, Student Government Association (SGA), Language Lab, and the Presidential Ambassador Program, Sara served as Senator for International Students her freshman year and Vice President of the Dahlonega campus for the next two. She began tutoring French in 2023 and became a Presidential Ambassador in 2024. We caught up to hear more about how Sara finds time to lead while completing a dual major degrees in International Affairs and French in just three years.

“UNG is where I found belonging,” she shared. “It gave me leadership experience, lifelong friendships, and a true sense of community.” Sara credits the Honors Program for fostering her academic ambition and connecting her to supportive peers and faculty. She says nearly every opportunity she’s had stems from her Honors involvement.

As she prepares for life after graduation, Sara is exploring several exciting opportunities: she is currently an Alternate for the Fulbright in Spain, she has applied to a master’s program at Sciences Po in Paris, and has already been accepted into Georgia Tech’s graduate program.

What she’ll miss most? “The people,” she said. “My friends, professors, coworkers—and the beauty of campus through every season.”



“Get involved. That’s how you find your people and make the most of everything UNG has to offer. The Honors Program really helped and encouraged me to feel an integral part of UNG! I couldn’t have achieved as much as I did in these 3 years without the support of the program.”

Research with the Cornhuskers: HAILEY PRUITT

Chemistry major Hailey Pruitt spent summer 2024 completing a Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. We caught up with Hailey to learn more about her experience and her motivation.

How did you go from UNG to Nebraska?

As a transfer student into UNG, I joined Honors because I wanted to get involved in research and was interested in the thesis option. In summer 2024, I applied and was accepted to conduct research in electrochemical aptamer-based biosensors in Dr. Rebecca Lai's lab at University of Nebraska – Lincoln. UNG's Nationally Competitive Scholarship Office was a huge support in helping me find and prepare for this opportunity, as were Dr. Quarles and Dr. Hollabaugh, who I had begun research with in UNG's Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry the semester leading up to the REU. At Nebraska, I learned fundamental skills in research design and data analysis alongside laboratory work that I have brought into my current research.

What takeaways do you have from the REU experience?

My experience at the REU has definitely left me with a positive view of research and has encouraged me to continue it in my future studies and career! REUs are great opportunities, and I'd encourage students to apply to many different programs at any point in their undergrad career, as it is an exciting chance to learn something new! For students headed to grad school after college, it's also a chance to experience academia and see what you can expect from a PhD program at an R1 school while making connections with other research-focused students.

How has Honors impacted you?

Currently, I serve on Honors leadership at Gainesville and for the past two semesters have been working on my thesis project. As an Honors student, I have had the opportunity to work closely with many different faculty members through course upgrades, and it was actually from an upgrade project that I found the idea for my thesis. My project aims to design a small-molecule drug to inhibit the activity of an enzyme known as PAD4, which has been shown to be overactive in some cases of rheumatoid arthritis. My research integrates the fields of organic synthesis, biochemistry, and medicine and will apply both experimental and computational simulations to evaluate potential inhibitors. I am very thankful for the support from the Honors program for my work, both in obtaining the resources to carry it out and in the opportunity to present it and collaborate with other Honors students at conferences such as GCHC.



HAILEY DURING HER TIME AS
A "HUSKER" IN NEBRASKA

2025 Academic Recognition Day Scholar: Katie Foodman

Every year, the University of North Georgia selects just one student from across its 5 campuses to represent UNG as the University System of Georgia's Academic Recognition Day Scholar. This year, spring 2025 Honors graduate - and multi-talent - **Katie Foodman** was chosen. Katie is a Finance major who served as both the president of Beta Gamma Sigma and the Chief Portfolio manager in the UNG Student Investment Club. Katie's academic inquiry was not limited to Finance, however; Katie was also a founding member and officer of UNG robotics as well as a Learning Assistant in Physics and a Telescope Operator for the UNG Astronomy program.



