



**GSU's Center for Community Media  
Promoting Local Journalism**

Pictured left to right: Deborah James, Novia Pagone,  
Kerri Morris, Randall Weissman, Gretchen Jankowski,  
Rhonda Jackson, Rebecca Siefert, Joshua Young

## Letter from the Dean



Jason Zingsheim  
*Interim Dean, College  
of Arts and Sciences*

Welcome to the sixth annual issue of the College of Arts and Sciences newsmagazine, *ArtSci*. I would like to frame my comments this year – a year of transitions, characterized by uncertainty as we continue navigating the pandemic and the impacts of long-standing social inequities on the communities we serve – through the words of our own students. In the pages that follow, student contributors invite us, individually and collectively, to be part of the solutions to our society’s many problems: “Will it be you?” “What will you bring to the table?”

If you are not already, I welcome you to become an active part of our CAS community. If you are already a member, please continue welcoming others into our ever-growing community. Our incredible diversity serves as both a reflection of, and an invitation to, the shared future of the United States. And our College’s use of high impact practices – such as this student-written newsmagazine and the multiple examples of collaborative, hands-on research projects it highlights – provides our students with the skills that employers desire, and our communities with well-prepared leaders.

We are again indebted to *ArtSci*’s faculty advisor Dr. Christopher White (English) and his team of dedicated students – Ansam Abdeljaber (English MA), Maria Blatt (English BA), Brandon Green (Finance MBA), Alexis Robinson (English BA), and Saad Shalabi (English MA)– whose stories illustrate only some of the many examples of impactful, experiential opportunities that the College of Arts and Sciences provides for its students. In this issue you’ll learn more about how GSU faculty and students are engaged in following the science in education, public health, and conservation, and how we are working to amplify and preserve the stories of our communities through local journalism, personal narratives, and oral histories.

GSU’s mission is to offer an exceptional and accessible education that prepares students with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed in a global society. This education exceeds the boundaries of the classroom as CAS students work with the Village of Bradley, become instructors to high school students in STEM, edit veterans’ oral histories with the “Making History Project,” and work with the Monee Historical Society to “chronicle the changes taking place both to the creamery building and the town,” as Maria Blatt writes.

GSU continues to have an incredibly positive impact on the region both through the wide range of academic opportunities that we offer as well as through our community outreach via the Center for Community Media; the Center for Performing Arts; the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park; the Art Gallery; and the Biological Field Station. As Kimelia Carter (Theatre and Performance Studies BA) reminds us, we are “a school that prides itself on having people of all backgrounds in attendance.” Whether you are joining us for a community event or returning to continue your education, we hope you feel the same sense of belonging expressed by our graduates. You can also stay connected by donating to scholarships to support our students, by volunteering your time and expertise, or creating internship and job opportunities for our current students and alumni. Please contact me ([CASdean@govst.edu](mailto:CASdean@govst.edu)) and let me know how we can work together. I look forward to hearing from you.

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*ArtSci* is a student-written publication highlighting the major events and achievements of the students, alumni, and faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences at Governors State University.

### **Alexis Robinson**

*Writer/Editor*

I am an English major in my final year of undergrad, and I am a huge fan of fantasy, sci-fi, drama, and historical fiction. Even though reading was my first love, writing eventually made its way into my heart, and I now enjoy writing short stories and poems in my free time.

### **Ansam Abdeljaber**

*Writer/Editor*

I am an English Graduate student and writing tutor. I spend my free time watching *Downton Abbey*, playing with my nieces, and hanging out with friends. I'm always looking to express my creativity through writing and art.

### **Brandon Green**

*Writer/Editor*

I am a student veteran in the MBA program with a concentration in Finance. I like to spend my free time writing short stories and poetry, playing with my kids, and enjoying cigars on my patio.

### **Maria Blatt**

*Writer/Editor*

I am an English major fascinated by language and the art of storytelling. Like most English majors, I have an ever-growing pile of books I'd like to one day read. Outside of my major and education, I enjoy baking and gardening.

### **Saad Shalabi**

*Writer/Editor*

I am a graduate student working on my Masters in English. I enjoy stories in any form, and I've been hard at work increasing my knowledge and skills while also making new friends and building connections at GSU. I like writing about anything besides myself.

### **Dr. Christopher White**

*Faculty Advisor for ArtSci*

I am a Professor of English in my 13th year at GSU. My teaching and scholarly interests are in American Literature, Cognitive Literary Studies, and Narrative. Working with students on *ArtSci* is one of the many things I love about teaching at GSU.

