



# SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

## Greetings, Friends of PSIA ~

Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of the UNG Political Science & International Affairs Newsletter!

Our #PSIAfamily has been busy since the Fall edition. In the coming pages you will get a flavor of what our students, alumni and faculty are up to and have achieved the past several months. For even more articles about our #PSIAfamily, visit [PSIA News](#) which is part of the [PSIA home page](#); there you can keep up-to-date on all that is happening with our extended family, as well as to find past articles and all previous Newsletters.

I want to once more extend a special "Thank You" to all who generously have given to our Dr. Barry B. Friedman scholarship fund. Your generosity assisted Fadi Ghazal, a Political Science major on the UNG-Gainesville campus, in pursuing his degree program (see the article in the Student News section of the Newsletter)... along with all previous recipients of the scholarship! Please consider making a gift to the FRIEDMAN SCHOLARSHIP FUND today so we can continue to assist future PSIA students in their academic and vocational preparation (see the Final Notes section of the Newsletter for information on how to donate).

We welcome the opportunity to include YOUR activities and accomplishments in a future issue of the PSIA Newsletter! Please get in touch with us by filling out our [ALUMNI INFORMATION FORM](#) or by simply dropping us an e-mail at [PSIA@UNG.EDU](mailto:PSIA@UNG.EDU). We look forward to hearing from you!

Enjoy getting caught up on some of the activity of our #PSIAfamily!

Dr. Craig Greathouse  
Department Head

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## Meet Thomas Vella (Strategic & Security Studies, '21): National Security in the Private Sector

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

In 2021, Thomas Vella was one of the early graduates of UNG's Strategic and Security Studies Program with a concentration in International Affairs and a minor in Arabic. While a student, Thomas's time with the PSIA Department led him to study abroad in Oman and take part in the esteemed Alexander Hamilton Institute's Washington Program on National Security. As an alumnus, he is employed in the private sector of national security as a Booz Allen Hamilton wargaming analyst.

Thomas's pathway to his current career was not straight and required diligence and perseverance. It all started when he landed an internship that brought him to Washington, D.C., giving Thomas a glimpse of life in the national security field. After taking a few positions not strictly national security focused, Thomas received his "first mini break, if you will, getting a job as an open-source intelligence analyst, which introduced me to the intelligence community and the intelligence cycle."



Thomas Vella,  
Strategic & Security Studies  
Graduate 2021

With many doors opened, Thomas landed his current job at Booz Allen Hamilton where he supports the United States' Department of War. When describing his position, Thomas shares: "The U.S. Military faces a wide range of strategic and analytical challenges constantly due to the nature of the work and some of these questions can be answered through a war game. My team helps design and conduct those war games to support analysis and leadership decision making."

Often national security is associated with the public sector, but Thomas informs how there are great opportunities for students in the private sector that can be "more insulated from the changes in government, like political leadership. They're a little less affected by changes in administration that might change priorities and funding." Thomas assures that there are contracting positions for "pretty much any opportunity you think might be just available to government employees."



## Meet Thomas Vella (continued)

Thomas's time at UNG and with the PSIA Department helped prepare him for his accomplished career. Notably, Thomas recalls how "my writing and analytical skills improved greatly within the program. I have many fond memories of working with Dr. Beall and Dr. Hightower to help strengthen my writing." Thomas shares how UNG's Strategic and Security Studies Program helps "train students to consume very large amounts of information quickly and turn it into clear actionable products, which is a skill that will transfer directly into national security. It also provides a very strong kind of foundational understanding of strategy, operations, and military history, which is incredibly valuable." Even as a civilian, UNG provided Thomas with exposure to the U.S. military, seen as highly beneficial within the national security field as "even those little tidbits of contextual information helps. Being able to say, I went to a strategic security studies program at a senior military college gives it a little more validity and weight that I recommend students kind of weigh in on."

For students interested in working in national security to make the most of their time at UNG, Thomas has three points of wisdom he wishes he would have known before he graduated. First, he wishes he would have known to start strategically building up notable skills for entry-level positions. "I recommend that you try to find opportunities, even if it's not national security related, that allows you to claim that you're working on your communication skills, leadership skills, and applicable skills, to help you get that first job."

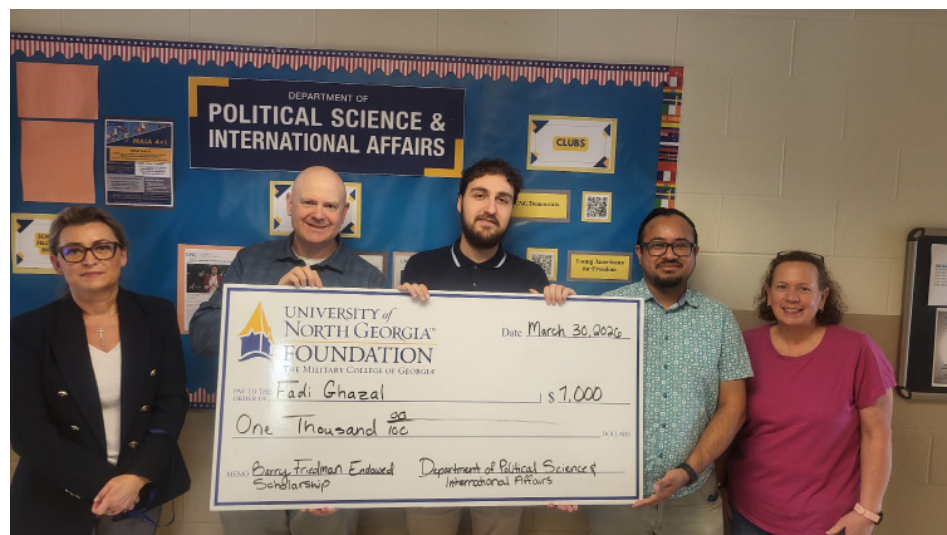


Secondly, Thomas shares how it is "much easier to get a security clearance as a student" and pursuing an internship or opportunity that will sponsor clearance can be a valuable career-building experience.