Katie is the 5th Honors Program student to be named UNG's Academic Recognition Day Scholar in the past 10 years. She joins alumni Haley Menees ('24), Kat Torres ('21), Caroline Brown ('19) and Jennifer Hightower ('16)

I had the privilege of accompanying Katie to the Georgia Capitol the day after her graduation, where she received a commendation from the USG Chancellor and a resolution signed by the Georgia Assembly. I also asked her a few questions about her many interests and successes:

Q: Why did you choose Honors?

A: I wanted to be part of a community of students who were intellectually curious and supportive who, like me, were excited to learn. The Honors Program gave me a close-knit, interdisciplinary network that made walking around campus feel more like home. It was a place where I could always find encouragement, collaboration, and have built lifelong friendships.



2025 Academic Recognition Day Scholar: Katie Foodman

Q: Most students focus on one field or at least one college. You majored in Finance, but you also spent a lot of time working with Physics, Astronomy, and Robotics — tell us how your diverse interests came about.

A: Since I was a child, I've always had a curiosity about space, which led me to explore Physics, Astronomy, and Robotics. So, when I started college at UNG, I declared a dual engineering and astrophysics major. However, I found myself equally drawn to Finance and Economics. I kept an avid eye on the macroeconomic conditions and stock market. While they may seem completely unrelated at first, both fields are grounded in mathematical thinking and require abstract, forward-looking problem solving. I ultimately chose to pursue Finance professionally because I find immense fulfillment in helping individuals reach their personal and financial goals - something I can do as a financial planner. Still, my background and experience working in Physics has shaped the way I approach complex financial issues.

Q: What's your favorite UNG or Honors memory?

A: One of my favorite Honors memories is volunteering to wrap gifts during the holidays each year. It was incredibly fulfilling to give back to the community that has supported me so much. I loved seeing students and professors come together outside of class to make a difference. This never failed to remind me of how special and interconnected the UNG community truly is.

Q: What's next for the amazing Katie Foodman?

A: I'll be joining Homrich Berg Wealth Management as an Associate Financial Planner. HB is the 11th largest registered investment advisor in the U.S. by assets under management. I previously interned with the firm, and I absolutely loved the experience. I'm thrilled to be returning in June and begin this next chapter in a career I'm truly passionate about.



KATIE WITH CHANCELLOR SONNY PERDUE AT THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA OFFICE

Q&A

Public Service Weekend Awardee: Claudia Marban

Q: Tell us about the Public Policy and International Affairs (PPIA) Program you were recently selected to be a part of.

A: The PPIA Program held a Public Service Weekend at George Mason University. The program focused on International Security, exploring how to address the world's complex security issues and connecting academic insights with practical applications.

Q: What were the most interesting facets of the program?

A: The program featured keynote speakers like Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley, former U.S. Ambassador to Malta, who shared her experience as the first woman to lead a diplomatic mission in Saudi Arabia, and Ben, Director of Defense Policy at the National Security Council, who discussed the Department of Defense's history and mission. There was a fast-paced crisis simulation where multiple government organizations had to collaborate and quickly provide recommendations to the president regarding a potential crisis involving Russian missiles in Venezuela.

Q: What did you learn? Any key takeaways?

A: I learned to take up space, give myself grace, and embrace mistakes. I realized that you can't criticize what you don't understand, and that transparency, accountability, and effective management are essential for success.

Q: Did any new avenues open up for you?

A: Hearing from the keynote speakers, especially those with diplomatic and defense backgrounds, was motivating. Their stories made me think about the possibilities of working abroad and gaining new perspectives, especially in international relations and public service.

Q: How did the event impact your future plans?

A: Meeting students from different universities, including some with roles at the State Department, made me think about the wide range of possibilities for my future career, especially in public service and international affairs.



Public Policy &
International Affairs
Program



Echoes of Excellence:

In April 2024, Honors alumnus and current UNG Alumni Relations Officer Jared Patterson ('14) attended the 2025 Honors Medallion Ceremony to celebrate 2024 graduate Sarah Miller. We caught up with Jared to hear more about what it was like returning to the graduation ceremony after 10+ years.