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We are always interested in new CAS-related story ideas. If you have one you would like to share, please contact Christopher White at [cwhite@govst.edu](mailto:cwhite@govst.edu).

# Promoting Local Journalism

*By Alexis Robinson*

## The Center for Community Media's Journey to Research Accreditation

Governors State University's Center for Community Media prides itself on being the journalistic vein in GSU's campus and surrounding region. The purpose of the CCM is to teach media literacy, promote journalistic integrity, engage in public service, and provide a resource for rich and diverse stories.



Dr. Deborah James

Under the leadership of Dr. Deborah James (Media Studies), one of the crowning achievements to come out of the CCM is their approval from the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) as a Research Institute. The CCM is the university's first official Research Institute in GSU's 53-year history. They received a 5-year approval from the IBHE on July 23rd, 2021. During this temporary status, the CCM will establish the necessary framework to acquire long-term funding that will allow the Center to become a permanent institute beyond the summer of 2026.

The CCM boasts a diverse number of programs and future plans to deliver media to GSU and its neighboring community. These new methods ensure that students working within the Center have the best well-rounded and co-curricular experiences possible.

One of these programs is GSU's radio station, which was proposed last year. Under the leadership of Dr. Lara Hrycaj (Media Studies), the radio station will combine in-person and remote collaboration opportunities. Dr. James believes this hybrid approach is the best way to "support 'live and local' media ecosystems that will promote local storytelling and leverage these stories into mainstream spaces in the Chicago media and beyond."



While this hybrid opportunity is taking shape, students in CCM's Student Media Institute (SMI) will have their shot at producing a timeslot on Homewood's Public Access Comcast channel GSUTV! Advised by Professor Jessica Scott (Media Studies), GSUTV will be a place for news, sports, and culture. The SMI applied for this slot in fall of 2019. Their application was approved earlier this semester, and they've since assembled a team of experienced faculty members and an external practicing journalist. The show is scheduled to air May 1, 2022.

Dr. James states that they're looking to include "impactful [content] from across the disciplines that is relevant to our campus and the broader community." Claude Martinez, a senior in GSU's Media Studies Program, has accepted the position as show Producer and he will lead the show up until May 2022.

In addition to these bold new programs, the Center is constantly hosting events and broadcasting programs for the greater GSU community. One notable upcoming event is a panel discussion slated to launch in September 2022. The discussion will be presented by the Center to emphasize the "importance of diverse and inclusive local journalism and storytelling."

We hope to see you there! ■

# Steering Students Towards S.T.E.M. Careers

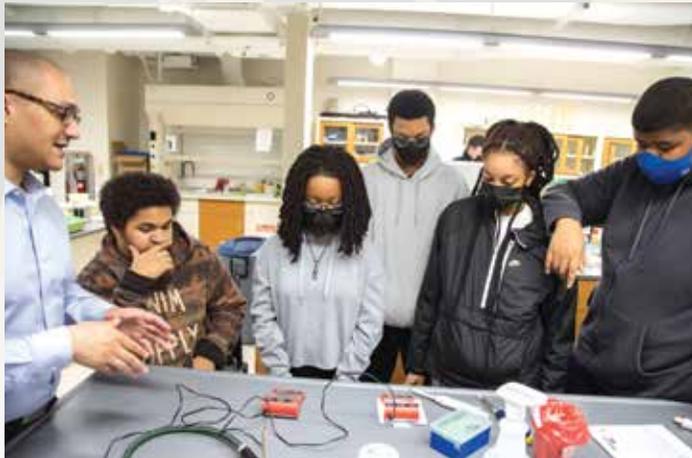
By Brandon Green

## GSU Partners with Boy Scouts of America

Boy Scouts of America are guiding local high school students to the Jaguars den in search for hands-on experience with S.T.E.M careers of tomorrow.

In fall 2021, CAS began a grant-funded partnership with the Boy Scouts of America, where GSU students teach local high-school students courses in Animation, IT, and Biotech. It began when GSU staff member Blaise Lukasiewicz facilitated a connection between BSA representative Kristen Vogt and CAS's Stacy Amedeo.

Stacy, Kristen, and former CAS Dean Andrae Marak developed a strategy to serve both GSU students and local high school students.



GSU student Quincy Santomieri with local high school students.

