

MGA TODAY

SPRING 2023

*Introducing the
First Graduating Class
Doctor of Science
in Information
Technology*

Christa Self

*1st Graduate to Receive
B.S., M.S., & Doctorate
in IT from MGA*

2023

Members Of MGA's First Doctoral Program Class Turn Tassels / 4

The 28 members of the charter class of Middle Georgia State University's first doctoral program, the Doctor of Science in Information Technology, graduate this spring and make history.

Other MGA Graduate Programs Reach Major Milestones / 8

The University continues to add new master's and graduate certificate programs, and some are producing their first graduates this spring.

Middle Georgia State University Foundation / 28

Why I Give to the MGA Foundation:

Retired Navy Commander Earl "Butch" Beatty III

Why I Serve on the Alumni Board:

Isaac Ramsingh

Why I Leave A Legacy: Dr. Carolyn

Bradley, MGA professor emerita

Thank You: From MGA Foundation scholarship recipients

Fundraising Success: See how resources raised through the MGA Foundation make an impact

Happenings: Return of the annual President's Gala, Knights Golf Tournament

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A look at some of the people and events that make MGA great

A New Day for MGA's Dublin Campus / 18

With strong support from regional leaders, the University has transformed the campus – a former hospital – into a center for nursing and other healthcare degree programs.



State Of The University / 24

In his 10th State of the University address, MGA President Christopher Blake, Ph.D., highlights positive enrollment signs, new degrees, campus evolutions, and more.

ON THE COVER – Christa Self, one of 28 candidates for graduation in the charter class of MGA's first doctorate – the Doctor of Science in Information Technology. She will be the first MGA student to earn information technology degrees from the University at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. IMAGE: JESSICA WHITLEY-PENNDRORF

ABOUT MGA • Middle Georgia State University educates and graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region through professional leadership, innovative partnerships, and community engagement. MGA's four core values are Stewardship, Engagement, Adaptability, and Learning. mga.edu/vision

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Greetings to our University Community!

As we complete another academic year, it is fitting to reflect on our collective achievements and progress. Within these pages, you will find compelling stories of these achievements that illustrate our vision and values.

MGA's vision is simple yet powerful: to transform individuals and their communities through extraordinary higher learning. This vision is brought to life through the remarkable journeys of our students, faculty, and alumni who have leveraged the transformative power of education as a catalyst for positive and impactful change.

Our core values of stewardship, engagement, adaptability, and learning are deeply integrated into the fabric of our university community.

The commitment to stewardship is demonstrated by the stories that highlight the generosity of supporters and our alumni's impactful contributions to their communities and professions. Engagement speaks to connections continuing to be built with our communities, as evidenced by the collaboration of many to address healthcare needs in Dublin.

Our culture of adaptability and learning fosters innovation in the face of a rapidly changing world – represented by the graduation of our first ever doctoral students. This achievement marks a significant milestone for our university. It illustrates that our students are not only learning, but they are also developing into the leaders needed for tomorrow.

I am immensely proud of the achievements showcased within this year's magazine.

These stories exemplify the passion and commitment within our remarkable and expansive community.

Together, we are inspiring and nurturing the potential that exists within every student. I am proud of the dedication and hard work of our faculty, staff, and students. I am humbled by the generosity of our supporters. I am truly honored to serve as your president.

Thank you for being an integral part of our university's success stories.

Go Knights,

Christopher Blake, Ph.D.
MGA President

As Students Of The First Doctoral Program Turn Tassels, **MGA's Graduate Studies Programs Come Of Age**



Some live nearby – Macon, Warner Robins, Fort Valley. For others, home is a flight or two away in such places as Los Angeles, Calif., Cornish, N.H., and Reno, Nev. In total, they come from 10 states, Washington, D.C., and Canada.

Representing a wide age range – 30s to 70s – most work directly in the field of information technology but in varying roles – educators, researchers, managers, and CIOs – that signify the multitude of career paths available in their dynamic, ever-evolving profession.

They are the 28 members of the charter class of Middle Georgia State University's first doctoral program, the Doctor of Science in Information Technology. And as they graduate this spring, the Class of 2023 is ready to make history.

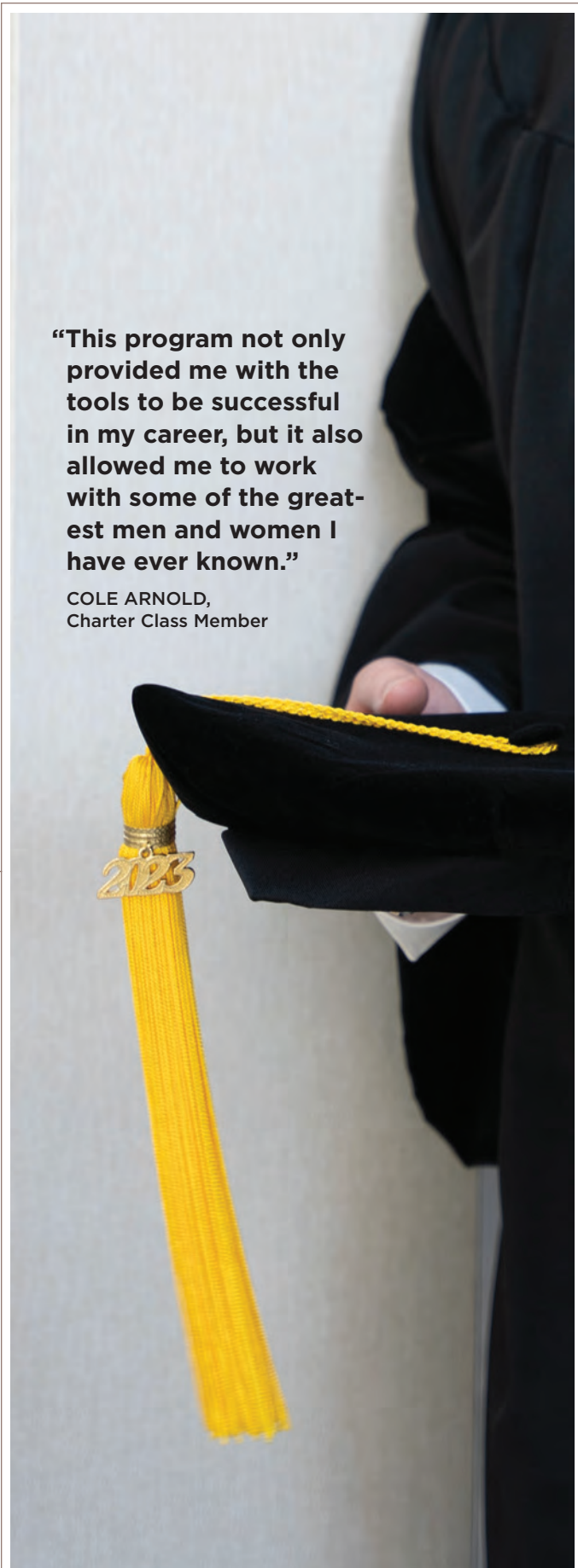
"I feel honored and humbled to be part of this first cohort," said charter class