Last, Thomas encourages students to recognize the value of networking and to build their connections as "reaching out to people via LinkedIn or your fellow alumni or maybe even professors and just building that network while you can, will help you kind of speed up your career."

Overall, Thomas Vella imparts how "working as a contractor in national security has been incredibly rewarding, and I encourage every student who is interested in national security to go pursue it."

## Fadi Ghazal Awarded Barry Friedman Scholarship



Fadi Ghazal, center, receives the Barry Friedman Scholarship surrounded by PSIA faculty.

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

The Dr. Barry Friedman Scholarship in Political Science & International Affairs for the 2026-2027 Academic Year has been awarded to Fadi Ghazal who is pursuing a degree in Political Science on UNG's Gainesville campus. Ghazal continues in the footsteps of the scholarship's three past esteemed recipients: Victoria Landa (International Affairs '24), Fatima Santillan (PS/Pre-Law '25), and Jordan Barrocas (Strategic & Security Studies '26).

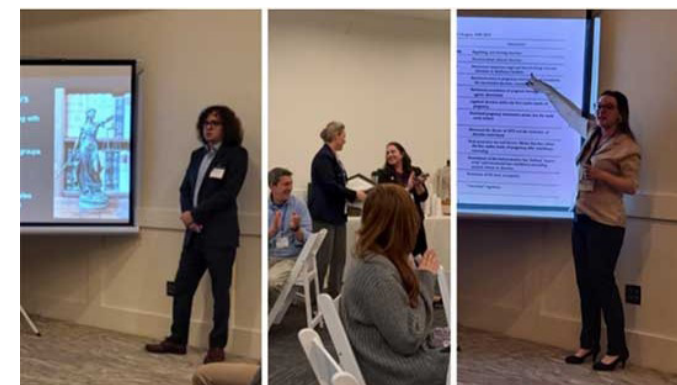
PSIA Associate Department Head Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller shared that Ghazal "impressed the selection committee with his commitment to his education, to our department and the drive to succeed in the future".

Ghazal stated the PSIA Department has been vital in helping him succeed and thrive: "Professors like Dr. Chand, Dr. Wilson, and Dr. Wilk have motivated me and given me insight into the Political Science field. They have been incredibly supportive."

Ghazal plans on using the scholarship "to assist with fees, books, and costs associated with tuition" so that he can continue to focus on his studies and future ambitions post-graduation in 2027. Looking toward the future, he shares: "my goal right now is law school; I'm pretty set on trying to get into one. My professors have been great at sending me resources and properly educating me on law school".

The \$1,000 grant is one way the PSIA Department aims to care for its students who work and study diligently, making their education more affordable. The Department is thrilled to provide this award to Fadi Ghazal and extends its sincere thanks to all those who have contributed thus far to the Barry Friedman Scholarship fund!

## Building Student Leaders at GPSA



Eli Polk, left;  
Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller, center;  
and Olivia Holm, right

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

Members of UNG's Political Science & International Affairs Department joined other leaders and professionals in the field for the 57th Georgia Political Science Association (GPSA) Annual Conference on November 5th-7th in St. Simons, Georgia. The GPSA conference places students in contact with professionals in the field while allowing them to make strides in their careers through showcasing their own research. In 2025, seven accomplished students and twelve faculty members represented UNG as GPSA explored the theme of "Democracy in Transition." They follow the long-standing tradition of the department to participate in this distinguished regional conference each year.

During the conference, Dr. Miner and five PSIA students (Alison Freligh, Sheila Ganley, Sara Gonzalez, and Meg Kelham) presented on the Trump administration's foreign policy decision-making. During Dr. Miner's International Affairs Capstone course in the spring of 2025, his students performed the initial research and afterwards discussed, analyzed, and compared findings and conclusions to prepare for GPSA. Dr. Miner shares that: "While individually each is an excellent writer and speaker in an academic context, this was a valuable opportunity to collaborate by comparing our five different case studies in order to assess patterns in the foreign policy making of the current Trump administration".

Associate Department Head Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller was not only featured on multiple panels, with her fellow faculty members, but also received the James T. LaPlant Award for her excellence in teaching and mentoring.

Dr. Viman-Miller is no stranger to helping students reach their full potential, whether within her classroom or outside through prestigious opportunities, like GPSA. Continuing her history of coaching students toward success at the conference, she mentored Eli Polk and Olivia Holm to share their undergraduate research at GPSA's esteemed and selective Pajari Panel. Dr. Viman-Miller says that she believes in "the power of mentoring students to participate in professional conferences which enhances their research skills, expands their academic networks, and fosters early professional socialization within the scholarly community".

## Students Shine at Model UN Conference

Condensed & adapted from article written by Clark Leonard, UNG Director of News & Communications

UNG's Model UN team, a combination of students in a Political Science course by the same name and student clubs on UNG's Dahlonega and Gainesville campuses, won five awards at the Southern Regional Model United Nations (SRMUN) Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, in November 2025; awards included Outstanding Position Paper Award for the Philippines; Outstanding Position Paper Award for Bangladesh; Best Position Paper Award in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for Bangladesh; Best Delegate in the General Assembly Plenary for the Philippines; and Honorable Mention for Italy.

The conference offered a valuable growth opportunity for the students.

Gabrielle Weir, a senior pursuing the B.S. Political Science/Pre-Law, was in her second competitive Model UN event after taking part in UNG's on-campus competition in Spring 2025.

"I really enjoyed the research portion," Weir said. "That's something I've always been interested in."

Sofia Quiros, a junior pursuing the B.S. Political Science, served as head delegate for the Philippines at SRMUN. Her goal is to earn a Master of Arts in International Affairs and also complete a juris doctor degree. She appreciated the hands-on nature of the competition.

"It's a great opportunity for students to improve their skills while also making friends along the way," she said.

Phoenix Rabe, a sophomore also pursuing the B.S. in Political Science, who learned about the Model UN competition from PSIA faculty member Dr. Bibek Chand on the first day of class in the fall, is grateful for how UNG is shaping him.

