Dr. Bagie George
My Professional Journey to My "Dream Job," and Helping Students to Find Theirs

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At UGA in the UGA Cadaver Lab where my GGC students are shown the human diaphragm, lungs, and the other organs of a cadaver.

Showing my students what to look for as they compare healthy living tissue to lung tissue diseased with cancer.

Preserving a sample of sediment and leaves mixed with invertebrates (insects) taken from a Yellow River tributary with my Ecology class.
November 10, 2017

Dr. Martha L. Venn
Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Board of Regents, University System of Georgia
270 Washington Street
Atlanta, GA 30334

Dear Dr. Venn:

Engaged, Inspiring, Selfless, and “Lifesaving”

These above words are just a few that attempt to capture the extraordinary character of Georgia Gwinnett College’s nominee for the Regents Teaching Excellence award. Dr. Bagie George is the single most inspirational, dedicated and inclusive member of the faculty of Georgia Gwinnett College since its founding in 2006. I am delighted and honored to nominate her. She is a charter faculty member of Georgia Gwinnett College and I have been fortunate to work beside her for twelve years; previously as Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs and currently as President for the past four years. Throughout this time, she joined our forces in building this College and she was specifically instrumental in the creation of our enviable Biology Program, the design factors in our newest science laboratory building, and served as the sole author of GGC’s initial Faculty Manual—a manual that has set the cultural tone of student focused instruction for all of GGC’s faculty. Dr. George possesses exceptional characteristics in her teaching methods, student interactions and leadership accomplishments. She is a natural leader in her significant efforts to continually reach beyond the norm in every aspect of her career: teaching, student engagement, scholarship and service.

Dr. George remains the complete mosaic of a sincere, enthusiastic, meaningful, and gifted teacher. I will make a humble attempt to hone in on just a few observations of how she shares her many talents and incorporates them into the most intuitive, creative, energetic and positive experiences that any college student can have. Among her numerous awards and recognitions, Dr. George won the 2017 Outstanding Teaching Award from the National Society of Leadership and Success (a student-nominated award). A student nomination also led to her being awarded GGC’s Outstanding Teaching Award in 2017.

Common themes of accolades from Dr. George’s students point to her “encouragement” and the “confidence” they have gained in her classroom that they will always carry with them. I know of no better compliment for an educator. For a student to feel assured of the knowledge they have gained and to carry that to their next level of learning is a critical goal of student success. Her students have internalized intellectual curiosity which is highly correlated with life-long learning. As an Associate Professor of Biology, her subject matter is not always easily imparted to students, yet she is known throughout the College (not just her discipline) for hurdling any obstacles that make studies difficult or mundane.
Early on in her career, Dr. George implemented a self-imposed policy to have individual mentorship meetings with students. In doing so she reaches students that otherwise would not understand the tremendous opportunities and support systems made available to them. She is touted by both non-science and science major students and a champion for the students and faculty alike. She challenges all who she teaches, mentors and inspires.

Dr. George’s commitment to her students extends outside of the classroom as well. She is faculty advisor for GGC’s signature Science Club, SCRUBS (Starting Careers and Research Using a Bachelors of Science). She is known for her compassion in mentorship and advising. I find her combination of heart and intellect to be inspirational, and according to one of her students it is “lifesaving.” Her dedication and leadership extends to our community. She is particularly active in local schools, leading “Science Day” activities and judging science presentations. Her organized “Crime Scene Investigation” events on campus are well-attended by younger students who learn real-world application for their science lessons.

Not content with her vast accomplishments, Dr. George continues to reach. She sets no limits and continues to research, learn, gather information, and stretch; all in the name of her students’ success (not hers). She does not confine her leadership to the classroom; she shares, listens and encourages her fellow faculty. In addition to her assigned scores of student advisees over the decade, she also chose to advise another dozen students with over 15 different academic research projects since 2006. Additionally, she is currently involved in three pedagogical research projects delving into innovative, developmental teaching methods so that thousands of other students would experience improved teaching by their faculty.

I can honestly say that I do not believe our School of Science and Technology would enjoy the successes that it has for our students and their future employers without the selfless efforts of Dr. George. She has given GGC’s faculty, staff and most importantly its students the best gift imaginable: that of knowledge, inspiration, insight, interest, and confidence. It is without any reservation and with my strongest commendation that I recommend Dr. Bagie George for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award. She is most deserving of this prestigious award.

Respectfully,

Stanley C. “Staś” Preczewski, Ph.D.
President
November 15, 2017

Dear Dr. Venn and the Members of the Board of Regents Section Committee:

I am delighted to recommend Dr. Bagie George for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award.

Dr. George is one of the strongest advocates of experiential learning in STEM classes that we have at GGC. Recent research studies have indicated that, in order for STEM students to be prepared for both advanced studies in medical school, dental school, and graduate school, as well as to be prepared to enter their professional careers, STEM educators need to use more active learning and experiential learning strategies in the classroom in order to increase students' understanding of critical concepts.

This is no problem for Dr. George. In fact, in the STEC 4500 undergraduate research class, her ecology students are frequently seen out in the nearby creeks in waist-high waders, as is Dr. George herself, as they collect water samples to study the effects of contaminants and pollution on our rivers and waterways. In her Anatomy and Physiology I and II courses, she often takes students to "Bodies, the Exhibit" at Atlantic Station where they observe the effects of diseases and aging on the bodies of over 200 cadavers in the exhibition. She also takes her students to the Yerkes laboratories and to the Universities of Georgia Research Labs so that her students can learn more about basic scientific and translational research.