member Jonathan Hobbs, 33, of Americus, Ga., an IT professional at Georgia Southwestern State University. "There are so many brilliant people in this program that I have been able to learn so much from over the past two years. Their experiences have helped me broaden my knowledge in and out of the field, and I have made many lifelong friendships."

Launched in summer 2021, the DSIT is designed for professionals who already hold leadership roles in the IT field. The cohort-based degree – meaning groups of up to 30 students all begin and progress through the program together – is designed to take five semesters to complete and includes coursework in research, leadership, and focused topics.

Each student must complete an applied research project to find solutions to the complex challenges in the IT field. This spring, members

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“This program not only provided me with the tools to be successful in my career, but it also allowed me to work with some of the greatest men and women I have ever known.”

COLE ARNOLD,
Charter Class Member



MGA Charter Class
Doctor of Science
In Information Technology

Spring 2023

mga.edu/DSITgrads

See photos of and additional biographical information about the charter class members at webpage above.

Chris Adams, 37, Dahlonega, Ga. Chief technology officer (CTO) for University of North Georgia.

James Adcock, 72, Memphis, Tenn., & Atlanta, Ga. Associate professor and judicial expert witness.

Ndidi Akuta, Griffin, Ga. Chief information officer (CIO) for Fort Valley State University.

Jimmy Ardiansyah, Nashville, Tenn. Senior manager/consulting director, IBM.

Cole Arnold, 35, Athens, Ala. Cybersecurity/program protection engineering, KORD Technologies, LLC.

Michael Barker, Columbus, Ga.

Jeremy Bro, Hawkinsville, Ga.

Joshua Brunty, 40, Salt Rock, W.V. Cyber forensics and security faculty member, Marshall University.

Jessica Butel, 36, Cornish, N.H. Product security professional for infrastructure solutions and applications for Lenovo.

Jude Clemente, British Columbia, Canada. Educator.

Mustafa Abo El-Rob, 39, Denver, Colo. Information technology and management consulting senior manager at Accenture.

Kieran Fletcher, 44, Elizabeth City, N.C. Information systems manager, U.S. Army, former Foreign Service information management specialist.

Amanda Glover, 53, Macon, Ga. Primary LMS administrator and instructional designer, Fort Valley State University.

Jimmy Harper, 40, Alapaha, Ga. Vice president of enrollment management and information technology, South Georgia State College.

Jonathan Hobbs, 33, Americus, Ga. Manager of IT and faculty support and computer science adjunct instructor, Georgia Southwestern State University.

Ans Irfan, Los Angeles, Calif. Associate professor at Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California, and religion and public health fellow at Harvard University.

Anwar Islam, Dallas, Texas. Cybersecurity program manager in a government agency leading security governance, risk management, compliance, vulnerability assessment, and incident management.

Brian Kendrick, 38, Atlanta metro area. Supports implementations for cloud and hosted Closed Circuit Campus Card Transact Systems.

Franklin King, 51, Cary, N.C. Solutions architect – CcaaS.

Zaineb Naamane, 32, Washington, D.C. Data engineer responsible for designing, developing, testing, and maintaining data pipelines and data architectures.

Christa Self, 32, Warner Robins, Ga. IT specialist, Robins Air Force Base.

Raven Small, 32, Butler, Ga. Senior security administrator at Research Management Consultants Inc. as a federal contractor for the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

Dawn Tatum, 60, Acworth, Ga. Director of Partnerships & Engagements and senior lecturer of IT, College of Computing and Software Engineering, Kennesaw State University.

Lindy Thorn, 45, Reno, Nev. Director of the Office of Information Technology Management at a large government contractor.

Chris Tsavatewa, Macon, Ga. Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Middle Georgia State University.

Sonja Westbrook, 57, Dunwoody, Ga. Leads IT teams and teaches.

Elizabeth Williams, 33, Brooklet, Ga. Technical account manager at Tanium.

Tom Williams III, 33, Brooklet, Ga. Senior manager at Tanium, adjunct IT instructor at MGA.

Degrees are awarded at the end of the term in which all requirements are met.

of the charter class were finishing up projects exploring such topics as gender and racial diversity in computing fields, cybersecurity awareness and training in higher education, applications of sentiment analysis, cyber frameworks and regulations in the U.S., and the benefits and challenges of cloud-based big data analytics.

Students interact and form relationships in person during brief residences that take place at the beginning and end of the program while taking their classes online.

“Interest in the program has been exceptionally strong from the beginning,” said Dr. Kevin Floyd, who helped design the DSIT as associate dean of the School of Computing. “We’ve had about 150 applications total for the two cohorts we’ve admitted so far.”

Members of the charter class mostly had career advancement or some kind of professional enhancement in mind when they applied to the program.

Amanda Glover, 53, of Macon has held information technology roles at Fort Valley State University for 27 years. She wondered if she could build a post-retirement second career helping faculty embrace technology to a greater degree.

“I welcome the opportunity to teach in this field to share my experiences and help prepare the next generation for this industry,” she said. “This program has provided me a wealth of knowledge and the confidence to start my next journey.”

Lindy Thorn, 45, of Reno is the director of the Information Technology Project Management Office of a large government contractor.

“I’ve gained a lot of knowledge that I’ve already taken back to my current role,” she said, “and I plan to further utilize this knowledge, hopefully continuing to grow my career in the information technology field.”