After developing beautiful flyers to catch the attention of would-be participants, and conducting interviews of GSU's students, Stacy was able to find 3 shining stars in their respective degree programs to lead courses in Animation (Jeremy Wiss), Biotech (Quincy Santomieri), and I.T. (Sreeja Reddy Maddi). Jeremy, Quincy, and Sreeja led courses as "content experts" based on a curriculum provided by the BSA, but they were given freedom and flexibility to sculpt the courses so the high school students would get the most out of their 3-hour, once-a-month meetings.



Professor Tim Gsell and GSU student Quincy Santomieri with local high school students.

For the meetings, students would arrive at 9 a.m. to meet with their course instructor and jump right into the action. Quincy mentioned that science is a field where students "need to be there" and "do science in order to really understand it." He gave the example of students being able to test enzyme reactions as one experiment his Biotech students would cover.

Quincy and his fellow instructors Sreeja and Jeremy all aimed to give their students a chance to experience collegiate-level science.

The feedback from the students has been phenomenal. The Exploring program participants have been so enthusiastic about learning, they would be willing to forgo their weekends and run it weekly instead of monthly, "so that they can continue to build on the skills that they are learning," Jeremy explained. The most amazing thing about these last 8 months is the learning isn't coming to an end yet. Ms. Amedeo is hopeful GSU can keep partnering with the Boy Scouts via the Exploring program as the BSA has confirmed their grant has been renewed for next year.

Who will be the next brilliant course instructor rising to the occasion to help guide local high school students into S.T.E.M careers of the future? Will it be you? ■

# Calling All Historians

By Maria Blatt

## GSU Works with Local Community to Help Preserve their Heritage

In 2011, passionate citizen Christina Holston and a group of like-minded community members were granted two weeks to save the historic Monee creamery building from demolition. Given the high stakes ultimatum, Holston began organizing events and fundraisers with the slogan, “Save the Creamery.” “The point is not [just] that we raise the money,” Holston remarked, “for me, [preserving] history is like a no-brainer.”

After successfully saving the historic limestone building from its demise, the real work began. It had to undergo serious renovations; Holston recalls, “There was a sink hanging off the wall, no toilet, no plumbing, no heat, no electricity, nothing.” In fact, renovations were not completed until Spring 2021. After renovations, the building is now called The Monee Heritage Center. Holston, the director of The Monee Historical Society, emphasizes, “The Heritage Center is a living, breathing part of the community.”

Following the renovations, The Monee Historical Society reached out to Governors State University to see if anyone was capable of recording their grand opening event. They were able to find the perfect candidate for the proposed internship after meeting with Dean Andrae Marak and CAS External Relations Coordinator, Stacy Amedeo. Jeremy Wiss, a graduate student at GSU who needed one more internship to complete his MFA, jumped at the opportunity. Within hours, he was on-site filming the grand opening.

Heading into the project, Wiss did not know what to expect: “I did not think a one-light town in the middle of nowhere would have such a rich history.”

What was once expected to be a one-time project eventually turned into an ongoing partnership. Together, the University and the Heritage Center are working to chronicle the changes taking place both to the creamery building and the town.



*“The Heritage Center is a living, breathing part of the community.”*



Ribbon cutting for opening of the Monee Heritage Center.

But this work is not limited to just film. Holston encourages anyone compelled to get involved to do so. She stresses, “It’s not a case of ‘this is what the job is and this is what we want you to do’,” but rather, due to the numerous projects taking place, there is something for every volunteer to enjoy. In addition to their preservation work, the Society has planned a whole calendar of events including a Garden Walk and Artisan Sale on June 11th.

The Heritage Center looks forward to the possibilities created by the collaboration with GSU, “The Governors State partnership has such wonderful potential both for students and for us.”

To take part in the preservation of local history, or to just enjoy the Center’s many community programs, you can contact Christina Holston at the Monee Heritage Center or visit

<https://moneehistoricalsociety.com/contact-us/>. ■

# Slamming into Storytelling

By Ansam Abdeljaber

Last year, Dr. Novia Pagone and Dr. Kerri Morris hosted the first-ever story slam at GSU, called “First Voice.”

The idea came from Dr. Pagone’s Fall 2019 First-Year Seminar on storytelling and Dr. Morris’s Writing Studies course, which students were required to take simultaneously. In both classes, students worked to create a literacy autobiography. This experience allowed students to work closely with the Digital Learning and Media Design (DLMD) studio to share and record their stories. Then, at the end of the semester, Dr. Pagone and Dr. Morris decided to take their students to Grown Folks Stories, a monthly storytelling event located at the Green Line Performing Arts Center.