"I'm getting out there in politics so I can build my resume," Rabe said. "All of these opportunities propel me toward a career in politics in ways that I didn't understand beforehand."

Jordan Strecker, a sophomore pursuing the B.A. in International Affairs with a European concentration, examined how to bring food into war-torn areas without impacting sovereignty in his SRMUN work representing Italy.

"The competition helped me get more familiar with international affairs," Strecker said.



UNG students / PSIA Political Science majors Ivania Fuentes and Haniya Rizwan won Best Position Paper Award in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for Bangladesh.

## Model UN Conference (continued)

Ivania Fuentes, a junior pursuing the B.S. Political Science, said Model UN, his coursework and mentorship from PSIA faculty member Dr. Jon Miner are putting him on the path to law school.

"UNG provides you with the resources necessary to succeed," he said. "They were very supportive of each other and performed very well," said Dr. Chand, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Model UN faculty adviser at the Gainesville Campus.

Dr. Miner, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs and Model UN faculty adviser at the Dahlonega Campus, said SRMUN was a great professional development setting.

"The applicability of the skills at the conference helps these students in whichever job they start after graduation," Miner said.



PSIA Faculty Drs. Bibek Change (front left) and Jon Miner (back left) pose with the UNG student delegation at the Southern Regional Model United Nations Conference. UNG students won five awards at the event in Atlanta this past November.

## Olivia Sullens Recognized for Leadership



Olivia Sullens, second to left, commemorates the event with fellow UNG leaders

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

On March 1, 2026, UNG celebrated its 10th annual Women's Leadership Recognition Luncheon. Of the ten student honorees is PSIA's Olivia Sullens, who is majoring in International Affairs with a concentration in Europe and a minor in Russian. The event honors accomplished alumni through the Willie Lewis Society as well as student leaders making outstanding strides in leadership and impacting their community during their time at UNG.

Being a part of UNG's Corps of Cadets, Sullens remarks how she is "most proud of putting FROGs through FROG week, as it is the oldest tradition of the Corps of Cadets". She has networked with other Senior Military Colleges, taken part of Cadet Troop Leader Training in South Korea at Camp Humphreys, and even planned multiple operations for the program as she speaks in front of parents, staff, top military officials, and distinguished alumni. Beyond the Corps, Sullens is pleased with "being the former VP Finance for Epsilon Gamma chapter of Kappa Delta where I learned about budgeting and how to organize money during philanthropy events". All of these accomplishments are merely the beginning of what Sullens has accomplished as she nears her graduation in Summer of 2026.

Sullens shares how the PSIA department has supported her as she leads, as the department "helped me chart my academic path through college. Whether it be through scheduling classes, office hours, or helpful feedback, my professors were always there". Over her time with the PSIA department, what stands out the most to her is how "each of my professors are inspiring because they exude passion for the subject they teach. Their backgrounds and desire for their students to be involved in further academia is a testament to their devotion as professors".

For fellow students looking to impact UNG and step out in leadership like herself, Sullens believes the first step is to get involved in organizations that interest them. She wisely advises: "From there, take every opportunity to place others before yourself and volunteer to perform the tasks that are not usually sought after. Take the opportunities in college that allow you to be comfortable while uncomfortable; as this is the best environment for personal growth".

## Sofia Quiros Awarded CURCA Grant



Sofia Quiros and her faculty mentor, Dr. Bibek Chand; photo previously published by Denise Ray, UNG Communications Specialist

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

During the 2025-2026 academic year, ten students, in collaboration with faculty members, were awarded mini grants through the University of North Georgia (UNG) Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (CURCA).

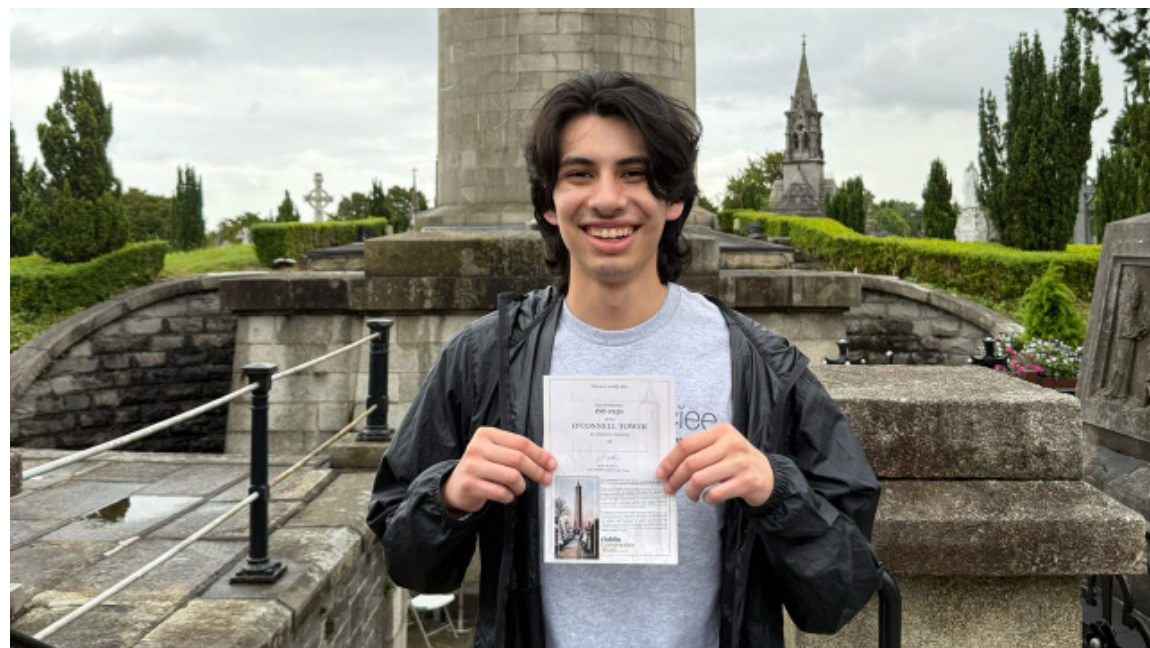
Sofia Quiros, who is pursuing a B.S. in Political Science with plans to continue at UNG to earn a Master of Arts in International Affairs, was one of the ten whose research was funded. In her research, she looks at how international image relates to hosting the FIFA World Cup.