Yet, as much as her students rave about her courses, they rave even more about her mentoring and advising, which often continues on even after the students' graduations. Recently last summer, one of our charter students, Stephen Haney, who was GGC's first SGA president and who graduated eight years ago in 2009, contacted Dr. George to let her know that he had fulfilled his dream of completing medical school as well as his residency in Chicago. Neither distance nor having graduated long ago makes any difference to Dr. George's students, because she is able to create such very strong, positive relationships with her students. Our students consistently tell us about how "Dr. George cares about each of us as a person," and how she is willing to do all she can at any time to assist them. In fact, she regularly helps her students, many of whom are first-generation, write and complete their medical school applications, nursing school applications, and their applications for their first professional jobs.

It is a tribute to Dr. George that she is able to take GGC's students, a substantial number of whom come to us academically underprepared, and help them find their true potentials and fulfill their professional and personal dreams.

For all that Dr. George has done to help our students succeed, I recommend her unconditionally for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award.

Sincerely,

T.J. Arant, Ph.D.
Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs/Provost
USG Outstanding Teacher Selection Committee,

It is my pleasure to give my strongest possible recommendation for Dr. Bagie M. George for Outstanding Teacher in the University System of Georgia. I have known Dr. George since August 2006 when she joined the charter faculty at Georgia Gwinnett College. I have had the privilege of watching Dr. George become one of the most active, vibrant, engaged, and dedicated members of the GGC faculty. I have also watched with admiration as she has begun to establish her reputation as one of our most gifted and valuable faculty leaders. In my opinion, Dr. George exemplifies all of the attributes that we seek in our best faculty members in the USG. As her record clearly demonstrates, she has all the attributes that make her an ideal selection for Outstanding Teacher.

Dr. George has excelled in every domain where we expect outstanding contributions from our faculty. Dr. George has been an outstanding teacher, engaging students in a breadth of courses including non-majors biology courses, anatomy and physiology, and advanced biology courses. Her versatility of teaching is one of her greatest strengths. As a member of our charter faculty, she has had to develop new courses throughout the general education program as well as the biology major. In doing so, she has incorporated the latest concepts from the academic literature, the most appropriate practical applications, and cutting edge educational technology. She has incorporated active learning throughout the courses she offers. This has been where Dr. George has excelled. This activity cannot be overstated. It is reported that in order to improve STEM education we must discard our reliance on didactic instruction and make our STEM classrooms more engaging and filled with active learning. Dr. George excels in this area and has published an article on this. Even though she is senior faculty, she is constantly working to improve her teaching. As such, she has participated at teaching seminars both at GGC and at biology conferences, and has shared her innovative techniques with faculty of many disciplines. Her students repeatedly rank her as an excellent classroom teacher. I frequently get emails from her students reporting that she has helped them.

Her teaching has extended to engagement with students outside the classroom. She has supervised numerous students in our senior undergraduate research course. She has worked with students one-on-one in field biology and in cell biology research. Many of these students have made presentations at regional conferences. This activity is a laudable high impact practice that shows Dr. George’s commitment to students outside the classroom as well. In addition, Dr. George has shown a commitment to helping students attain post-graduate schooling in the health area. For several years she has been the faculty advisor for the SCRUBS student club.
that is composed of students interested in medical, dental, pharmacy, PA schools. She organizes outside speakers to inform students about these opportunities and advises students preparing for interviews.

Dr. George exemplifies all the attributes that we expect in our faculty. She is a tremendous teacher, an effective scholar, and influential leader of faculty colleagues, a great supporter of students, and a fine example of service. She provides an outstanding model that other faculty members strive to emulate. At root, though, what grounds Dr. George is her commitment to teaching and student engagement. I recommend in the strongest possible terms that Dr. Bagie George be selected for Outstanding Teacher in the USG.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr. Thomas Mundie
Dean, School of Science and Technology
To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to submit this letter on behalf of Dr. Bagie George’s candidacy for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award. I have known Dr. George for eleven years. She has an amazing commitment to creating engaging learning environments in and outside of the classroom.

Dr. George and I met as charter faculty of Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) in 2006. What stood out about Dr. George was her commitment to providing her students with a solid education, holding them high standards, and to enhancing the GGC learning environment through her passion for research and teaching.

It is because of her passion for teaching that Dr. George is well-respected by her students. She cares about their learning. She pushes them to understand difficult material by making learning tangible for her students. She constantly seeks new ways to make biology relatable to her students. There are two classroom projects that Dr. George initiated that are very impressive. First, she incorporated the use of clickers into her daily lectures. She utilized clicker technology for classroom learning long before clickers were made popular. We worked on a presentation for the Georgia Teaching Fellows that demonstrated the effectiveness of clickers in students’ retention of course topics. Second, she developed a senior capstone course where students investigated various topics and wrote grant proposals as an application of their gained knowledge. It was a creative take on the regular senior thesis. By introducing students to the idea of grant writing, she gave students a valuable skill that would serve them in their futures. Both the use of clickers and the innovative senior project demonstrate her commitment to educating her students to become life-long learners.