After COVID hit, Dr. Pagone (Spanish and Global Studies) and Dr. Morris (English) decided to make the project university wide and give all students the chance to tell their stories in front of a crowd. Dr. Pagone explains, “Even though we were fully virtual, it seemed like a good time to create a space where we could build a community.” Dr. Morris added, “We just really love hearing the stories and think it creates an atmosphere of connection among us.”

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*“We just really love hearing the stories and think it creates an atmosphere of connection among us.”*

Last year's event theme was "When Life Throws You a Curveball." Each student had 5-10 minutes to tell their story. The stories needed to be true and about the person telling them. Storytellers were not allowed to have notes when they presented. Rather, participants needed to tell their story like they were saying it to a friend.

First Voice's story continues this year with the theme of Lemonade – stories about a time when you made something good out of a bad situation. The event is sponsored by the Center for Community Media. The first event is on April 15. Any student is welcome to come in and tell their story. Then three students will be chosen to move on to the next round. Those students will work closely with faculty who are experts in storytelling to polish and perfect their stories for the second round, which is on April 29.



Not sure how to begin telling your story? Ryan Cuellar, last year's second-place winner, advises participants to "make sure you're passionate about the story you're telling." Dr. Pagone suggests that students practice with a friend, a family member, or look in the mirror and tell your story. Finally, Dr. Morris advises, "Make sure you know your last line before you start."

Check your emails, and be sure to RSVP to tell your story or be an audience member. Beginning this year there will be a more formal judging process. Dr. Morris says for the second event "we're really hoping people would bring family and that it will be a big crowd."

Who will be the next story slam champion?  
Will it be you? ■



*What's your story?*



Andres Cornejo, this year's first-place winner.



Ryan Cuellar, second-place winner last year.



Nuha Abdessalam, third-place winner last year.

# America's #1 Sculpture Park Just Got Better!

By Brandon Green

They're here! Last year, *ArtSci* announced that theNate was getting two new art pieces to add to its beautiful sculpture park. Now after months of construction, one of the two new pieces, "Stargazing with Contrails," is ready in theNate for art lovers from all walks of life to enjoy. It was a gift from Paul Uzureau, an advisory board member, and his wife, Linda Uzureau.

As for the second piece, "Birds in the Air," over 40 artists submitted proposals in a competitive application process to have their sculptured art selected. A curriculum and exhibition vitae for the artist, sculpture images from each of the cardinal directions, and a free and clear title to the art piece are a few of the items artists had to submit for review to have their art considered as an addition to theNate's sculpture park.

Both of the newly selected sculptures were created by local artists. "Stargazing with Contrails" by Terrence Karpowicz, was completed in September of 2021, and is currently being added to GSU's free self-guided audio tour on Otocast. Jeff Stevenson, Director and Curator of The Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park and Visual Arts Gallery, stated that although the second sculpture isn't ready yet, he's hopeful it will be complete and installed in the Spring of 2022. Currently it is titled "Birds in the Air," but Stevenson advised the title may change.

First established before GSU was founded in 1969, the Nathan Manilow Sculpture Park has been one of the premier sculpture parks in the Chicagoland region.

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*"Stargazing with Contrails' provid[es] us with an opportunity to look up, see the sky, experience nature, constellations, and find our north star."*



Stargazing with Contrails

In 1968, Lewis Manilow (son of Nathan Manilow) loaned the use of a house on the future campus of GSU to sculptor Mark di Suvero to build a few sculptures. Since then, GSU has maintained its mission of "Art, Conservation, and Education" by selecting pieces that complete the founder's vision. Stevenson noted that "Stargazing with Contrails" does this by "providing us with an opportunity to look up, see the sky, experience nature, constellations, and find our north star." He went on to explain that the other piece, "Birds in the Air," will see the artist Bernard Williams "using motifs popular in the tradition of African American quilt-making to perforate the steel walls of his sculpture." In this way, the sculpture will function as an "observation deck" for visitors. The visitors will be able to see "unique views of the prairie restoration project known as The Butterfly Ranch."

Additions like these are why theNate was voted #1 sculpture park in the nation, according to a USA Today's "Reader's Choice 2021" poll. Whether visitors want to view the collection of sculptures in-person on a stroll through theNate, or visit virtually on Otocast, be sure to spend a little time and view "Stargazing with Contrails" and "Birds in the Air." ■

# A Commitment to Public Health

By Alexis Robinson

## GSU's Pre-Health Club Gathers Students from Across the Disciplines

GSU cultivates many extra-curricular opportunities, and its students aren't afraid to seize them. One example is the pre-Health Club, which welcomes students from all majors who are interested in pursuing a health career.