Encouraged by her faculty mentor, Dr. Bibek Chand, Sofia shares: "I've always been interested in the realm of sports, particularly soccer and the World Cup... I've always been curious on how an event emerged in popular culture can affect a country's international image."

Sofia credits her time at UNG for preparing her as her involvement both in the classroom and out, through Model UN and similar activities, helped her strengthen her expertise in elementary research and public speaking. Looking back on the skills and knowledge Sofia has acquired, she realizes: "I knew that I had a basic understanding... but being able to work hands-on in our classes and in clubs has truly made me realize that I possessed these necessary skills on a professional level, especially with things such as data collection and applying research to real life situations."

Even when her project comes to an end, Sofia assures it is just the beginning of her bright future. She hopes to present her research at conferences, such as UNG's CURCA Annual Research Conference, and aims to use these opportunities to continue refining her paper to submit her work to esteemed, peer-reviewed journals. "The number of opportunities on an undergraduate level that have opened up for me is tremendous, and I cannot thank my mentor, Dr. Chand, and the university enough. I am glad to be able to carry on these skills with me into my professional endeavors."

## Gonzalez Selected for PPIA Junior Fellowship Program



UNG junior Mauricio Gonzalez is the second PSIA / UNG student to be selected for the Public Policy International Affairs Junior Fellowship Program. He posed for a photo (shown here) during a trip traveled to Ireland thanks to a fellowship from the Douglass-O'Connell Global Internship Program.

Written by Denise Ray, UNG Communications Specialist

Childhood experiences can play an important role in a person's dream of what to become as an adult, and Mauricio Gonzalez of Gainesville, Georgia, was no different.

The First-Generation college junior at the University of North Georgia (UNG) is pursuing a degree in political science. He recently became the second student from UNG to be awarded a spot in the Public Policy International Affairs Junior Fellowship Program. The fully-funded, seven-week program is hosted by one of three universities (Harvard, Princeton and the University of Michigan, the host institution for Gonzalez). Gonzalez will take part in the program this summer. The experience is designed to propel students to graduate school.

"They're really preparing me for the rigor of grad school," Gonzalez said. "It's pretty great."

His father's personal story has inspired him, and Dr. Bibek Chand, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, encouraged him along the way. In fact, it was Chand who suggested participating in the fellowship program.

"I am not surprised that Mauricio received the PPIA fellowship. He has always been a go-getter," Chand said. "Mauricio is relentlessly working to serve his communities, within UNG and beyond."

## Gonzalez Fellowship (continued)

The aspiration to attend law school or graduate school is in line with his desire to help his community, something he's wanted to do since he was a child.

"People helped me when I was young, so I'll return the favor," he said. "I've really been heavily considering the legal field, because that's where I can make the biggest impact on people's lives."

His focus is to be determined but he's considering doing pro bono immigration work.

"I don't really want to charge people because I've seen how my parents have struggled to pay for immigration bills and stuff like that, and I don't want to do that to people," he said. Gonzalez said he hopes to inspire others as Fatima Santillan (B.S. Political Science, '25), the first UNG recipient of the PPIA fellowship, inspired him.

"I always looked up to her. I've had interactions with her, and she's an amazing person. She's definitely a trailblazer," he said.

Gonzalez completed a U.S. Department of Agriculture internship in Washington, D.C., between his freshman and sophomore years.

"Without that first internship, I probably wouldn't have been able to get anything else. It was very crucial for me to get that first federal experience," Gonzalez said.

The next summer, he traveled to Ireland thanks to a fellowship from the Douglass-O'Connell Global Internship Program, and he worked for a trade union while overseas.

Gonzalez has also visited the nation's capital through the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute.

"Mauricio has a bright future ahead of him, and I cannot wait to see where his journey takes him," Chand said.

Gonzalez's efforts have not gone unnoticed by others.

"Mauricio has relentlessly pursued opportunities that support his growth as a community-focused leader, first federally and later abroad in Ireland. The highly competitive PPIA Junior Summer Institute complements this previous federal and international internships by providing graduate-level coursework that will refine Mauricio's policy expertise and support him in developing his career plan as a future civic leader," Dr. Anastasia Lin, Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and director of the Nationally Competitive Scholarships office, said. "His impactful service and sustained leadership, coupled with the training he will receive at PPIA JSI, prepare him to drive meaningful, positive long-term change throughout his career in law and beyond."

## PSIA Champions On and Off the Court



MPA Graduate Student  
Kiley Graham  
(photo previously published by  
University of North Georgia Athletics)

Written by Hailey Walter, PSIA Communications Intern

UNG's women's basketball team has wrapped up their 2025-2026 regular season, even making it to the PBC Semifinals, and PSIA members have had a part in the team's monumental success.

Assistant Coach Amber Skidgel, who graduated with her Master of Public Administration from UNG in 2022, is finishing her sixth season on the coaching staff and third in her present role. Cooper Turner also leads from the bench as the women's basketball graduate assistant while studying to earn a Master of Public Administration.

Kiley Graham, the team's talented new guard/forward, wraps up an accomplished season as a student-athlete. The Ohio native became a Nighthawk after graduating Summa Cum Laude with a double major in history and political science, along with a minor in English, from the University of Charleston (WV). Now she's set her sights on a Master of Public Administration from UNG.

Kiley shares how she has been able to translate what she's learned in the classroom to the court as "public administration emphasizes accountability, collaboration, and problem solving under a lot of pressure. Studying organizational behavior has made me more aware of group dynamics, which has helped me communicate effectively with teammates and understand different personalities."

Being a student-athlete is no easy feat, but Kiley has found success through her hard work and the department's intentional support: "From all the resources I can access online and professors that understand my rigorous schedule during competition, I have felt extremely supported as a student first and an athlete second."