Dr. George is an amazing colleague. She is passionate about educating all students regardless of their educational strengths or weaknesses. Her commitment to her students and to fulfilling the mission of Georgia Gwinnett College cannot be matched. She has served the institution in several capacities, but it is her commitment to providing a unique learning experience for her students that makes her stand out. Another way she gives back is by mentoring junior faculty and she regularly shares her insights on education with her colleagues at teaching conferences and workshops throughout the state.

I have been extremely fortunate to call Dr. Bagie George both colleague and friend. She has taught me a great deal about teaching to transform students. Her passion for higher education is contagious, and GGC is very fortunate to have her as a faculty member. She is the faculty member that truly embodies the mission of the institution.

Sincerely,

Dr. Holly A. Haynes
Dean, Leonard Schiemer School of Psychology and Biblical Counseling
Associate Professor, Behavioral Sciences
Cindy Valenzuela  
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To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure and honor that I write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Bagle George for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award. I have known Dr. George for almost 10 years and being her student/mentee has been an extraordinary blessing.

I met Dr. George at a non-majors biology course she taught and my life drastically changed from that point forward. From the start, I was able to see the unconditional support from Dr. George towards me and the entire community of students at GGC.

The door of Dr. George's office was always open to any student who had concerns with classes, major, and life. I spent many hours in her office where she would just listen and smile. Dr. George was not just approachable; she genuinely cared for the overall wellbeing of all students that walked into her classroom, office and life. After approaching Dr. George in class several times, I noticed she was very different. Dr. George's character and charisma made her stand above all of GGC professors. All the students that had the chance to meet Dr. George were blown away by her individuality and concern to guide us through the right path.

Due to Dr. George's incredible investment in my life as a whole, I decided to pursue a degree in biology. I could write many pages describing Dr. George's knowledge and commitment to profess, but such are not what make Dr. George the great human being she is. Dr. George's compassion towards my situation as an immigrant and obstacles to overcome as 1st in my family to reach college inspected me to continue.

Additionally, impediments continued to attempt to hinder my education, but Dr. George remained close to not allow me to give up. Dr. George created such a safe environment and much acceptance where I knew she was someone I could count on. Without hesitation, I decided to ask her to be my mentor and she gladly accepted. Dr. George gave me the confidence to pursue a career in science, which led to involvement in leadership roles on campus and the community.

More than being a club advisor and mentor, Dr. George became my inspiration. In my experience as an international student many times I was overlooked. Faculty and staff did not see my potential and never bothered to learn anything about me. I have never felt so welcomed and understood as I did when I spoke to Dr. George. In the four walls of her office, Dr. George took the time to not just learn my aspirations, but my struggles. Her office was always open anytime I had troubles either academically or personally. Dr. George was always available regardless of how busy she was completing tasks in her office or class. Under Dr. George's guidance, I was able to strengthen my leadership skills, but most importantly believe in myself. Dr. George believed in me when I did not have any hope or intention to continue my journey.
It was always evident to me that Dr. George was unique. Dr. George loved her job. Dr. George was not just another professor that lectured and graded assignments; she held a job on a relatively new college campus for a different reason. To many professing in a small college campus is uninspiring or simply another job, some might enjoy working with young adults, the few like Dr. George live to impact the lives of next world leaders.

Dr. George always went above and beyond the requirements of professing. She excelled in her position because she fully enjoyed the diversity and size of the student population. Having Dr. Bagie George in Gwinnett College was by far one of the most important aspects of our college experience. Graduation came and I walked up the stage, I shook Dr. Thomas Mundie’s hand; I looked up and saw Dr. George. She waited for me with arms wide open. We hugged tightly and cried together. "You did it!" She said.

It was then that I realized Dr. George was more than my professor, mentor and advisor, she was my savior. Dr. Bagie George saved my life and inspired me to live. She saved me from the lies of society that told me I would not amount to anything. She saved me from myself when everything was dark. I owe Dr. George my life, who I am today, and who I will become. My children will one day know of the strongest and most kindhearted professor that saved my life.

It is without any reservations, whatsoever, that I highly recommend Dr. Bagie George for the Felton Jenkins, Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award. I can only wish every student, has the chance to experience Dr. George’s support and inspiration, and to have her enrich their lives and leave such a long-lasting impression on them as she did on me.

Sincerely,

Cindy Valenzuela
Georgia Gwinnett College Alum
To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to give my highest recommendation for Dr. Bagie George. I was fortunate enough to have two classes under Dr. George’s tutelage: Interdisciplinary Applications of Biology, and Anatomy and Physiology II. I was initially apprehensive to take Interdisciplinary Applications of Biology. It sounded nebulous and irrelevant to my future goals. I could not have been more wrong. Interdisciplinary Applications quickly became one of the most interesting, useful, and memorable classes of my entire college career. The curriculum was daunting and full of projects that required us to push ourselves far beyond our academic comfort zones. One of these projects had each group of students develop an original hypothesis and then propose a complete experimental design to test it with. Dr. George challenged us to make the design as realistically feasible as possible. Each step in the experiment and every resource used had to be categorized, thoroughly understood, budgeted for, and justified. She monitored our progress through frequent meetings and mini presentations. Dr. George had exceptional advice at every stage, and consistently pushed us to expand our understanding. By the end of the course, each group of students had created a sophisticated hypothesis, complete with a budget proposal and an incredibly detailed experimental design. Dr. George pushed me to do something that I did not think would be possible at this stage of my education. I am very proud of the work that my group did, and we all have Dr. George’s incredible leadership to thank for it.