Tell us about the experience of returning to a Medallion Ceremony as an Alumni

The medallion ceremony was neat! I still have mine at home and didn't have the foresight to bring it with me. The ceremony admittedly made me feel old; eleven years goes by way too quickly. It is still amazing to see what UNG students have done, are doing, and what they will continue to do. Sarah is no exception!

Speaking of Sarah, how did you get to know her?

I got to know Sarah through our church, The Branch, here in Dahlonega. My wife and I opened our home for small group Bible study in Fall 2023 to college students, and Sarah was one of the ones who accepted. We've gotten to know Sarah well over the past two years, and she has been a dedicated student, friend, and babysitter for us on occasion!

What is your current role at UNG?

I serve as an Alumni Relations Officer for Young Alumni with UNG Alumni Relations. I supervise our Young Alumni Board, and I am in charge of all Young Alumni programming, including the UNG 20 Under 40 program. I always help the UNG Honors Program where I can, as so many of the students and alumni I interact with are products of UNG Honors.

Let's dig deep - what is your favorite Honors memory?

Dr. Stephen Smith took us on a whitewater rafting trip on the Ocoee my freshman year. Though it was close to my hometown, I had never been rafting. I don't think I plan to do it again, but it was a blast and wouldn't change it for the world.



JARED AND THE WHOLE FAMILY CELEBRATE WITH SARAH



THE INFAMOUS 2010 WHITEWATER TRIP

KUDOS & CONFERENCES

GCHC Podium Presentations:

- *Self-Analysis in Career Exploration*, Brecklen Pavlich
- *The Forgotten Victims: A Comparison of Militarized Rape by the Japanese and Soviet Forces During WWII*, Brianna Litz
- *Refugees in Europe: A Constructivist Perspective*, Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez
- *Educational Censorship and Christian Conservatism*, Alexandra Soto

GCHC Poster Presentations:

- *Deadly to Diminished*, Paige Alexander, Teagan Lamp, Jack Dougherty
- *Finding, Isolating, and Purifying the Bacteriophage Joyful*, Emma Boyen
- *Appalachian Resident's Inaccessibility to Hospitals*, Lavender Bumgarner, Emma Goss, Emma Pittman
- *Basics Of Raising a Bacteriophage*, Gabrielle Grogan
- *Using Machine-Learning Techniques in R to Uncover Variables Related to Overdoses*, Hanzhen Guo
- *Exploring the Factors Behind Disappearances in the Southern Appalachian Mountains*, Jordan Lindsey
- *Polarized Culture: How Polarization Has Abated Cultural Voting Practices*, Sophia Magana
- *Exploring the Restorative Justice Model on College Campuses*, Claudia Marban
- *Slow but Steady: The European Commission's Goals for Achieving Gender Equality*, Aidan Pavlich, Emilyn Slemons
- *Design and Investigation of Selective Small Molecule Inhibitors for Peptidylarginine Deiminase 4 in the Context of Rheumatoid Arthritis*, Hailey Pruitt
- *Uncovering the Secrets of Living Longer and Healthier Lives*, Emma Reece
- *Copy Number Variations in AKAP11 In Patients Diagnosed With BD-I*, Shabnam Rezai
- *The Kentucky Fugates*, Natalee Schiffhauer, Madelyne Tanner
- *Cars are Just Computers that Happen to Drive: Exploring ECU Exploitation Utilizing Cybersecurity Tactics*, Dagen Shehorn
- *Genome Sequence and Annotation of Arthrobacter Globiformis Phage Ruchi (AS1) from Dahlonega, GA*, Brooke Tatum
- *The Nazi Twin Studies: An Ethical Nightmare*, Emma Wilson, Mak Levine

SRHC Presentations:

- *Basics Of Raising A Bacteriophage*, Gabrielle Grogan
- *The story of Two Passages through Mammoth Cave*, Kaitlyn King
- *Investigating the Use of Metacognitive Regulation Strategies in Reading Primary Scientific Literature*, Sarah Miller
- *Polarized Culture: How Polarization Has Abated Cultural Voting Practices*, Sophia Magana

AWARDS & HONORS

National Awards:

