Feature: Kershawnda Johnson, retention specialist

Working hard to improve the retention rate at Georgia Southwestern State University is Kershawnda Johnson, the university’s retention specialist.

Johnson considers it her role to make sure her students stay on track to graduation and get to know the resources available to them at GSW. Johnson’s position requires her to collect data that tracks student progression and identifies areas of improvement for the university to better assist students. She also connects students with online resources like Beacon and Canes Connect and other resources like career services, TRiO and tutoring. She collaborates with faculty and staff to coordinate retention efforts across campus. In addition, she serves as the contact for first-semester transfers and assists in the advisement of students that are not in good academic standing.

The retention rate has shown great improvement. The numbers reported at the last Complete College Georgia convocation show a nearly seven percent increase in retention over the past two years, five percent of which occurred within the last year. The retention rate rose from 62.62 percent in 2011 to 69 percent for the 2013 cohort, which exceeded the projected retention rate of percent.

Prior to GSW, Johnson worked for five years as an educational specialist for the Federal TRiO Upward Bound program housed at Georgia Southern University. The program worked with high school students that were low income and/or first generation college students that wanted to go to college but did not know how. Her former experience has given her great insight on what most students and parents expect college to be like and what high schools are doing to prepare students.

Peer co-instructors aid in retention

In addition to the faculty and staff efforts to improve retention, students of the university are also working hard to improve retention. These students called “Storm Spotters” are peer co-instructors of the University 1000 classes at GSW. The Storm Spotter effort was introduced last year as a Complete College Georgia (CCG) grant initiative.

The Storm Spotters are upper-class students at GSW that serve in a critical role as the liaison between the classroom and residential halls and between the GSW faculty and first-year students. Storm Spotters are responsible for promoting a smooth transition to college for first-year students, providing peer mentoring in like majors, stimulating campus engagement, and connecting students with campus resources.

Spotters provide a support system and are often the first stop for students, whether they are facing academic or personal issues.

Spotters also assisted with the first ever “Canes Camp,” a boot camp designed to prepare first-year students for the college experience. It took place a week prior to the beginning of the fall 2014 semester.
David Jenkins, assistant director of Admissions at Georgia Southwestern State University, has been named president-elect of the Georgia Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (GACRAO) for 2014-2015. Jenkins was chosen by his professional peers during the Association’s 61st annual meeting held in Savannah, Ga. on October 25-28.

GACRAO is composed of higher education professionals from more than 100 admissions and records departments at public and private colleges and universities located throughout the state of Georgia. The Association works to advance the professional goals of its members through the dissemination of information and the interchange of ideas on problems of common interest to higher education.

Jenkins earned both a BBA and an MBA from Georgia Southwestern and has been in the Admissions Office since 2001.

The newly-elected GACRAO executive committee consists of President Donna Webb, Director of Enrollment Management at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College; immediate Past-President Cindy Peterson, Dean of Admissions and Undergraduate Enrollment Management at Piedmont College; treasurer, Selena Magnusson, Registrar at Georgia Northwestern Technical College; Secretary Amy Clines, Director of Undergraduate Recruitment at Columbus State University; and Jenkins.

Additional information about the Georgia Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers may be found at www.gacrao.org.

Jeff Green, professor and chair of the Department of Theater, Communication & Media Arts at Georgia Southwestern State University, was inducted as a Full Fellow to the Georgia Repertory Ensemble of Artists and Theaters (G.R.E.A.T Fellows) at the Georgia Theater Conference in Columbus, Georgia on Oct. 12.

The purpose of the G.R.E.A.T. Fellows Program is to recognize the professional status and accomplishments of teaching artists working in public and private educational institutions within the state of Georgia. This program also serves as a vehicle for fellows to produce inter-agency scholarship and creative activity.

G.R.E.A.T. Fellows must be members of one of the professional theatre unions or associations, or they should demonstrate equivalent professional status. In addition, Fellows require a record of professional activity deemed worthy of recognition by the Georgia Theater Conference (GTC) Executive Board. To merit Full Fellow status, Fellows must also have a record of service and activity with the GTC, also deemed by the GTC Executive Board.