A large part of Interdisciplinary Applications is based around ethical issues and divisive topics. Dr. George navigated these ideas using a wide variety of methods such as class discussions, debates, and mock negotiations. Dr. George was Socratic in her teaching style. She encouraged everyone to participate in discussions, and allowed us to reach important ideas and revelations on our own by gently guiding us with a thought-provoking question. She was notorious for her ability to turn a debate on its head with one question, forcing us all to dig deeper into our own understanding and challenge our beliefs. Presentations followed the format of a scientific thesis defense: the presenter would give their presentation and then face an in-depth interrogation from the class and Dr. George. This method was intimidating to say the least, but it drove me to learn my presentation topics on a much deeper level than I previously had to for other classes. Dr. George essentially gave us a crash course in real-world presentations, when the stakes are much higher than our GPAs. She taught us how to effectively convince, communicate, and persuade with science. This is a skill that is rare even amongst scientists.

The second course I took, was Anatomy and Physiology II, was heavily technical and memorization-driven. So, the students’ being bored is always a very real possibility. Dr. George’s teaching style was perfectly balanced between note-taking and interactive tasks. It is evident that she really understands how students learn most effectively. The work we did was always a tool to further our understanding, not just a way to pass the time.

I graduated last year and recently began the lengthy and messy process of trying to get into nursing school as an older student with an atypical background. I felt completely overwhelmed. I emailed Dr. George for some advice, hoping on a whim that she would have a few minutes to spare to answer some questions via email. As usual, she exceeded my expectations entirely. She offered to meet with me and help me one-on-one. She spent over an hour talking me through the process and helping me to form a plan for my future. Dr. George was in the middle of an incredibly busy semester, she had never been my advisor, and I wasn’t even her student anymore, but she still went above and beyond to help me. I entered her office feeling overwhelmed and somewhat defeated, and I left her office with hope, a concrete plan, and a sense of purpose.

I have seen Dr. George teach across the full spectrum of class types: from one class full of projects, ideas, and discussions to another class driven entirely by concrete information. The fact that Dr. George can teach through this whole range with incredible efficacy is a testament to her exceptional teaching skills. Her skills as a teacher are matched by her kindness and generosity of time and spirit. She is truly the most influential teacher of my college career, and I could not be happier to give her my enthusiastic recommendation.

Sincerely,

Taylor Holbrook
REFLECTIVE STATEMENT
My Professional Journey to My “Dream Job,” and Helping Students to Find Theirs

There I was, about 10 miles out in the middle of the Okefenokee Swamp surrounded by 50 mating alligators with the motor of our boat jammed full of water lilies. The alligators appeared to be focused on our small but shiny motorboat as if it was a possible mate. Carefully, I paddled the boat between grunting alligators so we could collect my invertebrate samples before dark. Once we had passed most of the huge alligators, my mind began to wander. I began to think about why I was here in the middle of this swamp. I was here because I had decided to finish my dissertation research so I could get my Ph.D.

Yet, it had not been that long go when all I had dreamed about was putting on surgical gloves so that I could assist with medical surgical procedures. From the age of four up until 21, all I had ever wanted to be was a doctor. Now, I wasn’t so sure. When I was six, I had asked my parents for a doctor’s kit for Christmas, one with a working stethoscope, a blood pressure cuff where the needle moved, and a syringe that looked like it administered medication. When Christmas morning came, I was heartbroken that I did not get the kit. Yet, I would not be deterred; I asked and asked, and after several months of begging as only a child can do, they surprised me with a doctor’s kit. However, as I opened the box and looked inside the kit, disappointment flooded over me; the blood pressure cuff in this kit had no working parts. I had wanted it to have a real cuff that “worked” like a real physician’s. That is why, even today, one of my favorite labs is where I teach and use working blood pressure cuffs.

So why was I here in hip waders, paddling a motorboat back to shore in the swamp, with medical school the farthest thing on my mind? Why would a student who had been accepted into medical school give up her childhood dream of attending? When I had first gotten my letters of acceptance from Mercer, MCG (now Augusta University), and John Hopkins, I had been torn. Should I go to medical school or not? Then I decided that I would not “decline” the admissions; I would just “defer” for a year so that I could finish my Master’s degree in Biology at Georgia Southern University. Then I had thought it was simply because I had wanted to finish the degree that I had started. But later I would say it was because I was slowly beginning to gravitate toward my true calling, one that for so many years I had ignored.

It was just before the first letter of acceptance from medical school came, that I had received my first teaching award, the “Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award” (1996 – 1997). My supervising professor had nominated me and I was so surprised to receive the award! I was even more surprised by the written comments that came with the award. I was told I was innovative and an experiential instructor. I was told that I had an ability to convey difficult concepts to students in a manner which they could understand. Could others have seen something in me I could not, or did not, want to see in myself?