- Claudia Marban - Public Policy and International Affairs Junior Summer Institute
- Nevaeh Owen - Gilman Scholarship
- Autumn Sniffen - Boren Scholarship, Phi Kappa Phi Study Abroad Scholarship
- Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez - Alternate, Fulbright ETA to Spain
- Jessie Zinn- Alternate, Fulbright ETA to Bulgaria
- Albany Zavarce Angulo - STEMNetX 2025 Fellowship Program

UNG Campus-Wide Awards:

- East Asian Studies Outstanding Student Award: Autumn Cleymans
- Most Promising Student in Intermediate Language Awards: Brianna Litz
- Chinese Flagship Excellence Award: Autumn Sniffen
- Rising Musician Award: Sofia Perez
- Outstanding Student Award of Psychology: Mary Kellen Beck
- Mac Callaham Scholarship: Emma Wilson
- Finance Excellence Award: Katherine Foodman
- Bryan L. Redd Jr. Leadership Award: Angela Ayala
- Ben W. Sanders Award: Alyssa Pold
- Rachel Ford Springer Award: Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez
- Academic Recognition Day Scholar: Katherine Foodman
- Outstanding Psychological Science Student Award: Melissa Brown
- Psychological Science Student Award: Laraib Ranjha
- Mary and Ed Mayhew Outstanding Biology Senior Award - Hasten Veal
- Most Outstanding Honors Student: Hasten Veal
- Clark Theodore Outstanding Traditional Student: Claudia Marban

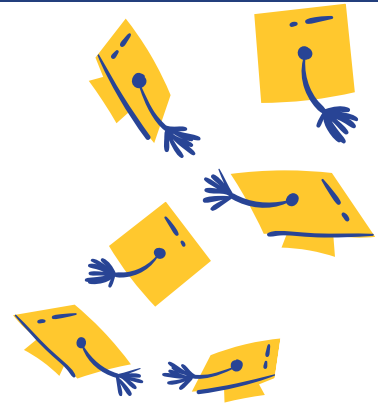
Summer Research Awards:

- Micah Chandler- National Science Foundation REU: Computational Math and Data Science at Emory University
- Emma Wilson - Fulbright Canada-Mitacs Globalink Research Internship: Health Sciences at University of Regina (Saskatchewan)

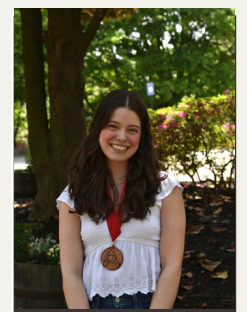
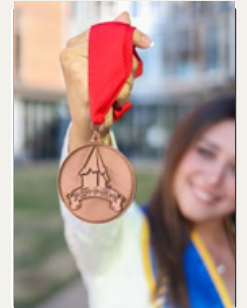
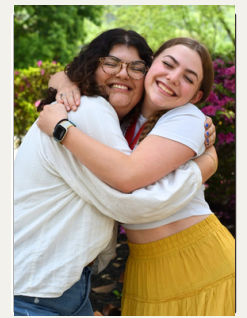


Congrats

2024-2025 GRADUATES



- Angela Ayala, Biology
- Oneika Bigby, Biology
- Melissa Brown, Psychology (minor in Neuroscience)
- Ashleigh Carroll, Chemistry
- Ava Clavijo, Kinesiology with an Exercise Science Concentration
- Scott Fitzgerald, Cybersecurity
- Laura Kate Gleaton, Biology
- Katie Foodman, Finance
- Destani Fountain, Cybersecurity with a Computer Science minor
- Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez, International Affairs & French
- Wolf Helm, Computer Science & Cybersecurity
- Haley Menees, Biology & Chemistry with minors in Spanish and Business
- Hannah Menees, Biology & Chemistry with minors in Spanish and Business
- Mary Kellen Beck, Psychology
- Jacob Maddox, Secondary Education/Chemistry
- Sara Miller, Biology with minors in English and Psychology
- Audrey Nesbit, Biology with a minor in Chemistry
- Alyssa Pold, Biology
- Laraib Ranjha, Psychology with a minor in Neuroscience
- Hasten Veal, Biology



