

From the Provost



Dr. Avinandan (Avi) Mukherjee
Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

One of the privileges of serving as Provost is having the opportunity to see the remarkable breadth of talent across Georgia Southern University.

Our faculty are educators, certainly, but they are also researchers, scholars, artists, practitioners and leaders whose work reaches far beyond our campuses. And alongside them, our dedicated staff bring expertise, creativity and leadership to the work of advancing our University and supporting the success of our students. And as we look toward the future of Georgia Southern, we are continuing to bring talented people into our University who will expand that impact even further.

This month, I am pleased to highlight two individuals who represent both.

Casey Schachner, professor of art on our Armstrong Campus, was selected through an international competition to design a memorial in Chicago honoring the millions of people around the world who lost their lives to COVID-19. Inspired by the visual similarities between the coronavirus and a dandelion—a plant associated with healing—her design will create a place for remembrance, reflection and, ultimately, healing.

What an extraordinary example of the power of creative scholarship.

Art gives us a way to process experiences that can be difficult to put into words. Through this project, Professor Schachner's work will contribute to how people remember one of the defining events of our lifetime. It is a powerful reminder that the expertise of our faculty can have an impact in ways and places we may never anticipate.

I am equally excited about an individual who will soon join our Georgia Southern community.

In February, Devita T. Stallings, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, will become our inaugural associate dean for nursing and director of the School of Nursing in the Waters College of Health Professions.

Dr. Stallings brings more than two decades of experience in nursing education and clinical practice, along with an impressive record of academic leadership and scholarship. A Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, she joins us from Saint Louis University, where she serves as associate dean of undergraduate and prelicensure nursing education.

Her appointment comes at an important moment for Georgia Southern. As we continue to expand our impact in health professions education, strengthen our research enterprise and respond to critical workforce needs across Georgia, strong academic leadership will be essential. I am confident Associate Dean Stallings will help us build upon the School of Nursing's momentum while creating new opportunities for our students, faculty and the communities we serve.

These two announcements represent different moments in the life of a university: celebrating the impact of one of our faculty members and welcoming a new leader who will help shape what comes next.

But both remind us of something fundamental. Universities are defined by their people. When we give talented people the opportunity to teach, discover, create and lead, their impact extends outward—to our students, our professions, our communities and, sometimes, far beyond them.

That is excellence in action, and I am proud to see it represented by Professor Schachner and Dr. Stallings.

GS RECEIVES RENEWED FUNDING FROM THE GEORGIA OPIOID CRISIS ABATEMENT TRUST TO CONTINUE OPIOID OVERDOSE PREVENTION AND EDUCATION

Georgia Southern University recently received a $234,474 grant from the Georgia Opioid Crisis Abatement Trust. The award will expand the University's naloxone initiative— first launched in 2022, to promote harm reduction and opioid overdose awareness – as well as enhance substance use prevention and education programming.

The new funds will increase on-campus access to naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal drug. During the two-year project period, 2,000 doses of the drug and 5,000 fentanyl test strips will be distributed across the Statesboro and Armstrong campuses, while training an additional 1,000 faculty, staff and students in overdose recognition and response.

A joint effort between the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health's (JPHCOPH) Center for Addiction Recovery (CAR), University Health Services, and the Office of Student Wellness and Health Promotion (SWHP), the expansion was inspired by recent data from state and federal agencies.

According to the Georgia Department of Public Health, opioid overdose deaths had nearly tripled for young adults aged 18-24 from 2019 to 2022. Moreover, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that a bystander was present for more than half of the overdoses statewide and a majority chose not to intervene.

GS RECEIVES PERFECT SCORE ON CYBERSECURITY AUDIT, GAINS ACCESS TO INCREASED RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Georgia Southern University researchers can now compete for federal funding, including Department of War (DoW) funding that requires strict cybersecurity protections, after the University's Talon Secure virtual environment earned Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification Level 2 certification.

With Talon Secure certified, Georgia Southern faculty can pursue larger DoW grants, support current DoW-funded projects and join defense companies as research partners or subcontractors.

Inside Talon Secure, researchers can store and work with government information that is unclassified but still must be safeguarded, such as technical data tied to defense programs. The certification confirms the system meets federal requirements for protecting that information.

"Protecting sensitive research isn't a box we check, it's a standard we hold ourselves to every day," said Georgia Southern Vice President for Research and Innovation David Weindorf, Ph.D. "This certification opens the door for our faculty to compete for consequential defense research, and it tells our federal partners they can bring that work to Georgia Southern with confidence."