Around the same time I had received my acceptance letter into the doctoral program in Entomology at the University of Georgia. After I learned that I was selected as a teaching assistant for Human Anatomy & Physiology, I had been even more excited about this opportunity than about my receiving the letters from medical schools. As a teaching assistant at the University of Georgia, one of my greatest joys was being able to dissect cadavers. One
particular cadaver stands out in my mind. This cadaver was a 70-year-old woman with shiny pink nail polish still present on her fingernails. When I opened her thoracic cavity, I cut into some metal wires. With further exploration, I realized that this was part of her pacemaker. When I showed this to my students, I was astounded by their reaction. They became so inquisitive and engaged. I used this opportunity to discuss the electric signal through the heart and the intricacies of a pacemaker. This then allowed them to gain a foundation that would aid their understanding of the cardiovascular system.

As I continued to dissect the muscle tissue of the 70-year-old cadaver’s leg, I noticed a long scar on her knee. Dissecting past this scar, I saw a flash of shiny silver metal, and I realized that this was an actual knee replacement. After further inspecting the tibia and femur, I saw how far the screws were inserted into the bones. With this, I was able to finally entice the two football players in my class to approach the cadaver; in previous labs, they had refused to come within 5 feet of any cadaver. These big, tough, muscular guys had been so intimidated by a dead body, but now they joined in and were excited along with my other students. They all began asking questions. It was this energy and this excitement from my students that still fuels my passion to teach today.

Through this process I realized there was so much more that my students needed to know in order to pursue their dreams and goals in life.

In Latin, “doctor” means “teacher.” I knew then my “dream job” was not to become a physician; I was going to earn my doctorate and become a professor. So, although I didn’t become a physician, I became a doctor, and to me, the best type of doctor — one that teaches our future doctors.

I. Summary of Two Innovative Teaching Strategies

“Pass the Marker.” Here I was, standing in front of 75 students in my A&P class. It was just the beginning of my second semester of my first full-time teaching position. And yet again -- the same student who was more than twice my age was asking question after question about a concept that I was introducing.

Just last week, Mr. Ricks had debated what I said about a physiological concept. What made this a challenge was I knew that his questions were not being asked out of the spirit of curiosity, nor out of genuine desire to know more. Rather, with every question that he was asked, the tone of voice with which he spoke implied, “Are you sure that you are correct? Do you know your subject matter?”

I knew I still looked like a grad student, like I was younger than my actual age. Regardless, I had earned my doctorate from UGA about a year before, and despite what Mr. Ricks thought - I did know Physiology.

Today, it was the last straw. I let him continue on for a few minutes. Then I very politely asked him to come to the front of the room. I told him to explain the mechanisms of action potential to the class. He started to stutter. Looking shell-shocked, he picked up the marker and began to
write, and that was when I decided to give him a taste of his own behavior. I questioned him at every point and asked for clarification about each step. For 20 minutes, Mr. Ricks got a clear understanding of what his behavior had been like, and he was not enjoying the experience.

Once the mechanism was on the board, I asked him to sit down, but before he did, he had to give the marker to another student. I could hear a pin drop. All the students now understood this behavior would not be tolerated. The student with the marker was asked to come to the board and correct Mr. Ricks’ first point. Then he had to give the marker to another student to correct the second point. The process continued until the mechanism was written correctly. This was the foundation of an active learning activity I still use today called “Pass the Marker.” At the end of class, Mr. Ricks came up to me and profusely began to apologize. Moreover, after the first quiz, several students commented on how much this simple exercise solidified the mechanism of action potential in their minds.

In 2015, the “Pass the Marker” teaching strategy was included in an article in the Journal of Academic Excellence that I wrote, “Active Learning: Helping Them Get on Their Feet.”

*This was one of the first times that I took what could have been a negative moment in the classroom, and by coming up with an innovative solution, created a new teaching strategy that benefited not only the first set of students who had used it, but also students who came after them in future classes.*

“Design Your Own Experiment.” In fact recently, in my Ecology class, I was met with a series of complaints about the lab activities they had been assigned to complete from the lab manual. Comments included, “There wasn’t sufficient background information”; “The procedures were not clear”; “The tables were not labelled correctly,” and it continued on and on. After about five minutes of listening to the students, I offered them this option. They could complete two assignments that I devised instead of the eight we had left in the lab manual. They quickly agreed, and as a result had to complete the following assignments: In their first assignment, they were to “Design Your Own Experiment.” For their second assignment, after all the students had turned in their experiments to me, I gave each group an experiment that a set of their classmates had developed, and they were to conduct the experiment, write a lab report, and evaluate the experiment. So, every time that a faculty member goes into a class, he/she has to be ready to innovate and be able to adjust based upon feedback from the students. This allows for the best learning opportunities for the student and instructor.

*And -- it is often out of such “adjustments” come some of the most innovative teaching moments and techniques that we can continue to modify and adjust to use in a variety of classes.*
II. Experiential Learning Inside and Outside the Classroom

For me, there is almost no distinction between “inside” and “outside” the classroom. When we began GGC in 2006, I had an Ecology class of five students and no lab facilities. So the “outside” was my laboratory classroom. Over the course of the semester, we conducted field experiments in the local stream adjacent to the campus. Chemically testing water samples from the stream, checking for invertebrate (insect) abundance, and evaluating water flow—all had to be done outdoors, since GGC was so new, the lab buildings had not yet been constructed. More often than not, my students were always hesitant to go out into the field. As they said to me, “It is too hot today”; “It is too cold outside, Dr. George”; “We will have to walk around too much,” etc. However, over the course of the semester they slowly began to change their tunes. They became interested in the impact of urbanization on the local streams. By the middle of the semester, even on days when we were in our classroom, they started asking me if we could leave our classroom and go outside to do research.