Ans Irfan, in his early 30s, lives in Los Angeles and is an associate professor at Keck School of Medicine, University of Southern California. His multidisciplinary work focuses on racial, social, and health equity. He felt “an overarching interest and practical need” to develop IT

leadership and ethics skills, competencies, and critical thinking through an IT lens. “The role of IT is the same for 21st century public health as sanitation was for the 19th century public health,” he said.

Christa Self, 32, of Warner Robins, is an IT specialist at Robins Air Force Base. Already solidly connected to Middle Georgia State as a graduate of the University’s bachelor’s and master’s programs in information technology, Self decided to take her MGA education even further as she pursues new roles in technical program architecture and college-level teaching.

She is the first student to receive IT degrees from Middle Georgia State at three levels – bachelor’s, master’s, and doctorate.

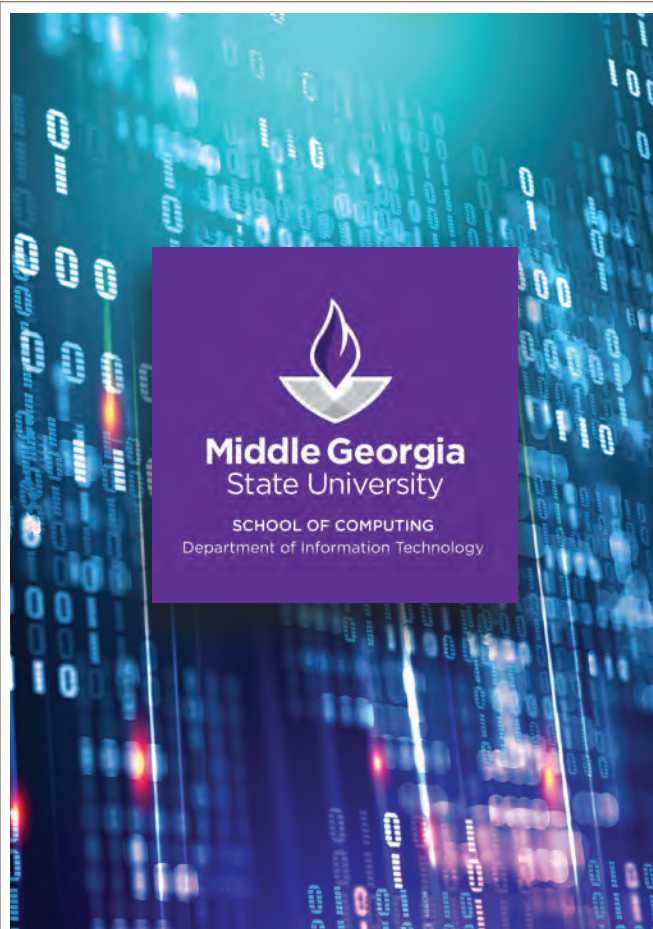
“I now have the confidence that I can take on anything my career or life bring me,” Self said.

Elizabeth Williams, 33, of Brooklet, Ga., is technical account manager at Tanium and is married to another member of the charter class, Tom Williams III, 33, a senior manager at Tanium. They welcomed their first child, a son, while working through the program together.

“From a non-traditional educational pathway and becoming the first person in my family to graduate college – and definitely the first to achieve a doctorate degree – I will teach my son that any dream he believes in can be realized,” she said.

For Floyd, who earned his bachelor’s degree in IT from MGA and has built his academic career at the University, seeing the doctoral charter class graduate is both a professional and personal exhilaration for him.

“I had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Master of Science and Doctor of Science in IT and I have taught courses in all of the programs,” he said. “It’s always heartwarming to see students graduate and go on to become successful professionals or move forward in careers they’ve already established. As part of my work legacy, I hope to see these quality academic programs continue well into the future and provide opportunities for new generations of students.” ■



www.mga.edu/ITdoctorate

About the Doctor of Science in Information Technology

MGA’s Doctor of Science in IT is a unique collegiate program that fulfills the University’s mission to provide high quality programs connected to community needs. The program, designed to meet the needs of both student and employer, is innovative and unique to the region and to the University System of Georgia. The interdisciplinary structure blends innovation, leadership strategy, and technology to empower world-class organizations. An applied research project offers students an opportunity to find solutions to complex information technology challenges.

New cohorts of students are admitted each fall. The program requires students to complete 54 hours of graduate coursework. All classes are online except for brief residencies at the beginning and end of the program where students gather in person.

Other MGA Graduate Programs Reach Major Milestones

By Sheron Smith

Eight years ago this summer, Middle Georgia State (MGA) officially became a University.

The historic move, representing a major transformation for an institution with decades-old origins in two junior colleges, came after the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the status change.

Within six months, the Southern Association of Colleges Commission on Colleges granted the new University permission to take the next step by offering two master's degrees. MGA launched those programs, the Master of Science in Infor-

mation Technology and the Master of Science in Nursing, in January 2016. The newly formed Office of Graduate Studies admitted a total of 47 students into the two programs.

Today, MGA offers 12 career-oriented graduate programs (including the University's first doctorate), which currently enroll a total of 450 students. The University's first master's program students graduated in fall of 2016 – and the number of graduates grows each year. This spring, MGA expects more than 110 students to complete graduate-level programs, including 28



candidates for graduation from the Doctor of Science in Information Technology. (See page 4.)

“We are, of course, thrilled to see the charter class of doctoral students completing the program and graduating,” said Dr. Loretta Clayton, MGA’s dean of Graduate Studies. “This is such an exciting milestone for the University. But even aside from that accomplishment, the past year or so has seen a number of significant developments in graduate programming. In the University System of Georgia, the mission of a state university is to provide graduate programs that support regional economic needs. I think MGA is excelling at that mission.”

Here’s a closer look at some of the students and recent developments in MGA graduate programs.

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

The master’s degree in occupational therapy, a bridge program designed to give certified occupational therapy assistants the opportunity to become full occupational therapists, is the first graduate-level program based on MGA’s Cochran Campus. The first cohort of students began in fall 2022 and is expected to graduate in 2024. Housed in the School of Health & Natural Sciences, the program is offered in a partially online/hybrid format, with much of the coursework completed online using various technologies, along with supplemental on-campus labs and experiential activities that take place about four times per semester.