Talon Secure was reviewed by a Certified Third-Party Assessor Organization and earned a perfect score, with no deficiencies in any of the 14 security categories tested. Several Georgia Southern departments collaborated to prepare for the audit, including the Office of Research Integrity, Research Security and Export Controls (RSEC) and Information Technology Services.

Janny Crespo-Grow, Ph.D., director of RSEC, said the assessor described Georgia Southern's performance as "the standard for what we should see in our assessments." Crespo-Grow, part of the Office of Research Integrity, specifically credited Chief Information Security Officer Nic Carroll and his team, who "took point" in preparation.

Carroll highlighted the cross-divisional collaboration behind the audit.

"Preparing for the audit meant bringing together people from the Office of Research and Innovation, IT, information security and compliance to answer one honest question: 'Does what we actually do every day match what our written procedures say we do?'" he said.

He added assessors tested 110 security controls against 320 assessment objectives.

"The assessment confirmed our protections are followed in practice, not just written down, and that is what gives our researchers an environment they can trust," Carroll explained.

GS'S DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS INCUBATION JOINS INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS INNOVATION ASSOCIATION (INBIA) BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Director of Business Incubation of the Business Innovation Group (BIG) of Georgia Southern University, Sheffie Robinson, DBA, has joined the board of directors for the International Business Innovation Association (InBIA), a global nonprofit dedicated to advancing Entrepreneur Support Organizations (ESOs) and those that lead them.

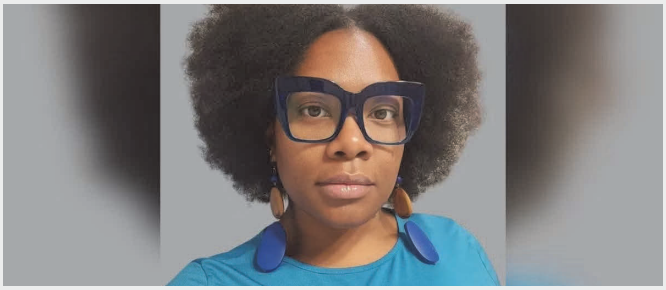
With experience mentoring and championing entrepreneurial efforts both in and out of institutions of higher education, Robinson demonstrates a deep commitment to helping others thrive. This dedication is evident in Robinson's leadership at BIG, where she has played an important role in expanding entrepreneurial opportunities throughout the region.

"What makes the BIG unique is that we meet entrepreneurs where they are," Robinson explained. "Through the Georgia Enterprise Network for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (GENIE), founders in rural and small-town Georgia have the same access to resources, expertise and networks that people usually associate with big cities. Our incubators in Statesboro, Metter and Hinesville anchor a broader network of partner organizations across the state that support our founders. We connect the University's talent and research capacity directly to the businesses that drive our regional economy."

According to Robinson, it can be a misconception that businesses fail because they aren't trying hard enough. However, she explained that there are a lot of small mistakes that anyone can make while opening a business, and Robinson, along with leaders at BIG and InBIA, seeks to prevent those startup errors before they ever start.

"Most founders don't fail for lack of effort; they stall because they don't know what they don't know," she said. "A good mentor shortens that learning curve, helps them avoid costly mistakes and opens doors to customers, capital and partners they couldn't reach on their own."

InBIA has provided a wide range of resources, training and thought leadership to empower ESOs to create meaningful skills, collective knowledge and comprehensive resources to help organizations run efficiently and promote startup business success for over 40 years.



Director of Business Incubation of the Business Innovation Group (BIG) of Georgia Southern University, Sheffie Robinson, DBA

One of only six leaders selected for the board of directors, Robinson began her role Oct. 1.

"I'm looking forward to bringing the perspective of rural and regional incubation to an international conversation," she explained. "So much innovation happens outside major metros, and I want to make sure those programs and founders are part of how our industry defines best practice. I'm also excited to learn from incubator and accelerator leaders around the world and bring those ideas back to Georgia Southern and the communities we serve."

However, her achievements go beyond this new role alone. In 2021, Robinson was named the winner of the EmpowerHERaccess Cloud Solution of the Year Award by Women in Cloud, and was also honored as a Top 10 Under 40 and Top CEO by the "Mississippi Business Journal." In addition, she holds numerous professional certifications in workforce development, project management and Agile methodology. Robinson also holds professional training in clinical sociology and sociotherapy.