After graduation, Kiley has her sights on an administrative role as she's "drawn to the behind the scenes work that keeps institutions functioning effectively and responsibly." Her experience as a student-athlete at UNG, a senior military college, is a slam dunk and has provided Kiley with a unique experience to equip and develop new post-grad interests, "like the U.S. Secret Service because of the dual role in protection and federal law enforcement."

## PSIA Student Harrison Crockett Rows the Pacific

Written by Larry Morton, PSIA Strategic Communications Team

What an accomplishment! PSIA celebrates one of its own for completing a truly extraordinary feat:

Class of 2028's Harrison Crockett, along with his Dad, Timothy, spent much of this past summer rowing across the mid-Pacific Ocean – from San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge to Hilo, Hawaii – the first father-son duo to do so.

The sophomore International Affairs/Europe major describes it as a journey that tested his limits and reshaped his perspective: "I did this not just for myself, but for anyone my age who doesn't think they are able to achieve anything."

Inspired by his father's solo Atlantic crossing in 2017, the idea began as a joke during Harrison's middle school year's. But when his father asked him to join a veterans' mental health awareness expedition nearly two years ago, Harrison said "yes."

"As months went by, it became more real and I thought to myself, 'why not, I might as well now.'"

The trip required more than just physical endurance. "On the boat I was pushed to my limit and then some. By the end of it all, I felt like a new person."

Along the 47-day journey, Harrison witnessed breathtaking moments: a moonless night sky filled with stars; a pod of dolphins circling the boat; and even a floating Wilson basketball – his own *Castaway* moment.

With hobbies like orienteering, tabletop games, and spending time with friends, Harrison is now more focused than ever on his goal: becoming a government analyst, ideally with the CIA or Department of War, following his career at UNG.



Harrison's story is a powerful reminder that growth often comes from the most unexpected places – and sometimes, from the middle of the ocean.

Harrison (rear) and his father, Tim Crockett; photo previously published with UNG News article "Student Makes History by Rowing Pacific", written by Clark Leonard, Director of News & Communications

## PSIA 2026 Fulbright Honorees

Written by Dr. Cristian Harris, Professor of Political Science & International Affairs

### Justin Wlosko Selected as Fulbright Scholar Finalist

Justin Wlosko has been selected as a Fulbright Scholar Finalist for 2026-2027. This is a significant accomplishment involving several years in preparation and expectation. After reaching the semi-finalist stage in 2025-2026, this selection as a finalist means that Justin will realize his goal of being an English Teaching Assistant (ETA) in South Korea.

Justin will be graduating with a B.A. in International Affairs with a concentration in Asia and a minor in Korean language in May 2026. He will be returning to South Korea where he completed a semester-long study abroad program in 2022 and will capitalize on his internship experience as a teaching assistant teaching Korean to both heritage and non-heritage students in Parsons Elementary School in Suwanee, Georgia in 2024. Justin is attracted to the varied dimensions of cultural and public diplomacy that the Fulbright Scholarship builds on and wants to pursue a career on global media including journalism and content production.

Written by Clark Leonard, UNG Director of News & Communications

### Allison Freligh Selected as Fulbright Scholar Semifinalist

Allison Freligh, a Fall 2025 graduate from Warner Robins, Georgia, with a degree in International Affairs, a potential English Teaching Assistant opportunity in Germany would be helpful preparation for her desired career as a Foreign Service officer. Freligh has always had an interest in politics. Mentorship from Political Science and International Affairs faculty members Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller and Dr. Jon Miner, her Model United Nations faculty adviser, has helped her hone in on that vision.

"They took the love I had for political science and made it feel like a much more attainable career," Freligh said.

Thanks to the encouragement of Bart Wisniewski, lecturer of German, to apply for Fulbright and the assistance of [Dr. Victoria] Hightower [Associate Director of Nationally Competitive Scholarships] in the application process, Freligh is one step closer to gaining invaluable experience overseas.

"It was such a far-fetched dream in the early stages, and now that I'm a semifinalist, it doesn't even seem real," Freligh said. "It wouldn't have happened without their help."

Freligh has served as a Language Lab tutor for German language courses at UNG, and she is a previous Panhellenic president and Delta Zeta vice president of recruitment. Her time inside the classroom and outside of it have her feeling ready for what comes next.

"In college, you get faced with so many challenges, and you have to figure them out as you go," Freligh said. "UNG has taught me how important having a good support system is. I had all these people in my corner cheering me on, even when I didn't think I was capable."

## 2025-2026 PSIA Department Award Recipients

Every Spring semester, recent PSIA graduates with the highest GPAs in select programs are recognized at the UNG Student Honors & Awards Day. We congratulate the following PSIA students who were recognized this April for their academic accomplishments!

Barry Friedman Legacy Award  
Master of Public Administration  
Graduate with Highest GPA  
Elizabeth Humphreys | May 2026  
Anna Fournaris | May 2026  
McLain Martin | May 2026

David Potter Award  
Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs  
Graduate with Highest GPA  
Sara Gonzalez Gonzalez | August 2025

Michael Reese Award  
Bachelor of Science in Political Science (Pre-Law Concentration)  
Graduate with Highest GPA  
Callie Armour | May 2026  
Gabrielle Weir | May 2026

Frank M. Smith Award  
Bachelor of Science in Political Science (Dahlongega Campus)  
Graduate with Highest GPA  
Elora Schenken | May 2026

Outstanding Student in Political Science Award  
Bachelor of Science in Political Science (Gainesville Campus)  
Camila Candamil | December 2025

## Cadets Receive Military Awards

We congratulate the following PSIA major students who were recognized at the March 2026 Military Awards Ceremony, and honor the cadets who officially committed to serving as officers in the United States Army during the Contracting Ceremony.