Most members of the first cohort are from the Middle Georgia region, but one lives across the country in Spokane, Wash. She is Misty Hueser, 34, a certified occupational therapy assistant for eight years.

“This is a specialized program that is not offered in my area,” said Hueser, who is director of rehabilitation for a skilled nursing and transitional care unit.

Hueser expects the degree to open doors to new job opportunities for her. “It’s a difficult program but the professors are knowledgeable



Director of rehabilitation for a skilled nursing and transitional care unit in Spokane, Wash., **Misty Hueser** discovered MGA’s Master of Science in Occupational Therapy by researching on social media. (Left) MGA’s first cohort of MSOT students.

and supportive,” she said. “Although it is mostly online our cohort is close, and we work on group projects regularly.”

The Department of Labor projects an estimated 24 percent increase in job opportunities for OTRs, with an estimated 3,800 new therapists being hired in Georgia alone, between 2016 and 2026. In October of 2018, new federal legislation was signed into law, increasing patient access to alternative pain management solutions including occupational therapy.

Master of Arts in Public Relations

The only free-standing master’s degree in public relations in the state, MGA expects to graduate the first students from the program this spring.

The charter class includes Kimani Black, 23, an assistant program coordinator for the Emory

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 10 —

University Alumni Association's marketing and digital strategy team.

Enrolling in the public relations master's degree program was part of Black's long-term career strategy to develop his own marketing services firm, which he has branded with the name Reliable Reps. But the MGA program is also helping him grow in his current job, he said.

"I am very passionate about this field and now I have even more fun on the social media side creating content, collecting and reviewing analytics, and most of all, connecting with so many great individuals," Black said. "I'm glad my experiences at MGA prepared me for such an environment."

MGA faculty designed the degree, housed in the School of Arts & Letters, in consultation with regional companies that hire public relations professionals. The 30-credit hour program includes coursework in writing and research, crisis communications, campaign planning and practice, web development, and production and design, among other topics.

The degree is designed to prepare students to begin or enhance careers as public relations professionals, market research analysts, or marketing specialists and managers – all jobs that appear on the Georgia Department of Labor's "Georgia's Hot Careers to 2028" list.

Master of Business in Professional Leadership

Housed in the School of Business, MGA launched this master's program just this spring with an initial enrollment of 13 students. It's a business and interdisciplinary studies degree.

MGA developed the degree with input from area government and business leaders, who identified an unaddressed demand for more people-centric leadership in the community and workplace focusing on the human dynamic of management.

Among the first students in the program is Trinity Choo, 23, a Macon native who earned a bachelor's degree in advertising from the

University of Georgia and now works as a logistics manager at Robins Air Force Base.

"I have always had an interest in leadership, so I knew that it would be a great fit for me," she said. "As a logistics manager, I serve as team lead for my own integrated product team. Leadership is a huge part of my job and what I am training for, so I know that this program will help me in my career."

Kimani Black, 23, an assistant program coordinator for the Emory University Alumni Association's marketing and digital strategy team, is a candidate for graduation this spring as part of the Master of Arts in Public Relations first class to complete the program.



Master of Arts in Teaching With Initial Teacher Certification

Housed in the School of Education & Behavioral Sciences, Middle Georgia State's MAT has been around for a while. But now an initiative called Project NURTURE (Network for Urban and Rural Teachers United for Residency Engagement) is making the program a more financially viable option for working adults who want to become classroom teachers.



A Macon native who now lives in Acworth, **Trinity Choo** is among the first students enrolled in MGA's new Master of Business in Professional Leadership. She is a logistics manager at Robins Air Force Base.



Visual artist **Ian Kloster** chose MGA's Master of Arts in Teacher Education so he could transition to a classroom-based art teacher. He is among the students who received a federally funded Project NURTURE grant to help pay the program's tuition and fees. Prospective MAT students who want to know more about Project NURTURE can email Dr. Kim Gray at kimberly.reininggray@mga.edu.

Visual artist Ian Kloster, 39, will graduate with the degree this spring and transition into a full-time teaching career. A federally funded grant he received through Project NURTURE provided him with enough resources to pay the program's tuition and fees with a bit left over.

According to Dr. Kim Gray, MGA's outreach coordinator for the program, Project NURTURE is targeted to people who already hold bachelor's degrees and are interested in changing careers to become teachers in underserved areas. Depending on the content area, qualifying students receive grants between \$15,000 and \$35,000 to help with tuition and other expenses while they complete the one-year, fully online MAT at Middle Georgia State.

"Typically, candidates for this program already work in schools as paraprofessionals or they are career changers," Gray said.

Kloster is one of those career changers and a standout student in the University's MAT program.

An Atlanta resident, the former Peace Corps volunteer holds a Bachelor of Arts in Illustration, Art & Design from the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire. He had long thought about becoming a classroom-based art teacher and was working as a parapro at a Fulton County elementary school when he learned about Project NURTURE and Middle Georgia State's MAT program.

"I always felt that I could be a great teacher," Kloster said. "I owe a lot of gratitude to my peers and family who encouraged me to consider teaching, and to (the principal) who hired me as an elementary school paraprofessional. That firsthand look at the life and times of a teacher gave me the confidence and experience I needed to pursue a teaching degree."

His initial teaching certificate in art education will qualify him to teach pre-kindergarten through 12th grade. His goal is to find a high school position in Fulton or Douglas counties.

"The MAT program is wisely arranged so that you never feel alone on your journey to become a classroom teacher," Kloster said. "I feel teaching is a calling. If you feel ready, (the MGA) program will give you the skills and knowledge you need to become a great teacher." ■

www.mga.edu/graduate-studies/programs



Here's To 2022-2023 At MGA!

What a year it's been! This academic year was vibrant with the presence of students, faculty, staff, alumni and visitors engaging with each other in ways that promoted learning, teaching, supporting, growing – and fun!





Profiles in Greatness



Dr. Simone Phipps

Dr. Simone Phipps, professor of management in the School of Business at MGA, earned a residency as an associate research fellow at the University of Cambridge Judge Business School's Centre for Social Innovation in London, England. Typically, Phipps' research involves the exploration of gender, racial, and ethnic minorities, with the aim of highlighting their struggles and contributions, as well as finding possible solutions to improve the minority experience in business and society.