For Robinson, the ability to support innovators and entrepreneurs is a passion built over nearly three decades. She looks forward to maximizing her skills as a leader and mentor within this new role.

"I love the moment when someone realizes their idea is real," she said. "I've been a founder myself for most of my career, so I know how isolating it can feel. Watching an entrepreneur land their first customer, hire their first employee, or secure funding they were told they'd never get is incredibly rewarding. Every one of those wins also strengthens a community, and that's what keeps me in this work."

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provostoffice@georgiasouthern.edu



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Interdisciplinary Clusters of University Excellence (ICUE)- Faculty Interest Form

GS PROFESSOR APPOINTED TO CHATHAM COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

José de Arimatéia da Cruz, Ph.D., professor of international relations and international studies in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, has been appointed to the Chatham County Board of Health (CCBH) for a six-year term through 2031.

He will join a seven-member governing body composed of local representatives, working closely with local government leaders, county commission and the county superintendent of schools. CCBH oversees the Chatham County Health Department, assisting in public health policy and adoption of new rules.

Combining his expertise in international relations, da Cruz also specializes in cybersecurity and public health, bringing a unique skill set to the Chatham County Public Health Department that bridges the gap between local health initiatives and global security by connecting public health and global disease management directly with national security and military preparedness.

Additionally, da Cruz serves on the City of Savannah Ethics Board, Hospital Authority and Public Health Board. He also holds notable research and operational roles at the Center for Strategic Leadership in the United States Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Alongside his military education roles, he is a research associate for the Brazil Research Unit at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington, D.C. With an active international profile, da Cruz has acted as a visiting professor at the Prague University of Economics and Business, the University of Stavanger in Norway and La Serena University in Chile.

On a national level, da Cruz holds specialized certifications from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in emergency management, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the U.S. Army in defense support of civil authorities. He is also a Cisco Certified CyberOps Officer and a Certified HIPAA Compliance Officer.

His extensive career spans the intelligence community across both the government and private sectors. Through this new appointment, da Cruz will provide the board with a macro-level understanding of how global health crises, biosecurity and technological threats impact community wellness and emergency readiness in the communities surrounding the Armstrong Campus of Georgia Southern.

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GS TEAM WINS $20,000 IN DOE MARINE ENERGY COMPETITION

A research team of multidisciplinary students in the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing (AEPCEC) at Georgia Southern University won $20,000 and a national title for their innovative tidal turbine design and community outreach plan at the 2026 U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Marine Energy Collegiate Competition.

Team Marine Seals won the Megawatt League's Community Connections Challenge during the Pacific Ocean Energy Trust's Ocean Renewable Energy Conference competition finals in Portland, Oregon. Outperforming 25 teams from across the nation, the group's victory caps an intense eight-month phased competition requiring comprehensive business planning, technical build-and-test execution and community engagement.

The team's competitive edge centered on creating a self-regulating seal for tidal turbines that could significantly advance the viability of renewable ocean energy. The technology stems from the doctoral research of mechanical engineering student Mohammad "Fuad" Hassan in Georgia Southern's Thermofluidic Systems Research Laboratory.

Located on the ocean floor, tidal turbines convert moving ocean currents into electricity, but their underwater components face severe wear from high pressure and corrosion. Powerful dynamic currents cause shaft deflections and misalignment in traditional rigid seals triggering system failure and demanding frequent, high-cost maintenance.

"If something fails offshore, you can't just go fix it right away," Hassan explained. "Systems need to last for years."

To address this problem, the team focused on a critical but frequently overlooked point of vulnerability: the mechanical seal. The team re-engineered the seal's geometry, allowing it to actively respond to constant pressure shifts. The design drastically reduces contact friction, wear and structural leakage, allowing underwater turbines to operate for longer periods of time before requiring costly maintenance interventions.

This multidisciplinary approach proved to be their winning edge. "The team responded with an incredible comeback," said Sevki Cesmeci, Ph.D., and Team Marine Seals' faculty advisor. "By bridging the gap between advanced marine engineering and public accessibility, the team demonstrated exactly what the Community Connections Challenge aims to foster: clean energy solutions that are understood, embraced and driven by the communities they serve."