So, now, in each of my classes—from ecology to A&P—I incorporate different types of experimental learning into the course—from Day One.

A. Experiential Learning in STEC 4500, Undergraduate Research Project. Whenever I think of my STEC 4500 research classes (which always have a small number of students, and so I am able to get to know them well) I am reminded of a quote by Maya Angelou:

“People will forget what you said, what you did, but will never forget how you made them feel…”

Stephen. I actually met Stephen when I was teaching at Georgia Perimeter College. Then, one day in one of my first A&P classes at GGC, I was calling roll, and I called out “Stephen Haney.” I recognized the name from somewhere, but I couldn’t put my finger on it. After class, he came up to me and said, “Hi, Dr. George; do you remember me from GPC?” Then it all came flooding back to me. He had been the student who took my A&P class because he didn’t know if he wanted to go to medical school. He was the student who sat in the back of the room and initially didn’t say much, but once I got him talking, he was bright and thought very critically. At times, he seemed distracted. He had been out of school for a while and had been working odd jobs, trying to decide if he should go back to school at all. He seemed without direction. He initially struggled to focus in my class and didn’t do well. Through the course of the semester, though, he buckled down and did extremely well.

At GGC, Stephen became one of my best students. He was an “A” student and the SGA President. He took several of my classes, including the STEC 4500 class which is a research class. However, it quickly became clear that Stephen was not what we would call an “outdoorsman.” Field work was not his thing. From the moment he signed up for my research
class, I heard excessive amounts of whining. “It was too hot”; “he needed gloves to wear in the stream because it was contaminated,” etc.

After about three trips to the stream, I heard less whining and more questions about what we were studying. He became more interested in the preliminary data we were collecting than in complaining about the heat. He wanted to understand the impacts of urbanization on this ecosystem. Ultimately, his project earned an “A,” and he used it as the foundation of his medical school essay. He graduated from GGC in December 2009, and graduated from Medical School in 2013 with the highest honors. He completed his residency in July 2017 in Chicago. He reached his dream.

Anna Parker. I met Anna when she started an STEC 4500 research class with me along with three other students. Anna was the quietest one of the group but just as intelligent. However, you wouldn’t have known that because she always let the other three of the group always lead. It was difficult to get her to be the first to speak up or provide an opinion. Over the course of two semesters of STEC 4500, Anna came out of her shell. It was a journey, but eventually she was the first one to speak and also take the lead. This took the others by surprise, but she continued to grow and mature. Currently, she has completed her Ph.D. in Biology at Georgia State University. She reached her dream.

Angel Lidelow. If you spoke to Angel, you would never know she had three kids. She had a fulltime job in addition to being a full-time parent, and she also took in foster kids. All the while, she maintained her grades. During her time at GGC she went through a difficult divorce, but she didn’t let that stop her education or her dedication to her kids. Her goal was to be a high school teacher. She wanted to give back and help the community by educating the future generation. Unlike Stephen, I never heard her complain about the heat or going out into the stream to collect samples. She was a trooper. She completed her degree at GGC in biology. Her son actually also attended GGC because of her inspiration. She is remarried and now is in Florida teaching high school biology. She reached her dream.

And that is what is so rewarding to me when I think about teaching—helping my students to reach their dreams, whatever their dreams may be. Whether it is teaching high school biology, completing a Ph.D., or finishing medical school, whenever my students tell me that they achieved their dreams, then I know I made the right choice to become a professor.

B. Experiential Learning in A&P. Whether it is teaching the dissection of a heart in the classroom or examining a diseased heart in the “Bodies, the Exhibit,” I feel it is important to engage students with the material. So, for 7 or 8 semesters, I’ve been taking sets of A&P I and A&P II students to Atlantic Station to view “Bodies, the Exhibit.”
"Bodies, the Exhibit" is sponsored by Premier Exhibitions, the leading provider of museum-quality displays throughout the world. Over 200 specimens of persons who lived in China and died from natural causes have been carefully preserved so that students (especially medical students) can see how disease and lifestyle actually and realistically manifest themselves inside the human body. Dr. Roy Glover, the Medical Director of "Bodies," taught at the University of Michigan Medical School for over 30 years, and he oversees this exhibition.

Students see depictions of a tumor in their texts, but when they get to the "Bodies" exhibit, and see in 3D an actual teratoma tumor (a type of ovarian tumor) in a cadaver, they understand so much more. For instance, when my students saw the lung of a cadaver that had been riddled with cancer and blackened totally by tar caused by years of smoking, and contrasted this one to the healthy pink lung of another nearby cadaver, then – they truly understand the dangerous effects of tobacco use.

After going to the "Bodies" exhibit, my A&P students tell me that, without this trip, some of the more difficult concepts of physiology such as understanding arterial blood flow would have been much harder to comprehend. It is by my incorporating these types of experiential learning experiences into my courses that my students are able to understand key anatomical processes.