Some of Green’s previous awards and recognitions include “Exemplary Support of Educational Theater” from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and being named a “Shining Star” in the University System of Georgia from the Georgia House of Representatives.
Announcements

The Rosalynn Carter Institute is pleased to announce that Naomi Latini has joined the staff as the REACH Program Manager. Ms. Latini worked with RCI from 2008-2010, before moving to Atlanta. As program manager, Naomi will be leading the national dissemination of RCI REACH to extend this powerful caregiver support program. Welcome back, Naomi!

Larry and Dr. Bonnie Simmons have a new grandson. Floyd Scott Simmons was born Friday, Oct. 17 to Brock and Lindsey Simmons.

Jeffrey Green presented two sessions of his interactive workshop, Lights, Camera, Action! at the Georgia Theater Conference, Oct. 9-11, 2014 in Columbus, Ga.

Congratulations to David Bradshaw, Web Developer and GSW alumnus, on his new position with IBM in San Francisco, Calif.

The Graduation and Honors Convocation, co-chaired by Susan Bragg and Courtney McDonald, will take place on Dec. 5, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. in Jackson Hall. A reception will follow in the Private Dining Room of the Marshall Student Center with a special surprise students will not want to miss!

Dr. Elizabeth Gurnack “flips” Biochemistry classroom

This semester Elizabeth Gurnack has “flipped” her Biochemistry classroom. A “flipped” classroom is a teaching method in which lectures are presented to the students outside of class, while the students work on what would normally be “homework” during class.

After teaching the Biochemistry course for twelve years, Gurnack noticed that students found the material very difficult and grew to dislike the class because of that. Therefore, she wanted to find a way to get the students to enjoy coming to class and have a better attitude towards the material. She also felt that she was wasting time covering material in class that the students found very easy to pick up from just reading the book, which meant she did not have sufficient time to spend on more difficult concepts.

Gurnack tapes all of her lectures as well as some demonstrations for students to view outside class. She also uses existing online videos and other sources to augment the lessons. These materials are available through GeorgiaVIEW. Students can even view the lectures via tablets and smart phones.

During class time, Gurnack assigns specific activities that the students work on that require them to use the information and knowledge they obtained from the lecture and text. The students spend a lot of the classroom time working together in groups on active problem solving. They then share and discuss their conclusions with each other. In addition, students can also ask for in-depth clarification on any information from the lecture or text that they may not have understood.

This is the first semester Gurnack has fully implemented this method in her classroom, but she reports that the students seem to be doing better on tests and enjoying class time much more than before.

GSW TRiO Staffers receive certification

Miranda B. Thomas (left) and Aisha Y. Alaman (right) recently participated and completed the curriculum for Certification in Academic Advising at the University of Georgia’s Training and Development Center in Athens, Ga. The certification is recognized by the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). The curriculum development is a collaboration of UGA’s Training & Development Center and the Franklin College of Arts & Sciences. Thomas is the assistant director and Alaman is the academic coordinator for TRiO Student Support Services at GSW. Both are also alumnae of GSW.
### Upcoming Events

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 6</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Men’s Basketball Exhibition Game, GSW v. UGA Stegeman Coliseum, University of Georgia - Athens, Ga.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 7-8</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>The 24th Annual Madrigal Dinner Presented by GSW and the Windsor Hotel For tickets, contact the Windsor Hotel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 12</td>
<td>12:00- 3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>The 25th Annual Career Opportunities Fair Cobb Galleria Centre - Atlanta, Ga. For more information, contact Sandra Fowler.</td>
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<td>November 13</td>
<td>6:30 - 8:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Open Mic Night Java City Co-sponsored by Sirocco and ISA</td>
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<td>November 17</td>
<td>3:30 - 5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Retirement Reception for Ms. Paula Williams President’s Board Room, 2nd floor Administration Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 20</td>
<td>11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Faculty Staff Potluck Luncheon Hosted by the Staff Senate in the Private Dining Hall For more information, visit <a href="https://gsw.edu/resources/facultyandstaff/staffsenate/index">https://gsw.edu/resources/facultyandstaff/staffsenate/index</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>November 26</td>
<td>6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Annual GSW Thanksgiving Meal New Faculty Dining Room Free Event; Donations accepted prior to event</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 4</td>
<td>5:30 - 7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>GSW Holiday Party Marshall Pavilion Dining Room Please bring one new, unwrapped toy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 5</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Graduation &amp; Honors Convocation Jackson Performance Hall Co-chaired by Susan Bragg and Courtney McDonald</td>
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**Congratulations to GSW for winning 3rd place in the Sumter Scarecrows competition!**