AUSA MS IV Award &  
National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution  
Col. William Candler Chapter Scholarship  
c/LTC Gill Garner (SSST/Intelligence)

AUSA MS III Award  
c/SSG Alyssa Estes (Political Science)

National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Trahlyta Chapter  
Gold ROTC Medal  
c/LTC Olivia Sullens (Int'l Affairs/Europe)

General Society of the War of 1812 Medal  
c/SSG Nevaeh Owen (SSST/Int'l Affairs)

National Sojourners Award  
c/SFC Piper Sheetz (Int'l Affairs/Europe)

Harold B. & William M. McEver Scholarship  
c/MSG Xander Atkinson (Political Science/American Politics)

Major (Ret.) Richard Neikirk Leadership Scholarship  
c/SFC Noah Riley (SSST/Military Science)

Greystone Power Corporation Corps of Cadets Endowed Scholarship  
c/SPC Danica Heeter (SSST/Language)

Contracting Ceremony Cadets  
c/SSG Chad Bruetsch (SSST/Military Science), c/SSG Ethan Carver (PS/Pre-Law),  
c/MSG Max Hatcher (SSST/Military Science), c/SFC Stephen Medlin (SSST/Mil. Sci.),  
c/CPT John O'Quinn (SSST/Language), S/SSG Nevaeh Owen (SSST/Int'l Affairs),  
c/PFC Alfredo Ponce (Political Science), c/SGT Ben Smith (SSST/Military Science),  
c/SGT Jay Tysinger (SSST/Military Science)

## New National Political Science Honor Society Members

The University of North Georgia's Xi Kappa chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society, inducted a handful of new members for this academic year. PSIA Professor of Political Science, Dr. Charles "Trey" Wilson, who serves as the faculty sponsor for the Xi Kappa chapter, related that the following seniors all qualified for membership based upon their outstanding academic accomplishments in the discipline of political science:

Nolan Keith Barnes (Political Science)  
Miguel Del Angel (PS Pre-Law)  
Bailey Louise Dianto (Political Science)  
Olivia Christine Victoria Holm (PS Pre-Law)  
Marcus Wyatt Micallef (PS Pre-Law)  
Alexis Lee Mosley (Political Science)  
Nicolas Zamudio (Political Science)

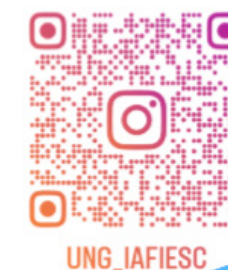


The PSIA Department congratulates these students for their remarkable achievements and welcomes them into the ranks of the honor society, which is one of the oldest such organizations at UNG and one of the largest in the country.

## Political Science Student Groups Remain Highly Engaged

Under the leadership of group president Tyler Nerbonne, the UNG College Democrats student organization (Dr. Carl Cavalli, faculty advisor) has experienced a significant growth in membership and been very active this academic year, including hosting a number of candidate forums that have featured at least two of the leading candidates for Georgia governor and senator.

Among other activities, the UNG International Association for Intelligence Education Student Chapter hosted a seminar featuring guest speaker Brian Hooper, President of the Atlanta Chapter of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, who as a national security professional in the intelligence community and the U.S. Department of State worked on complex security and counterterrorism concerns. Mr. Hooper offered firsthand insight into careers in intelligence, global affairs, law, and public service and the real-world challenges involved.



The Political Science Student Association continued its Crossroads discussions, engaging topics including U.S. foreign policy, social media politics, government funding and shutdowns, ethics in government, and Middle East war: <https://www.youtube.com/@ungPSSA/streams>

The ninth annual Model UN Conference was held March 27 on the campus of UNG-Gainesville; the theme for this year's conference was "Addressing the Rights of Migrants and Freedom of Movement."

## Maddie Lindell Selected as Commencement Speaker

CONGRATULATIONS to Honors Graduate Maddie Lindell on her selection as the student speaker for the College of Arts and Letters commencement ceremony on December 10, 2025.

Maddie followed in the pathway forged by Carlee Blankenship, PS'23 in Dec 2023, and Neva Garrett, PS '24 and Tracy Amaya, PS '24 in May and Dec of 2024 respectively.

A Communications major from Conyers, GA, Maddie joined the Department via her minor in Political Science, an addition to her undergraduate education which built upon her Associate's degree with a Political Science Pathway from Georgia State. Our Political Science minor gave her the opportunity to "take higher-level political science classes with the attendant experience in different opportunities" while imparting "a lot of important skills that are invaluable to me."

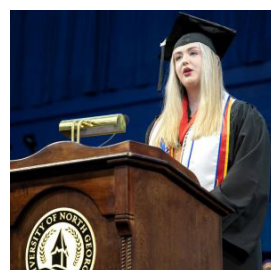
In addition to her busy academic schedule, Maddie serves the UNG student population as the Fraternity & Sorority Life Coordinator in UNG's Center for Student Engagement & Leadership; oversees her "Nighthawk Maddie" Instagram channel as part of her

duties as a UNG Social Media Ambassador; and is the outgoing president of Lambda Pi Eta, the Gainesville campus-based communications honor society.

As she prepared for her 10 December time in the spotlight, in Maddie's own words:

"I'm very grateful to have been given the opportunity to speak. I really wanted to gear my message towards the larger UNG student population and even to parents, family, and alumni, just because we're really all on this journey together. We're all in this together."

The entire #PSIAfamily wishes all the best for Maddie as she puts her undergraduate years behind her and begins her onward journey!



"I'm very grateful to have been given the opportunity to speak. I really wanted to gear my message towards the larger UNG student population and even to parents, family, and alumni, just because we're really all on this journey together. We're all in this together." Maddie Lindell

## Recent Graduates



### December '25

Bachelor of Arts in International Affairs

Sheila Ganley | Asia

Mia Libosada | Asia

Allison Freligh | Europe

Margaret Kelham | Europe

Bachelor of Science in Political Science

Zachary Blye | Political Science

Paulette Brady | Political Science

Camila Candamil | Political Science

Andrew Houston | Political Science

Dylan Kautz | Political Science

Timothy Kelly | Political Science

Ai-van (Catherine) Nguyen | Political Science

Gracie Sanford | Political Science

Chrystal Turner | Political Science

Chad Wright | Political Science

Soledad Zavala | Political Science

Grace Bozynski | Pre-Law

Isabella Dockery | Pre-Law

Katelyn Enlow | Pre-Law

Vyctoria Freeman | Pre-Law

Joeli Higgins | Pre-Law

Christopher Munive Oliveira | Pre-Law

Cynthia Reyes Garcia | Pre-Law

Associate of Science in Political Science

Lindsey Covarrubias | Political Science Pathway

Joeli Higgins | Political Science Pathway

Bachelor of Arts in Strategic & Security Studies

Evelyn Morejon-Hernandez | Intelligence

Evan Smith | International Affairs

We congratulate  
ALL our  
December 2025  
graduates  
and  
wish you well!