Dr. Aparna Palakodeti (Biology) was approached by a chemistry student to start the club 5 years ago. Since then, it has grown to 18 members in a myriad of STEM and Health programs. Dr. Palakodeti notes that "We have students pursuing majors in community health, biology, anthropology, chemistry, etc."

Two officers of the club, President Lauren Frick (Community Health) and Logan Krska (Community Health), both joined in the hopes of networking and creating meaningful relationships with other members. "Being able to build a personal connection with the members of the club has been helpful" Lauren states. One such member, Claudya Skalski (Anthropology), has gone on to graduate from GSU, and she is now in the process of becoming a coroner.

Apart from the networking opportunities, club members are also very dedicated to community service and volunteering. With the help of Dr. Palakodeti, Lauren coordinated sending cards to a nursing home in Orland Park. The club had plans for another opportunity like conducting a blood drive at GSU, but Covid-19 put this on hold. Dr. Palakodeti expressed her frustration towards this hurdle: "[Hopefully] once restrictions are lifted, we can jump back up on our volunteering."

In addition to this, the club has also been considering other ventures such as Feed My Starving Children, an organization that provides food to developing nations across the world.

With all of the club's ambitious endeavors, Dr. Palakodeti has identified a long term goal: "We hope that [the Pre-Health Club] will be a database of people and a database of resources." The club is always looking for new members so they can continue to build upon this database. What will you bring to the table? ■



Members of the Pre-Health Club before Covid.



*"We hope that [the Pre-Health Club] will be a database of people and a database of resources."*

# Education in Action

By Alexis Robinson

## GSU Public Administration Partners with the Village of Bradley

GSU has always pushed the boundaries of education. A shining example of this exists in the Master of Public Administration Spring 2022 Capstone course, Problems in Applied Public Management (PADM 8900). Graduate students taking this course have the opportunity to gain practical experience with a local government and implement real changes within the community. In a collaboration between GSU and The Village of Bradley, students in groups of 2 or 3 will come up with plans for assigned government projects under the direction of their professors and government liaisons. At the end of the semester they will present these deliverables to a room full of Bradley's government officials. This exciting new course is the first of its kind at our university. With the help of Dr. Mary Bruce (Public Administration) and Dr. Anna Bernadska (Assistant Director of Research Compliance), Dr. Natalia Ermasova has helped usher in an ingenious new form of practical learning at GSU.

Dr. Ermasova teaches budgeting, public finance, transformational leadership and economics at GSU, and she combines them all in the PADM Capstone Course. Her expertise and experience have contributed to the course's successful implementation. However, Dr. Ermasova recalls the early challenges of getting this course off the ground: "I contacted mayors in many different villages and towns, but no one would ever answer me," and if they did, "no one would want to start it." She felt like the course wouldn't ever come into fruition: "you have to know someone before you can really get anywhere." Fortunately for Dr. Ermasova, her former student, Catherine Romanowski, works with the Village of Bradley as their Project Manager.



Dr. Ermasova reached out to her and asked if the mayor of Bradley would be interested in working with graduate students. From here, the class developed over the course of 6 months. After much deliberation from GSU's legal team, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which outlines the legal contract for the partnership, was developed between the institution and Bradley. The Village also provided GSU's students and faculty with access to their Finance Director, Robert Romo.

In recent years, Catherine and Robert have helped to rebuild the Village of Bradley from the ground up. They've brought the Village from a \$2 million/year deficit to a \$2 million/year surplus, which earned them a Distinguished Budget Award by the GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association). Now, their main goal is to continue to implement programs that will help the Village run efficiently, which is where GSU's students come in.

For the Capstone collaboration, there are 6 projects, each of which will be assigned to a small group. Projects like the Property and Sales Tax Rebate Program will help put money back into residents' pockets in the form of a refund check. Another notable project is the Rte. 50 South Corridor plan. Students assigned to this project will develop an initiative for a strip mall to help bring in an extra \$160 million dollars to the village. All of this may sound very intimidating, but this course boasts an impressive batch of students already familiar with the inner workings of local government. Two students are the Chiefs of Police in two other small villages; another student has several years' worth of experience in landlord management; and a third serves as the Executive Director for South Holland's Business Association.

It is easy to see that these projects are not only in good hands, but this course is also already projected to carry on into the future. Dr. Ermasova expressed keen interest in working with other small villages in the south suburbs, "We will work with Matteson or Homewood in future semesters, [or] probably with the Village of South Holland." Whatever the case may be, let us cheer on our Public Administration faculty members and MPA students as they embark on this exciting new journey in education. ■



Interior of the Bradley Municipal Building.