School of Aviation alumnae and Delta Air Lines **Capt. Anya Kearns** was featured in the January/February 2023 edition



Capt. Anya Kearns

of JAMES Magazine. Kearns was the first Black woman to earn a four-year aviation degree with a concentration in flight from MGA in 2016 before becoming a captain with the Delta Air Lines pilot staff in 2022.



DeMarcus Beckham

MGA history alumnus **DeMarcus Beckham** is making history himself as one of Macon Magazine's 2022 "5 Under 40," a listing of young leaders under the age of 40 who are making a difference in the community. Beckham, 29,



Nancy Guyse

is an advocate for various causes related to equality, inclusivity, health, and culture.

MGA faculty member **Nancy Guyse** was chosen to be a Georgia Governor's Teaching



Haley Jo Lucas

A LOOK AT SOME OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS
& EVENTS FROM THE PAST YEAR THAT MAKE MGA STUDENTS,
ALUMNI, FACULTY, AND STAFF GREAT!



Stephen Adams



Dr. Tyler Achatz



Dr. Donna Ingram



Dr. Mary Roberts

Fellow for the 2022-23 academic year. A registered respiratory therapist and assistant professor of respiratory therapy at the University, Guyse was one of 12 faculty chosen for the highly competitive

program from institutions across the state.

*Onward and upward! At age 27, MGA aviation graduate **Haley Jo Lucas** is the first female pilot for the Georgia State Patrol's Aviation Division.*

In early August 2022, the division presented her with her wings at a ceremony attended by many of her colleagues and family members.

*MGA alumnus **Stephen Adams** was named in Georgia Trend magazine's Georgia 500 Most Influential Leaders. As a business and information technology student, Adams worked as an intern with the Macon Economic Development Commission before graduating in 2008. Now the Macon native is executive director of the Macon-Bibb Industrial Authority.*

***Dr. Tyler Achatz**, MGA assistant professor of biology, was the 2022*

*recipient of the American Society of Parasitologists' (ASP) Ashton Cuckler New Investigator Award, a competitive honor given to the most outstanding North American early career parasitologist of the year. The award is based on the recipient's research over the course of graduate studies. Achatz recruited the help of MGA biology major **Zoe Von Holten** to assist with the research project involving systematic parasitology.*

In October 2022, MGA's Department of Teacher Education and Social Work welcomed three education faculty members of Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne (URCA).



French students visit MGA

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 16 —

*Their visit is part of a burgeoning partnership between the two institutions. URCA, a public university based in Reims, France, has previously hosted a few MGA teacher education students, faculty members, and **Christopher Blake, Ph.D., MGA president.** In February 2023, four students from URCA spent two weeks at MGA.*

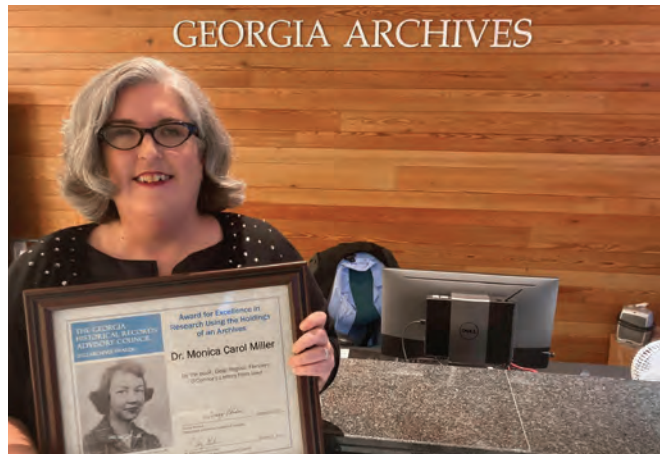
Dr. Donna Ingram, chair of the Department of Nursing, and **Dr. Mary Roberts**, executive director of the Center for Career & Leadership Development, were named to the University System of Georgia's (USG) 2022-2023 class of its Executive Leadership Institute (ELI). Ingram and Roberts are 2 of 35 faculty and staff members from 25 USG institutions and the University System central



Dr. Andy Davidson

office chosen for the program, designed for faculty and staff to develop new leaders within the university system and offer professional development opportunities to help them grow their careers in Georgia.

2022 was a scary-good year for **Dr. Andy Davidson**. In October, the Bram Stoker Award-nominated author and assistant professor of English at MGA published his third horror novel, "The Hollow Kind." The novel received



Dr. Monica Miller

great critical acclaim – including a rave review from *The New York Times* – and climbed its way through several must-read book lists from *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *USA Today*, *Barnes & Noble*, *Esquire*, and *Chicago Tribune*.

Dr. Monica Miller, assistant professor of English and MGA's coordinator of graduate technical writing programs, received the 2022 Excellence in the Use of Archival Records award from the Georgia Historical Records Advisory

Council. Miller used archival records while working on the book, "Dear Regina: Flannery O'Connor's Letters from Iowa," which the University of Georgia Press published last summer. Miller's southern-flavored summer of 2022 also saw the release of "The Tacky South," a collection of essays she co-edited with Dr. Katherine Burnett of Fisk University, which examines connections between "tackiness" and the American South.

During their 2022 spring break, MGA nursing students and alumni **Lissette Shipp, Katie Poupard, Summer Barnwell, Jessica Axton, and Erica Billingslea** accompanied **Dr. Lacey Wallace**, associate professor of nursing, to Subirana, Honduras. Through UMVIM, they partnered with a local Methodist church to set up a clinic



Ashley Turner, Devereaux Lindsey, and Thomasa Negron



Dr. Eric Sun



Dr. Balding, Dr. Hazlett-Knudsen, and Dr. Nicholson

in an area that lacks medical care. Along with a Honduran doctor and dentist, the MGA group saw 530 patients in four and a half days. They also hosted a VBS for about 100 children and delivered basic food and home supplies to over 40 families.

MGA Knights shine on the field and in the classroom. The Southern States Athletic Conference had 153 fall sport student-athletes earn Daktronics NAIA Scholar-Athlete honors in 2022. Of 10 schools,

MGA ranked third in number of student-athletes on the list of scholars.