## Dr. Bibek Chand Receives Teaching Excellence Award

PSIA is proud to share that Dr. Bibek Chand, Associate Professor of Political Science on the UNG-Gainesville Campus, was awarded the UNG Center for Teaching, Learning & Leadership (CTLL) Teaching Excellence Award for Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty. The award recognizes excellence in teaching by a faculty member over the course of a distinguished career, including demonstration of a well-articulated teaching philosophy that has been developed through methodical examination and improvement of teaching and learning with sustained and documented impact on student learning both in and out of the classroom. Qualifications include activities designed to advance the quality and practice of teaching and learning, to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and/or to increase global and multicultural understanding. Dr. Chand shares:



“Being selected for the 2025 Teaching Excellence Award for Tenured Faculty was a privilege. Teaching has been a passion of mine since I started teaching my own courses in 2015. I am a strong proponent of an engaged classroom environment where students participate actively. One of the core reasons why I use simulations and policy writing exercises is to ensure that students are receiving “hands-on” education. Over the years that I have tried these approaches, I have found that students tend to retain conceptual frameworks better when they are encouraged to put them to use. Simulations tend to do just that. I am also a proponent of teaching outside of the classroom is an innate part of students’ professional development. Thus, I strongly encourage my students to pursue research if that is of interest to them. Currently, I am supervising one research project and, in the works, to develop another one.

Overall, teaching for me is a means of fostering students who are able to use their education for positive change in their communities and the wider world. The best way to do it is through immersion in a wide array of perspectives and experiences, inside and outside the classroom. As such, my teaching includes encouraging students to seek experiences outside the classroom while maintaining connections between their course materials and the experiences in the field. Several of my student mentees have been successful in being selected for great opportunities in the field of International Affairs, which includes the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship Program, the Peace Corps, the Carter Center, Douglas-O’Connell Internship, Fulbright-MITACS Globalink Internship Program, and the PPIA Junior Summer Institute.”

PSIA Associate Department Head Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller states: “This CTLL Award recognizes what we have long known about Bibek Chand: his dedication to students, passion for teaching, and boundless energy that make a meaningful and lasting impact on our community. We are immensely proud of Dr. Chand for receiving the CTLL Award. His unwavering loyalty to students and teaching, coupled with his positive energy and extraordinary capacity to do so much for others, exemplifies the very best of our academic community. We deeply appreciate the care, commitment, and inspiration he brings to his work every day.”

PSIA faculty continue to be actively engaged in scholarship, service, student and community engagement in a great variety of ways; here is a sample of some PSIA faculty activity since our last newsletter!



Dr. Carl Cavalli was interviewed by [ABC News](#) regarding the Georgia 14th primary runoff election as well as by [Roll Call](#) magazine (a top publication for news about Congress) about the Georgia 14th primary; he also has been scheduled by the UNG Vanguard student newspaper for an interview regarding social media and politics.

Dr. Cavalli, supported by the work of Dr. Ted Rossier (Lecturer in Political Science) and student intern Hailey Walter, also helped the ancillary site for our *Basics of American Government, 5th edition* textbook go live: <https://go.ung.edu/bag/>. Teaching materials will soon be added to the site for use by vetted faculty users of the textbook.

Dr. Bibek Chand recently published two co-authored articles:

“Small Island Developing States’ Use of Courts to Fight for Environmental Security.” *Journal of East Asian Security* (November 2025, with J. Ricky Price and Christine Bianco).

“China’s Maritime Goeconomic Strategy in the Western Indian Ocean Region.” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (June 2025, with Dharmendra Kumar and Angela Z. Gapa).

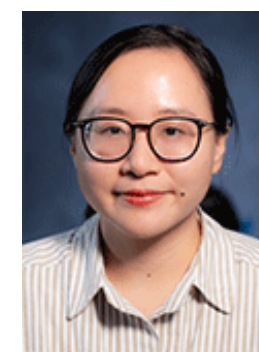
One of Dr. Chand’s student mentees, Sofia Quiros, was recent awarded a grant from the Center for Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (see article elsewhere in the newsletter).

Dr. Jing He recently published three articles:

“Uncovering Big Data in Teaching Public Administration.” *Teaching Public Administration*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01447394261438340> (2026)

“Fiscal Transparency Ranking and Corruption: Theory and New Evidence from China.” *International Journal of Public Administration*, 1–23. (2026, with Zhang, P., & Lee, J.).

“Distinguishing Risk in Public Administration: A Conceptual Framework” in *Chinese Public Administration Review*, 16(4), 302–320 (2025)





Dr. Jaimie Kelly has been appointed to the program development team and helped in the curricular design for the first master's degree program developed by the University System of Georgia. Development of the USG's Master of Science in Organizational Leadership is in the finalization stage for those USG institutions which will participate in the program, and will include a concentration in Project Management (additional concentrations may be offered as the program is further developed). The program, to be launched Fall 2027, will be taught by faculty across the USG but will be housed at the University of North Georgia within the Department of Political Science & International Affairs.

Dr. Kelly will serve as the subject matter expert on organizational theory for the program and is in process of developing courses in Organizational Theory as well as Principles of Management for Leaders. Dr. Kelly states, "The USG's new M.S. in Organizational Leadership will not only be a great opportunity for students to develop critical skills needed for the workforce, but also will meet the growing needs of industries within the state of Georgia."