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*"We will work with Matteson or Homewood in future semesters, [or] probably with the Village of South Holland."*

# Digitizing History

By Saad Shalabi

## GSU Film Students Preserve Veterans' Voices

A fascinating living history mission is currently underway at Governors State University. A team of graduate students is working with the Making History Project to edit and archive the oral histories of United States veterans.



**The Making History Project** is a non-profit organization that records interviews with veterans of America's armed conflicts, from World War II to present-day campaigns. Founded by Patrick Russell, a Miami-based lawyer and Director of The Making

History Project, the organization's goal is two-fold: to study the effects of trauma on combat veterans and how it impacts their lives, and to digitally archive those interviews within the Library of Congress as part of their Veterans History Project.

The partnership between the Making History Project and GSU grew out of a preexisting relationship Patrick had with our university. When Stacy Amedeo, the Promotion and External Relations Coordinator for CAS, first became aware of the Making History Project, she saw an opportunity for GSU students to assist. Stacy posted openings for audio and visual editors on Jobs for Jaguars as both internships and work study positions. During the Spring 2022 semester, these posts were filled by Marshall Gibson, Virgil Wayne, and Nellie Workman. Marshall, Nellie, and Virgil are all graduate film students at GSU, and Virgil, in fact, is a U.S. Army veteran himself.



Patrick Russell



Stacy Amedeo



Virgil Wayne



Nellie Workman



Marshall Gibson



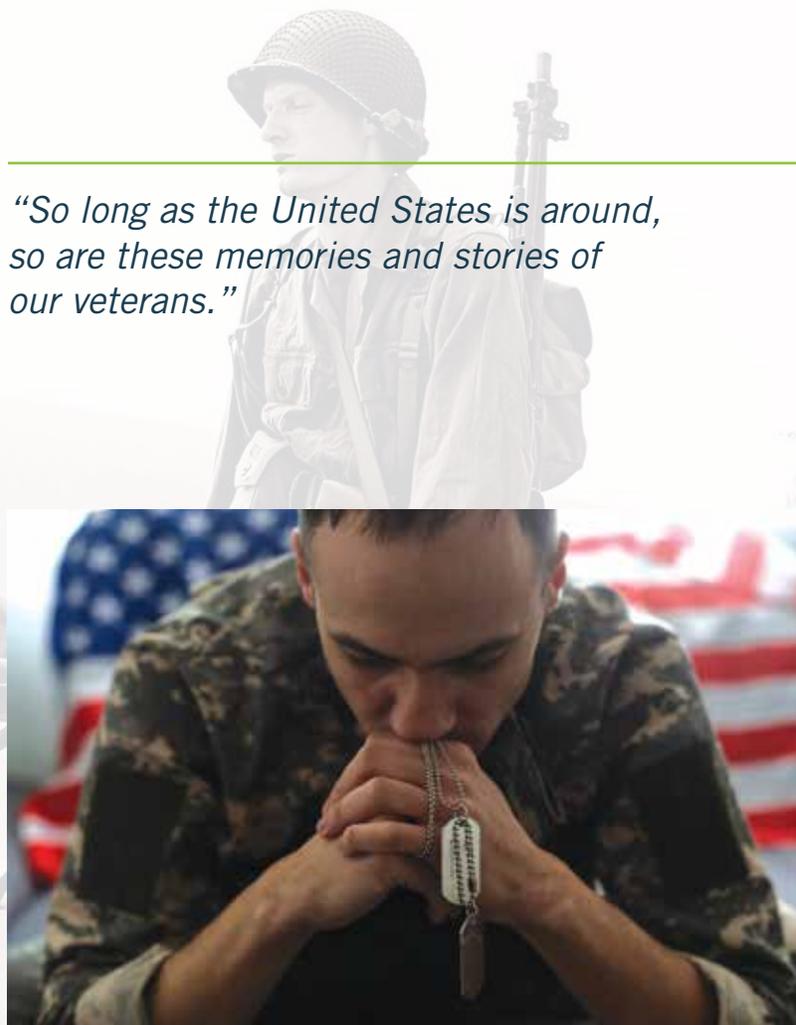
*“So long as the United States is around, so are these memories and stories of our veterans.”*

The GSU team is working diligently to edit the interviews Patrick has already recorded. Once an interview is completed, each veteran receives a personal copy, and another copy is sent to the archives. Besides the Library of Congress, Patrick notes that academic institutions like the University of Florida’s Samuel Proctor Oral History Program also have a repository of archived interviews. Both Patrick and Stacy hope that GSU will also develop a repository in the future.