MGA recognized seven faculty and staff members for outstanding achievements in teaching, scholarship, and/or various areas of service at 2022 Convocation, an annual gathering of all MGA faculty and staff leading into fall semester and the return of students. Those receiving awards were **Dr. Donna Balding**, assistant chair of the Department of Natural Sciences;

Dr. Andre Nicholson, associate professor of media and communication; **Dr. Rebekah Hazlett-Knudsen**, associate professor of social work and director of the Bachelor of Science in Social Work program; **Dr. Eric Sun**, associate dean for the School of Health & Natural Sciences; **Thomasa Negron**, admissions specialist; **Ashley Turner**, professional advisor; and **Devereaux Lindsey**, student services coordinator.

With the support from the Office of the President, the MGA Library has received funding to make their Coffee and Conversation events an ongoing series at the University. Modeled as

book talks, Coffee and Conversation events “germinated from the library’s desire to anchor the library to our scholars and in turn promote their scholarship throughout the University and the community,” said Tamatha Lambert, director of Library Services. The library has hosted authors such as MGA’s own Dr. Andy Davidson and Christopher Blake, Ph.D., MGA president, gathering great interest and attendance both campus and community wide. They continue to host Coffee and Conversation events at the Roberts Library in Cochran and the Macon Campus Library this spring featuring scholars Dr. Monica Miller and Dr. Kevin Cantwell. ■



MGA Nursing Students on Mission



Coffee & Conversation

A New Day for MGA's Dublin Campus

With strong support from regional leaders, the University has transformed the campus – a former hospital – into a center for nursing, with plans to add other healthcare degree programs

L-R are Dublin Campus-based nursing majors **Emmett Smith, Olivia Bailey, Kat Heard, and Keyanna Parks** in front of the campus entrance that served as the main entrance when the building was part of Laurens County Hospital. All four students are from the Dublin area and live close to campus, one of the nursing program's huge selling points for them.



After graduating from the University of Georgia, Kathryn “Kat” Heard returned to her hometown of Dublin, Ga., and reconsidered her career goals.

While she had always felt the pull to follow in her mother’s footsteps and become a nurse, the Trinity Christian School graduate had ended up, for various reasons, earning a psychology degree from UGA.

But “the medical field has always intrigued me,” said Heard, 23, “and I have seen my mom thrive in the nursing profession. So nursing came back into the picture for me.”

Her timing was perfect. Just as Heard made the decision to return to school and pursue a bachelor’s degree in nursing, Middle Georgia State University (MGA) was finishing up a major renovation and expansion of the institution’s Dublin Campus. The project has transformed the campus, the site of the former Laurens County Hospital, into a sleek and innovative hub for nursing and, soon, other healthcare degree programs.

“The ability to return to my hometown and find an affordable nursing program was great,” said Heard, who lives minutes away from the campus and is now in her second semester. “I remember walking in the first day and looking around in amazement. It feels like an entirely new school.”

Following the \$6.8 million renovation and expansion at the Bellevue Road campus, MGA held a formal grand opening in early January. More than 100 guests attended, including state Rep. Matt Hatchett and state Sen. Larry Walker III, whose districts include Dublin and Laurens County, and W. Allen Gudenrath, 8th District representative on the Board of Regents, the governing body of the state’s public colleges and universities.

Karen L. Core, retired chief nurse executive for HCA for whom one of the campus’s new nursing classrooms is named, also attended, along with many of the project’s private donors. (See page 23.)

“The renovation of the Dublin Campus has been vitally important to that community and to the region,” said Dr. Tara Underwood, dean of MGA’s School of Health & Natural Sciences.

“Members of the Dublin community demonstrated their commitment with their investment of time and resources. They’ve helped place MGA in a strategic position to produce competent, highly skilled, and knowledgeable professionals that will provide needed healthcare services for current and future residents of the region and Georgia as a whole.”

—CONTINUED ON PAGE 20—

At the head of the table, **Shelly Hopko**, assistant professor of nursing, oversees students in the Dublin Campus Morris Bank Nursing Lab as they practice central line care and dressing.





Some of the Dublin Campus nursing students and faculty in the foyer of the newly renovated Karen L. Core Classroom.

PROJECT ORIGINS

In 2020, MGA received \$4.8 million in state bond funding to expand space, equipment, and faculty at the Dublin Campus – located near Carl Vinson VA Medical Center – to admit and graduate more nursing students. The project includes two large nursing lecture classrooms, a 20-bed hospital laboratory, a 3-bed nursing simulation lab, a technologically enhanced observation room that connects to the simulation room, and two additional nursing faculty members dedicated to the Dublin Campus.

The original funding was supplemented in early 2022 with a \$900,000 award from the Georgia governor's office. Gov. Brian Kemp allocated the funds through the Governor's Education Emergency Release Fund (GEER) II. GEER II was funded under a section of the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act.

Private donors have contributed an additional \$389,000 for the project, while another \$700,000

in funding came from the University System of Georgia's MRR (major repair and renovation) budget.

MGA has long offered an associate's degree in nursing on the Dublin Campus, typically admitting 60 students each academic year. The expansion project allows MGA to begin admitting 100 students each year and expand the bachelor's nursing degree (BSN) into Dublin.

About 40 of the 100 students admitted each year will enter the bachelor's degree program. The University sees the project as vital to MGA's mission to help meet critical workforce needs; in this case, producing much-needed RNs for rural areas. Over time, MGA plans to offer other healthcare degree programs, such as respiratory therapy, on the Dublin Campus.

INNOVATIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

MGA students enrolled in the Dublin Campus nursing program say they love the cutting-edge environment – and the convenience.



(Above, at right) **Brooke Strange**, clinical instructor, supervises as a student dons sterile gloves and prepares to suction a tracheostomy, a sterile procedure. "The setup is more realistic," Strange said of the Dublin Campus nursing lab. "All of these beds have oxygen hookups, suction hookups, and call lights. A lot of nursing is being familiar with where things are. It's important for students to come in here and see things the way they'll see them in a real clinical setting."

Photos by Jessica Whitley-Penndorf

Like Heard, Keyanna Parks, 23, a West Laurens High School graduate, is in her second semester of the program. An aspiring nurse since middle school, she hopes to work in pediatrics or labor and delivery. She said she "thoroughly enjoys" the modern look of the Dublin Campus nursing program facilities.