Dr. Sam Rohrer has transitioned full-time to the UNG-Cumming campus, where he is contributing to the development of upper-division Political Science offerings as part of the expansion toward a full four-year degree program. This effort focuses on building a sustainable course rotation that allows students to complete the B.S. in Political Science on-site. Beginning in Spring 2027, planned offerings include upper-division coursework in American Politics as well as a special topics course, *Star Wars and International Relations*, designed to engage students through applied and comparative perspectives on political systems and conflict.

Dr. Rohrer also recently published "Staying Power: A Leadership Trait and Survival Analysis of Modern Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom" in *Parliamentary Affairs*. The article examines how psychological leadership traits shape the tenure of British Prime Ministers using Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) and survival modeling. Drawing on parliamentary speech data, the study finds that task-focused leadership - characterized by structured, goal-oriented decision-making - is a significant predictor of longer time in office. In contrast, other commonly studied traits, such as need for power and conceptual complexity, do not show a consistent statistical relationship with tenure. The findings highlight the importance of disciplined, results-driven leadership in sustaining political longevity within the Westminster system.

## National Security Professional Speaker Series Offers Insights into Vocational Paths for Students

Dr. Jonathan Beall, Associate Professor of History, Strategic & Security Studies Advisor

Over the past two semesters, the National Security Professional Speaker Series, developed and hosted by UNG's Dr. Scott McDonald (Assistant Professor of Political Science) and Dr. Jonathan Beall (Associate Professor of History) on the campus of UNG-Dahlonega, has successfully exposed students to options and pathways into careers in national security – many which are available outside of more well-known "three letter agencies" (the CIA, FBI, NSA, etc.).

Fall 2025 speakers featured a former CIA analyst, Jeannie Johnson, who shared about her life and career as an intelligence analyst, followed by an early alumnus of UNG's Strategic & Security Studies Program, Meghan McPeak, who now works for the Department of Justice and shared about the great number of national-security career opportunities throughout the United States Federal Government.

Spring 2026 speakers featured a Foreign Service Officer (FSO), Matt O'Connor, who spoke about being an FSO – and the arduous path of becoming one – followed by another early alumnus of UNG's Strategic & Security Studies Program, Thomas Vella, who spoke about national security careers in the private sector.

Students in Strategic & Security Studies who are not seeking a career in the military need to identify a vocational role related to national security. The purpose of the National Security Professional Speaker Series is to connect students to those who have served in national security and broaden student understanding of national security careers outside of the Department of Defense and intelligence community so students may conduct a more expansive job search as they transition from being a student to working in their chosen field. Each National Security Professional Speaker Series meeting includes the guest professional sharing about their job, their organization, and how they entered into their role. Afterwards, there is 20-30 minutes of Q&A between the guest speaker and the students.

The National Security Professional Speaker Series primarily targets PSIA's Strategic & Security Studies students, although the seminars are open to students from all majors.

Learn more about the Strategic & Security Studies Program at <https://ung.edu/degrees/bachelors/strategic-security-studies.php>.

## Dr. Ronnie Grant Launches Pre-Law Workshops; Pre-Law Student Association Approved

This spring, Dr. Ronnie Grant (Assistant Professor of Political Science/Pre-Law) launched a series of workshops for students interested in law school; topics included "How to Get into Your Dream Law School", "How to Get Your Dream Legal Internship", "How to Crush the LSAT", "Building Top Resumes & Cover Letters", and "Crafting Powerful Personal Statements".

While hosted on the campus of UNG-Dahlonega, UNG-Gainesville and UNG-Cumming students have participated both in person and via Zoom.

A central feature of these sessions is the role of upper-division PSIA students who share their experiences for the benefit of others: among others, Sloan Taylor shared her experience in navigating the law school admissions process; Leslie Resendiz provided an overview of how she obtained her internship and what she has learned; Marcus Micallef shared his experience as a Political Science Pre-Law major; and Donatella Njika discussed LSAT preparation and test-taking.

Similar meetings will be held during the 2026-27 academic year in conjunction with the Pre-Law Student Organization which recently was approved as an official UNG student group.

## Forsyth County Public Library Great Decisions Series

PSIA faculty continued community engagement during Spring 2026 semester by leading local discussions on global politics at the Cumming, GA library through the Great Decisions: America's Global Affairs Discussion Program. As noted in the press release from Forsyth County Library Communications Manager, Leslie Marinelli, "the Great Decisions series is produced by the Foreign Policy Association, which has been encouraging nonpartisan discussion on U.S. foreign policy for over 100 years... [giving] participants the opportunity to learn about some of the most critical global issues facing America today."

The series met at the Cumming Library or on the campus of UNG-Cumming for six consecutive Wednesday evenings. The first session on U.S.-China Relations was facilitated by UNG Director of Special Programs, Dr. Chris Jespersen; the following five sessions were facilitated by PSIA faculty:



- Ruptured Alliances and the Risk of Nuclear Proliferation (Dr. Scott McDonald)
- Ukraine and the Future of European Security (Dr. Craig Greathouse)
- Multilateral Institutions and a Changing World Order (Dr. Raluca Viman-Miller)
- U.S. Engagement of Africa (Dr. Eddie Mienie)
- The Future of Human Rights and International Law (Dr. Ronnie Grant)

We appreciate our many faculty who continue engage not only students in the classroom but the community beyond!

MAKE A PRACTICAL, POSITIVE IMPACT ON A PSIA STUDENT TODAY!

Our Dr. Barry Friedman Scholarship has been awarded to a deserving PSIA student each year since its inception in 2023. To continue assisting our students in the coming years we need YOUR help! Your gracious donation will go toward building the body of the scholarship investment and enable us to award additional students in the coming years. Please consider giving a gift to the Friedman Scholarship fund today!

MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT  
for a PSIA Student Today!

[go.UNG.edu/PSIA](https://go.ung.edu/PSIA)

DONATE TO THE  
Barry Friedman Scholarship Fund

Some articles in this Newsletter have been edited from the original due to space considerations. To see the complete article, please visit [PSIA NEWS](#).

Internship Opportunities & Interns:  
If you have a need for an intern or know of internship opportunities, please reach out to us at [PSIA@ung.edu](mailto:PSIA@ung.edu).

Alumni! What have you been up to? Let us know [HERE!](#)

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