The team’s goal is to have all of Patrick’s interviews edited and archived by the end of this semester, but they hope the project will continue. “Once the editing’s done I don’t think this opportunity goes away,” Stacy says, “It’s just going to change and expand.”

One possibility could be in-person interviews conducted by students here on campus once they’ve been trained by Patrick. Another possibility? “A little photo booth with a video camera where [veterans] could record [their] own [stories],” Patrick muses, “Now, that’s kind of an interesting concept. Not a true oral history because you’re doing kind of like a self-testament. But setting something up like that might be kind of a cool idea. But that’s for down the road.”

For now, the GSU team is hard at work editing these important personal histories so that current and future generations can understand what veterans experienced in their own words. The Making History Project looks to honor the past and educate the future. Patrick eloquently sums up the spirit of his organization when he says, “So long as the United States is around, so are these memories and stories of our veterans.” ■



# GSU's Vaccine Angel

By Maria Blatt

## Dr. Walter Henne's Efforts to Combat The Virus



As the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic begins to fade, it is important to recognize the efforts of those who have carried us through the crisis. Dr. Walter Henne, an Associate Professor of Chemistry at GSU, played a major role in the education of faculty and

students during the ongoing pandemic.

Dr. Henne's efforts began by encouraging others to seek out and get the Covid vaccine. "First and foremost I am a scientist. . . . Following the science was what really guided me into that role from the beginning," Dr. Henne emphasized.

He first began helping faculty secure vaccines for themselves by participating in the Facebook group, "Chicago Vaccine Hunters." This group provided valuable insight into where and how to find available vaccines. "Even though [finding vaccines] was hard, by showing people it was possible it created a sense of urgency," Dr. Henne recalls.

At first, not only were vaccines hard to find, but not everyone was convinced of their safety and efficacy. To combat this, Dr. Henne worked with Zion Banks, the Media and External Relations Manager at GSU, to publish articles educating students and faculty about Covid-19. Dr. Henne also hosted a live stream to educate his students and answer questions publicly about the vaccine. He later took part in another live stream on Facebook for The Southland Health and Wellness Hour Podcast at GSU.

While many are now vaccinated, thanks to the help of Dr. Henne, his latest concern is the importance of booster shots. At the time of our interview, only about 27% of the United States population had received their booster. But getting the booster is crucial.



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*"First and foremost I am a scientist... Following the science was what really guided me into that role from the beginning."*

Notes Dr. Henne: "If you don't have the booster you have almost no protection against Omicron in terms of symptomatic infection." What matters here is the rate of infection. Although the numbers may seem abstract, Dr. Henne illustrates that if "it only affects .3% of the population, that's a million people." Therefore, he would urge anyone who has yet to get the booster to do so.

It is during these trying times that we should be grateful for our healthcare workers and our scientists. Thanks to Dr. Henne, our resident "Vaccine Angel," numerous students and faculty members have received their vaccines and remained healthy throughout the ongoing pandemic. ■

# Helping GSU Conserve Tomorrow, Today

By Alexis Robinson

## Dr. Nicholas Marra Brings a Collaborative Approach to Conservation Genetics



GSU has a keen eye for spotting new talent, and one of its newest picks is none other than Dr. Nicholas Marra. Dr. Marra came to GSU from a liberal arts college in Missouri. While there, he served as a faculty member in Biology and conducted research in Conservation Genetics (the

study of genetics that helps reduce species extinctions).

Dr. Marra received his Ph.D. in Conservation Genetics in 2013, and since then, he has been making great strides in his field. One notable example of this is his research on desert rodents and their ability to retain water in arid environments. These types of adaptations are a result of genetic variation because it allows species to withstand major shifts in the environment. “In conservation genetics, our first step is trying to figure out what genetic variation is present,” because it poses important questions that allow for more research opportunities.

Dr. Marra particularly enjoys the collaborative aspect of conducting research: “The thing I like most about research is talking with other people and coming up with solutions, ideas, and projects.” He is especially interested in research collaborations with students. “It’s a great way for students to learn about science, and that [practical experience] is very different from class [instruction].”