SAVE THE DATE

HONORS PROGRAM 30TH ANNIVERSARY



Saturday, October 18
(Gold Rush Weekend)



7 PM - 10 PM



Dining Hall Banquet
Room: 345 W. Main St,
Dahlonega, GA

**SUPPORTED BY THE
HONORS ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Questions? Contact Lillie Holtzclaw: honors@ung.edu

ALUMNI UPDATES

2018

Megan Box, Early Childhood Education

In two weeks I will graduate with my Bachelor's in Educational Studies from Kansas State University, focusing on elementary and special education. My capstone internship has led to a part-time job tutoring through Oconee Learning Center and Academy. My dream is to lead a SPED program in a private Christian school. I currently reside in Athens with my husband and our 3-year-old twin girls!

2018

Charlotte McDonnold, Studio Art/Photography

On May 9th, the love of my life asked me to marry him. His sister, also a UNG graduate, captured our moment beautifully at the beach.



2017

Madison Rodriguez, Psychology/Minor in Leadership in Society

I matched for internship at the Milton Hershey School and will be moving to Hershey, PA. I am set to graduate with my PhD in December 2026!

ALUMNI UPDATES

Joanna Keeler, Writing & Publication \ Graphic Design

Joanna is celebrating her first wedding anniversary this year, her third anniversary as a content specialist at GreenStar Marketing, and her fifth anniversary as an audacious seamstress, prop maker, and (if she can time it right) gardener. She and her husband Brian reside in Smyrna, GA where they host a weekly D&D game, tackle various virtual and physical DIY projects, and plan out their next big adventure. Currently, the priority is National Parks, but that could change at any moment. Joanna's also attempting to make headway on a book of short stories (and a novel) as most English graduates do. Hopefully, this is the year she finishes one!

2016

Heather (Perona) Ragland, Biology

I graduated from Emory University's PA program in December 2020 and worked in Atlanta for a year prior to moving to Gainesville and working for NGHS. I married Cameron Ragland on 10/21/2023 and we were fortunate enough to become homeowners in December 2024. We celebrated our anniversary/honeymoon by hiking through Olympic and Mt. Rainier National Parks in October 2024, and we try to get outside and hike whenever we have a free day (whenever we're not working or fixing up the house).

Other than hiking and working on the house, we enjoy hanging out with our two fat cats - Chichi and June Bug.



2016

ALUMNI UPDATES

2015

Lacie Laramore, Political Science/French

Began this year as Lead Program Analyst with CACI on the NavalX contract, which provides engineering/scientific and technology information, materials, equipment, and other support to the US Navy.

Enjoying the Alamo city (San Antonio) with husband, Andrew, twin 3 year olds Eleanor and John, and baby #3 due in June.

2015

Amy Rogers, English/History

I recently moved to Wilmington, NC and bought a house with my partner Cam. We're loving life 15 minutes from the beach!

I am also several months into a new job at Laurel Strategies, a CEO advisory firm that helps CEOs and presidents of leading global companies navigate the uncertainty of today's geopolitical landscape.



2012

Katie (Pinkerton) Kerr, Biology

Katie and Alex now have three kids (6, 3, and baby)! Thomas, Sarah, and Evelyn are enjoying homeschool, violin, and soccer in North Augusta, South Carolina. All five are also enjoying Dad's civilian job at Fort Eisenhower, which will not require cross-country moves or deployments. This year, the homebodies are looking forward to owning their first chickens and making a beautiful, non-smelly compost pile. Come visit!

ALUMNI UPDATES

2008**Adam Thompson,
Mathematics & Leadership**

My wife, Kayla, and I welcomed our daughter Sadie on Christmas Eve. I was also promoted to Lieutenant Colonel in August.