The multidisciplinary roster brought together students from mechanical engineering, information technology, mathematics and athletics, creating a unique cross-functional edge:

Mohammad "Fuad" Hassan (Graduate Team Lead): A doctoral student researching advanced sealing technologies and machine learning, Hassan previously helped the University secure $75,000 at the 2025 DOE EnergyTech University Prize and holds the prestigious 2026 STLE Elmer E. Klaus Fellowship.

Cemil Emre Yavas: An information technology doctoral student and Presidential Research Fellow with 25 years of software entrepreneurship experience, Yavas utilized predictive analytics and cybersecurity concepts to build an interdisciplinary bridge between data and mechanical hardware.

Madison Procyk: Holding both a bachelor's and master's degree in mechanical engineering from Georgia Southern, Procyk brought extensive background in experimental testing, having previously taken first place at the 2024 ASME International Mechanical Engineering Congress poster competition.

Simay Gunek: Bringing crucial manufacturing and inspection experience from an aerospace internship in Turkey, Gunek contributed highly technical machining precision and an international perspective to the design workflow.

Noushin Gauhar: Pursuing a second master's degree in mathematical sciences after earning a master's degree in computer science, Gauhar combined computation, advanced mathematics and statistical analysis to bring deep analytical and data-driven modeling expertise to the team.

Nevaeh Brown: A TRIO McNair Scholar who delivered the final community-engagement presentation under intense judges' questioning, Brown successfully balanced intensive research outreach with Division I athletics as a student-athlete on Georgia Southern's championship-winning women's basketball team.

Carrie Skelly: A mechanical engineering student, Skelly pairs a strong foundation in diagnostic problem-solving from her family's farm and automotive shop background with professional experience in office management.

Sevki Cesmeci, Ph.D. (Faculty Advisor): Associate professor of mechanical engineering at the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing.

"Team Marine Seals demonstrates the kind of experiential learning that prepares students to lead beyond the classroom," said Abhijit Bhattacharyya, Ph.D., dean of the Allen E. Paulson College of Engineering and Computing. "Their success reflects a commitment to excellence not only in academics, but also in translating knowledge into action."

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AWARDS GEORGIA SOUTHERN GRANT FOR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

The Georgia Southern University Research and Service Foundation received an $18,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) for the Performing Arts Center (PAC) in honor of "Celebrating the Nation's 250th Birthday with Music from U.S. Military Bands."

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is an independent federal agency and the largest funder of arts and art education across the country. In honor of the long legacy of military bands over 25 decades, the agency recognized Georgia Southern's Performing Arts Center for consistently including and promoting military bands, which have a longstanding history of participating in some of the nation's most historic events. To expand the concert's reach to even more community members, the NEA grant helped purchase advanced streaming technology.

PAC Director Daniel Brown recognized the community's interest in military band shows and sought to carry the tradition into 2026.

"To apply for this specific grant was a privilege," Brown said. "For me, this grant was all about providing program accessibility, celebrating our country and uplifting our community. Many of our patrons are senior citizens who, for various reasons, have expressed the inability to participate in our evening programming here at the PAC."

In fall 2024, the PAC hosted the United States Air Force's Band of the West, which performed for a full house, selling out the auditorium. Additionally, the U.S. Army Field Band and Soldier's Chorus were scheduled to perform in fall 2025 to a sold-out audience as well, but the show was unable to proceed due to a government shutdown.

In October 2026, the U.S. "President's Own" Marine Corps Band joined community members at the PAC as part of its National Concert Tour, entertaining a sold-out audience with traditional band arrangements, Sousa marches, contemporary works, vocal and instrumental solos and a salute to the Armed Forces.

For Brown, this is another way in which the University can honor the service members living throughout the communities served by Georgia Southern.

"Among our area seniors, a significant number of them are veterans as well," Brown explained. "We wanted them to have the opportunity to view these live performances that celebrate our military and our country to not only remind these vital members of our community that we value their presence, but to also thank them for their contributions and services."

Brown stated that the NEA funding will allow the PAC to continue reaching wider audiences when military bands join us through the University's annual programming.

"As we celebrate America's 250th anniversary, the National Endowment for the Arts is proud to support projects that celebrate the enduring legacy of U.S. military bands," NEA Chairman Mary Anne Carter said. "These awards recognize the vital role military bands have played throughout American history – from the nation's earliest days to the present – as powerful symbols of national identity, bringing music to public life and honoring service through a wide range of musical styles and traditions."

Upcoming PERFORMANCES

SCAN THE QR CODE.

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