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*“The thing I like most about research is talking with other people and coming up with solutions, ideas, and projects.”*

Dr. Marra understands the value of lessons that are learned outside the classroom as he is active in a myriad of activities and clubs on campus. Since beginning at GSU in fall 2021, he has helped his students start an Environmental Activities Club (a resurrection of GSU’s Sustainability Club) which is open to students from all majors. In a hope to provide more study abroad opportunities for his students, he has also joined GSU’s Global Affairs Committee, which encourages and approves study abroad programs.

In addition to the many activities Dr. Marra participates in, he has also facilitated March Mammal Madness. Similar to NCAA Basketball’s March Madness, mammals from various different species are pitted against each other (virtually) to see which animal will be the victor in their given environment. He hopes to continue this in future semesters as a campus wide competition, as this event is “a way to learn biology in a fun and different way.”

With all of these exciting new things that Dr. Marra is a part of, it is evident that he will make GSU an even greater, more sustainable, place to be! ■

# Voices from Our Graduates



**CLAUDE T. MARTINEZ**  
*BA in Media Studies*

My GSU experience was unique. During my time at GSU, my peers and I were so connected because we learned something new in our Media Studies classes and immediately applied those

skills to our work. My favorite memory at GSU was recording the Men's Soccer Tournament with Shu Fang and Dante Corona. GSU has shown me never to give up. Work as hard as you can now, and you are in the process of making your luck. At GSU, I was able to take full advantage of this by enrolling in classes and internships to hone these skills.



**HEATHER COX**  
*MFA in Printmaking*

During my time at GSU, I had the pleasure of working as a graduate assistant in the art gallery. That experience allowed me to curate shows, assist professional artists, lead sculpture park school tours,

and teach lessons to high school students. I have formed many friendships over the past four years, and they all made an impact. I will miss chatting with James and Nate (custodians) in the morning as I pass through The Hall of Governors. I will miss making art during the late nights with fellow students. I will miss the professors who supported and challenged me on my journey.



**CHANELL RAINES**  
*BS in Psychology*

GSU was like "a home away from home." The GSU experience taught me the importance of unity, diversity, and inclusion. What I will miss most about GSU are my professors and classmates/

colleagues. I was a peer mentor for incoming freshmen, formerly a part of Student Engagement. I worked in the library, was a part of the NSLS (National Society of Leadership and Success), and was recently a part of a Social Justice initiative. GSU has developed me as a thoughtful, knowledgeable, empathetic, voiceful leader.



**SARAH SHOAF**  
*MA in Communication,  
Media, and Performance*

GSU has pushed me out of my comfort zone more times than I can count, which at the moment made me so anxious, but afterwards, I had a feeling of accomplishment that made

it all worth it. I'm an introverted person, so most social situations can be overwhelming for me. Still, I got better at speaking up when I needed to and asking for help when I found myself struggling. I became more confident in myself and my skills by getting through unfamiliar situations.



**MARIA AVALOS**  
*BS in Chemistry*

My GSU experience has been great. I have been enrolled part-time for the past few years while working full-time. GSU has offered the flexibility with classes that I needed. The smaller

class sizes always ensured I received adequate attention from my professors, who have been my mentors in school work, and life. GSU has prepared me for the career and field of chemistry that I have already entered.



**KIMELIA CARTER**  
*BA in Theater and Performance Studies*

I have made connections, mentors, and, more importantly, great friends that I will always hold dear. Being able to come to campus and sit on the library balcony will always be a

treasured memory. A school that prides itself on having people of all backgrounds in attendance gave me the confidence and the freedom to pursue a career in performance. I took part in two plays a year, along with acting as President of GSU's Reconstructed. Being able to work with students that I would not normally get the chance to see if I stayed in the classroom made it all worth it.



**TIYEN SIMMONS**  
*BA in Media Studies*

My GSU experience was awesome. I got involved earlier, made some lifelong friends, and learned a lot about the media industry. GSU taught me how to get out of my shell. As an ambivert,

I used to always be shy around people. Now, I feel like I can properly communicate with anyone at any given time. One of my most fond memories at GSU is being able to go to Alabama for the Civil Rights Beloved Community Tour. I learned an extraordinary amount of information about my cultural background while building a family-like fellowship with those on the trip.



**ANSAM ABDELJABER**  
*BA in English*

My favorite memories at GSU are doing group projects/discussions with classmates and hanging out with friends on the library balcony. I loved being on campus, meeting new people, and hearing their

stories. Everyone here has a unique life experience, and I've gained many valuable life lessons from hearing them. I worked as a writing tutor and a writer/editor for the *ArtSci* magazine during my time here. Both have allowed me to discover my love for teaching and writing. I'm glad I chose to continue my GSU journey in the English master's program.



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