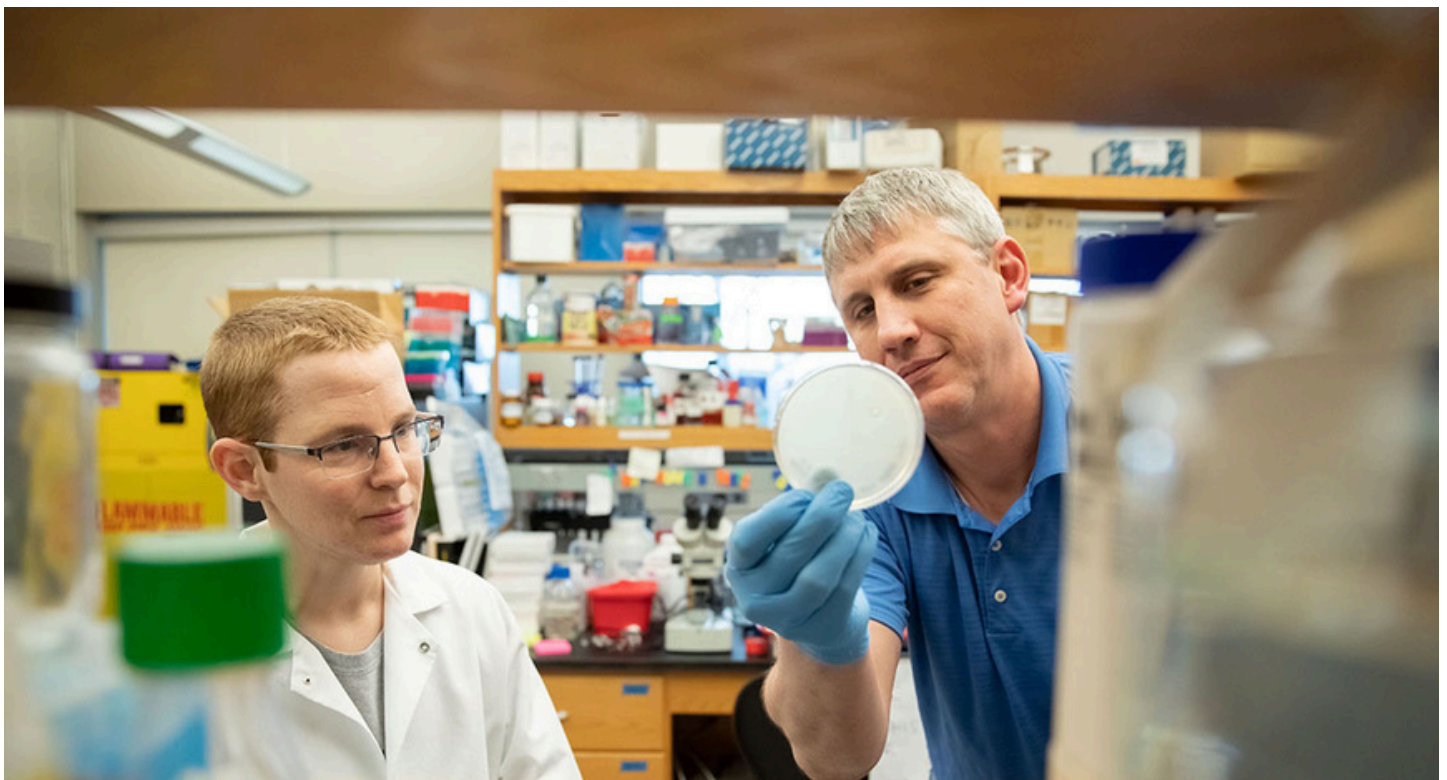
2007**Lauren Petro,
Psychology/Criminal Justice**

My professional life has recently been booming! I opened my own mental health private practice (Holly Counseling) in November 2023 and we have quickly expanded to include 5 clinicians. We are excited to start the next chapter of the practice and contribute to the next generation of mental health counselors by bringing on 2 new interns later this month. I am a trauma specialist doing EMDR therapy and hope to pursue credentialing as a counselor supervisor next year.

Personally I have 2 children, a 12 year old daughter and 8 year old son. We live in Augusta, Ga with my husband who serves in the Army at Fort Eisenhower.

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