"My favorite part is our nursing lab and how it imitates an actual hospital," she said, "including the desk area that is made to look like a nursing station."

Another West Laurens High graduate, 21-year-old Emmett Smith, is also following in the footsteps of his mother, an operating room nurse.

(Below, at right) **Becky Gee**, simulation coordinator for MGA's Department of Nursing, oversees setting up real-world nursing scenarios using human patient simulators – life-size manikins that replicate elements of human physiology such as respiration, heartbeat, and pulse. She said the simulation lab at the Dublin Campus is cutting edge. "I think it will be a huge marketing tool for the nursing program." Here, along with a student, she pushes equipment from the newly renovated lab down a hallway that once housed patient rooms when the site was Laurens County Hospital.



"It's helped tremendously being able to live with my family while I'm in school," he said. "I don't have to pay for housing and I only have a short drive to campus."

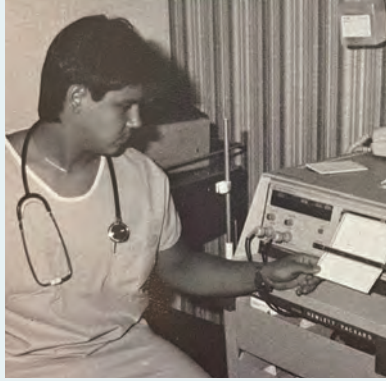
Olivia Bailey, 21, a Trinity Christian School graduate, has known from a young age that she wanted to be a nurse. She plans to graduate from MGA's program and remain in her hometown to begin her career.

"I'm grateful to have such a wonderful school and community that are willing to invest in my future," she said. "I know this investment with ultimately change the lives of those in my community and beyond." ■



MGA Nursing

LEARN MORE: www.mga.edu/nursing



Healthcare at the Heart of MGA Dublin Campus History

Not many college students can say they take their classes in the same building where they were born, but for many years that was often the case at the Dublin Campus of Middle Georgia State University (MGA).

Partly located in a building once used by Laurens County Hospital, MGA's Dublin Campus is not only the birthplace of many alumni and their family members but it echoes the medical facility it once was in other noteworthy ways.

"We have a morgue downstairs," said Dr. Stephen Svonavec, the University's director of commuter campuses, which includes Dublin. "It's not used as a morgue anymore, of course, but it's still there."

Fittingly, considering the campus's solid roots in regional medical history, MGA recently completed \$6.8 million in renovations and expansions that has transformed the site into an ultramodern facility for healthcare degree programs, including

nursing. (See pages 18 – 21.) Still, while solidly focused on the future, the University remains proud of the Dublin Campus's past, which now goes back four decades.

The Dublin Campus originated in 1983 when it opened at 509 Bellevue Avenue in the old Claxton Hospital building. At the time, the campus operated as a center where several University System of Georgia institutions, including the former Middle Georgia College, one of MGA's predecessor schools, offered core courses and a few select degree programs. An associate's degree in nursing, offered through Middle Georgia College, was among the first programs offered, specifically to help nearby Carl Vinson VA Medical Center and other healthcare facilities in the region build and maintain their RN workforces.

In 1986, after the Laurens County Board of Commissioners agreed to transfer the property to the Board of Regents, the campus moved to its present location – the renovated Laurens County Hospital building near the VA medical facility.

Enrollment growth at that location prompted the Board of Regents, the University System's governing body, to fund the construction of a new building in 2000 that allowed, among other things, expansion of the campus library.

Over time and for various reasons, other institutions withdrew their affiliation until the Dublin Campus became solely part of what is now Middle Georgia State University.

Today, MGA's Dublin Campus offers bachelor's and associate's degrees in nursing, an associate's in health science, and the University's core curriculum. In time, MGA's School of Health & Natural Sciences plans to expand the Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Therapy to the Dublin Campus, as well as add a new program in physical therapy.

"Nursing has always been at the heart of our offerings at the Dublin Campus," Svonavec said. "This recent expansion builds on that foundation in a way the students and faculty in those early years might never have imagined. **We're so proud of our Dublin Campus history and excited to make this huge leap forward into the future.**" ■



Private Donors Crucial to Dublin Campus Project

MGA is celebrating the completion of a nearly \$6.8 million renovation and expansion of the institution's Dublin Campus into a healthcare degree program hub.

MGA President Christopher Blake, Ph.D., and the University Foundation Board of Trustees hosted a formal dedication and reception earlier this year at the campus, located at 1900 Bellevue Road. Private donors were crucial to the project, which allows the University to admit more nursing students each year and expand the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program into Dublin. The University sees the project as vital to MGA's mission to help meet critical workforce needs; in this case, producing much-needed RNs for rural areas. Over time, MGA plans to offer other healthcare degree programs on the Dublin Campus.

Thank You To These Donors!

Jimmy & Kathy Allgood
 Morris Bank
 Don & Fara Avery
 Louie & Ann Curry
 Renee & Fritz McPhail
 Bob & Jackie Walker
 Tracy Green
 Dr. Stephen Svonavec & Dr. Kara Smith Svonavec
 Bank of Dudley
 Roger Miller & Bruce Miller/Wallace & Shirley
 Miller Foundation

State of the University 2023

MGA President Highlights Positive Enrollment Signs, New Degrees, Campus Evolutions, & More

In an era when many U.S. institutions of higher education are grappling with uncertain futures, Middle Georgia State (MGA) is poised for growth, President Christopher Blake, Ph.D., said in his 2023 State of the University address.

The president, who presented his address from the Dublin Campus's newly renovated Karen L. Core Classroom on Thursday, Jan. 26, focused on four areas: MGA's vital signs and statistics; the University's strategic roadmap; the greatness in achievements of students, faculty, and staff;

and the importance of engaging and collaborating with communities and people the institution serves.

In the area of vital signs and statistics, Blake acknowledged that MGA's current enrollment is slightly down from a year ago but the decline slowed compared to semesters earlier in the pandemic. Signs are good that the coming summer and fall enrollment will return to pre-pandemic levels, he said.

"I can say today our vital signs are good,"

"We're changing lives and, therefore, communities with our work."