C. Experiential Learning Spanning Two Courses. A few years ago, Dr. Julie Shearer, Assistant Professor of Biology, and I decided to devise a "two-course collaborative project" which would enable students to broadly understand biological concepts so that they could apply them in different contexts.

To do this, we require that students in her Microbiology course and my A&P II course work together on a group project. Usually, this requires the students to figure out how to work together even though they are not in the same class. Therefore, students learn to communicate through emails, texts, phone calls, and even arranging their own meetings together outside of class times.

Also, before each new semester begins, Julie and I decide on a common topic for both courses. For example, recently microbial diseases was the central theme of each course. Microbiology students were asked to concentrate on the microbial actions while A&P II students focused on
the human physiological responses, thus creating a more thorough look at the critical subject of microbes and diseases.

When the semester begins, usually most of the students in Dr. Shearer’s class and most of my A&P II students complain about their having to collaborate. Comments such as “It’s hard to figure out times to get together with my peer group members” and “I like to work by myself for a grade” are frequent.

But, by the end of the semester, the students realize how much can be learned by having students from the other class share different types of knowledge with each other. Some of the most positive comments on my end – of – the – semester course elevations are about how much the two- course collaborative project helped them learn.

III. Beyond the Classroom: Holistic Student Development

Just as I believe that the most valuable experiences for students in the classroom are experiential, I believe that, when my students are outside the classroom, the projects and interactions that I have with them have to be both interactive and meaningful.

So, over the decade that I have been at GGC, I have founded and sponsored the Student Organization (SCRUBS), helped students present at GGC’s student research symposium, and have taken them on various field trips.

A. SCRUBS, “Starting Careers and Research Using a Bachelor’s Degree.” SCRUBS was founded Fall 2006. Two students, Stephen Haney and Ashley Kirkpatrick, came up with this name. They wanted an all-inclusive club that would help support students who were pursuing professional careers.

Over the last 10+ years, as the faculty advisor, we have sponsored the following projects:
  - Trips to Emory’s Yerkes Primate Center
  - Trips to visit various schools:
o UGA Research Laboratory
o UGA Cadaver Laboratory
o Philadelphia College of Medicine (PCOM)
o UGA/Augusta University (then MCG) Medical partnership, Athens, Campus

• Trips to “Bodies, the Exhibit”
• Sponsoring guest speakers:
  o Former students have come to speak about their GGC experience and their current
    acceptances into various professional schools and/or current careers.
  o Speakers from Augusta University and other graduate schools have provided
    information about admissions requirements (For example, an Admissions Director
    from Augusta University’s Dental School came to speak about their requirements.)
• MCAT (and other entrance exam reviews). Students set up sessions for various exams
  and ask faculty to come speak about topics in different sections of the MCAT.

Being the advisor for SCRUBS since it began has allowed me to mentor students I might not
otherwise have had contact with. I have seen students excel and grow in their leadership skills as
well as in their academic careers. (Roughly, about 80% of our SCRUBS members have gone on
into professional careers.)

B. Official Mentees and “Unofficial Mentees.” At GGC I advise a large number of
mentees/advisees officially (about 40-50/semester). Also, I advise a sizeable number of what I
call “unofficial mentees,” those students who, after taking my class, just email me and meet me
on campus to “run things by me.”

When I think about teaching, I can’t help but think of the joy I feel when my students tell me they
were accepted into medical school or just offered their “dream job.” In my mind, these are our
true awards as educators.

Darelisa. One such example happened at the start of this semester. A former student of mine,
Darlesia Furguson, waved me down outside of the classroom. She was waving her GGC nursing
uniform in her hands! She wanted to tell me that she had been accepted into the nursing
program. She was here in Georgia alone, with her three kids and without her husband who was
back in her home country. She was here because she wanted to be a nurse in the United States.
Despite having to adjust to a new culture and balance her family, she excelled in my class. She
always had a smile or her face even though at one point she had to move from her apartment and
move in with a relative so she could save money to continue to go to school I didn’t realize the
impact I had on her life until I read the letter she wrote to me. Here is a short excerpt:

“Dr. George, you went beyond the call of duty and ensured that you knew each of us
individually. You wanted to know our goals and aspirations; you wanted to learn about our
families; you wanted to know our areas of strengths and weakness. This was done on a
continuous basis. You helped guide us and offered countless helpful advice. You were not only a
professor to me and the rest of the class; we felt like a family! This was essential to me because
my family is far away. Even though the class was challenging, I feel as though that I have gained
a wealth of knowledge, that has helped prepare me for not only for Nursing school, but life
itself.”
Crystal. Crystal was a student who just didn’t want to take Biology. She sat in the back of my Biology 1102 (non-majors biology) class with a lot of attitude although I had tried many different things to get her engaged with the material, during her group’s first presentation, she stood around and didn’t contribute. Then, while the other student groups presented, she filed her fingernails. I walked to the back of the room and asked her to put away her file and said that I would need to speak to her after class. She slammed her purse on her desk, put away her file, crossed her arms, and stared at the front of the room during the rest of class.

At the end of class, she walked up to me and said, “You wanted to talk to me?” She was oozing with even more attitude than usual. I asked her to sit down, and I sat across from her. I asked her how she was doing? And if everything was ok? She said yes, of course; it was that she just hated Biology and didn’t understand why she had to take “this dumb course” because she was a Business major.

So I asked her about her major and I told her that even though this wasn’t a business class, there would be beneficial information she could learn during the semester. I also asked how she would feel if she had a customer in a business act as she did during the class. It was then that she slowly started to understand.

Over the next couple of classes, I started to see her behavior change. By the end of the semester, we were the best of friends. During the next semesters, she came by several times to get advice about her career and her after-graduation plans. Even though she has graduated, she continues to keep me updated with her life, and actually, I am now her sister’s advisor. She emailed me to ask if I would take her sister on as a mentee. I just met with her sister this semester, and Crystal continues to sing my praise and tells her sister to follow my advice.

Luke. Unlike Crystal, Luke was a Biology major who had a 4.0. So it came as no surprise to me when he told me he had been accepted into the Physician’s Assistant School at the University of Washington. What did surprise me was the following email that I received from him:

“I am in my 15th week at the University of Washington’s PA program, and we just got our stats about our class. We had 1200+ applicants, 50+- interviewed for only 26 spots. As you may have heard, I am one of the LUCKY 26! Now that I am this far in, I just wanted to tell you how important your A&P summer course has been and how instrumental your method of lecturing was to enabling me to crank out a 4.0 in my first 3 months of this program!

Every day I find myself in a class saying, ‘Dr. George told me I’d see this again.’ Touché, Dr. George, touché! And, thank you!”

IV. Conclusion: Data collection in the Okefenokee Swamp was the right choice for me

Whenever my former students like Luke write me to tell me how much taking my classes helped them in their careers and lives, it is then that I know my going to medical school would not have been the right choice for me. Helping Luke be successful in his Physician’s Assistant program, helping Darlesia get into nursing school, and helping all of the other students whom I have
taught through the years reach their goals make me know that I made the right decision all those years ago to accept graduate school at UGA and go out in the Okefenokee Swamp, collect my samples, and complete my doctorate.

Not only have I found my “dream job”; I now am able to help my students find theirs.

Bagie Mariam George, Ph.D.: Abbreviated C.V.

**Education:**
- Ph.D., University of Georgia, Department of Entomology, Athens, Georgia 2002. "Bioassessment of Wetlands Using Invertebrates: Studies from the Southeastern U.S."
- MS., Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia 1997. “Mosquitoes and Other Diptera Associated with the Burrows of the Gopher Tortoise (Gopherus polyphemus) in Southeast Georgia.” M.S. Thesis.

**Academic Appointments:**
- Assistant Dean School of Science and Technology, Georgia Gwinnett College (August 2011-Present). Responsibilities include supervision of 29 faculty members of various disciplines in the school. Yearly classroom observations are conducted; yearly portfolios for each faculty are reviewed; and yearly reports are generated on individual faculty.
- Associate Professor of Biology, Charter Faculty, Georgia Gwinnett College (August 2010-Present).
- Assistant Professor, Georgia Gwinnett College, (August 2006-August 2010).
- Assistant Professor of Biology, Georgia Perimeter College (August 2003-August 2006).
- Biology Temporary Full-time Instructor, Darton College (2002-2003).
- Anatomy and Physiology I & II Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Georgia (1998-2001).
- General Biology Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Georgia (2001).
- General Biology Graduate Teaching Assistant, Georgia Southern University (1996-1997).

**Teaching Awards:**
- Georgia Gwinnet College Outstanding Teaching Award, 2017.
- National Society of Leadership and Success Outstanding Teaching Award, 2017.
- Governors Teaching Fellow Summer 2008.
- Georgia Gwinnett College Faculty Award 2007-2008.
- *Who’s Who Among America’s Teachers* 2005-2006. National Award is based on nominations from students.
- Women of Impact 2005. Georgia Perimeter College. Award based on nominations by students, faculty and staff.
- IT Scholar Award 2005-2006. Georgia Perimeter College. Award based on advancing the use of technology and the development of hybrid and online courses.
- Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award 1998 – 1999. University of Georgia Dept. of Cellular Biology. Awarded to the outstanding teaching assistant based on teaching
performance, supervisor evaluations, and student evaluations. Teaching assistants must be nominated by supervising professors.

- C.M Beckman Award 2001. Award based on PhD student paper competition at the Georgia Entomological Society Meeting 2001.
- Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award 1996 – 1997. Georgia Southern University, Dept. of Biology. Awarded to the outstanding teaching assistant based on teaching performance, supervisor evaluations, and student evaluations. Teaching assistants must be nominated by supervising professors.

Publications (Selected):


Paper & Poster Presentations (Selected):

- “Effective Pedagogical Practices for the Novice Faculty Member.” B. George & J.C. Morales. Future Faculty Fellowship Seminar (University of Georgia), Sapelo Island, GA. April 2016.
- “Beyond the Classroom: Collaboration between Faculty.” B. George & J.C. Morales. Future Faculty Fellowship Seminar (University of Georgia), Sapelo Island, GA. April 2016.

Service (Selected) (Since 2006, I have served on over 15 college-wide committees and over 16 school committees):

College-wide (Selected):
- First Year Matters Committee, 2010-2011.
- Faculty Senate, President 2008-2009; President-Elect, 2007-2008; member, 2005-2006.

School Committees (Selected):
- STEM Outreach Committee, 2014-2016.
- Biology Discipline Committee, 2006-Present.