Stewardship

Engagement

Adaptability

Learning



*State of the University
Address*

January 26, 2023

Blake said. “We’re healthier than we were at the beginning of the pandemic, but we have to keep going.”

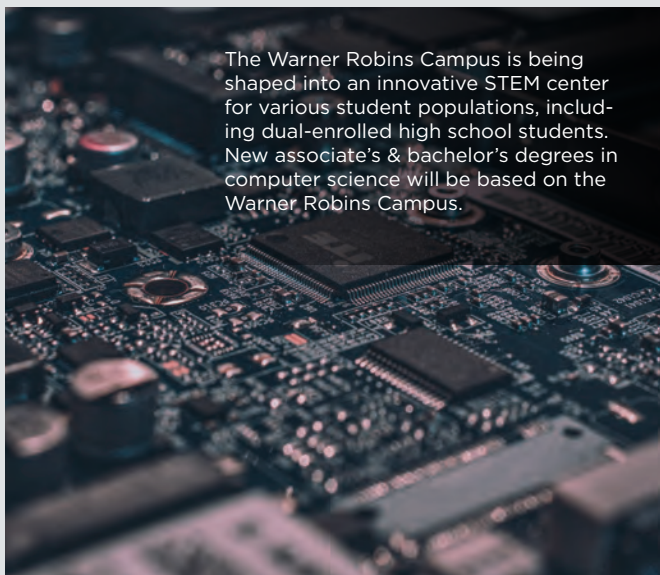
He noted that fall 2022 new undergraduate enrollment is up nearly 15 percent over last year, and new students pursuing graduate programs (master’s level and above) increased 63 percent. MGA’s goal for fall 2023 is to grow enrollment to a total of 8,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

Blake pointed out the University System of Georgia’s Board of Regents and Chancellor Sonny Perdue’s strong support of MGA, most recently demonstrated by the approval of the University’s new associate’s and bachelor’s degrees in computer science. Those programs will be based on the Warner Robins Campus to support Robins Air Force Base and other employers of computer science specialists.

On strategy, Blake stressed the need for the ongoing effective use of data and dashboards to help students be successful and move the University forward.

“We need to be unequivocally clear about measuring our performance,” he said, and quickly and effectively address underperformance in any area.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26



The Warner Robins Campus is being shaped into an innovative STEM center for various student populations, including dual-enrolled high school students. New associate’s & bachelor’s degrees in computer science will be based on the Warner Robins Campus.



This was Blake’s 10th “State of the University” address since becoming MGA’s president in 2014. The address is available in its entirety at <https://www.mga.edu/SOTU>



MGA is proposing athletics enhancements to create a more vibrant Cochran Campus and better engage the community.

“The public has a right to know that their investment (in MGA) is worth it. We have a good story to tell, and let’s make sure we use data to tell that story.”

On the University’s “greatness,” Blake noted that the word is more than a tagline. Greatness is expressed in concrete results, such as MGA graduated more students in the past year than ever before. This spring, he noted, MGA will graduate the charter class of students enrolled in the University’s first doctorate, the Doctor of Science in IT.

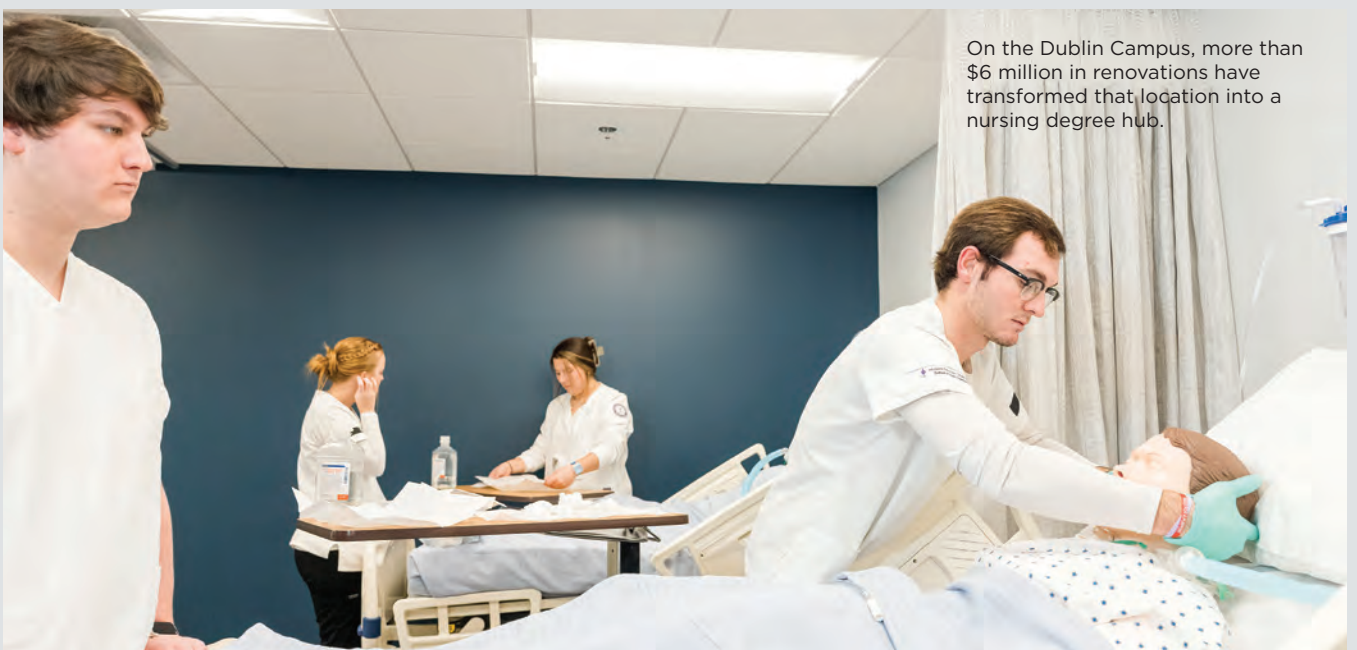
“We’re changing lives and, therefore, commu-

nities with our work,” Blake said.

In the area of engagement and collaboration, Blake renewed his call to enhance the on-campus experiences of undergraduate students while balancing the needs of adult students and those in graduate programs who are effectively served through online classes and degrees.

“We need to be a haven for undergraduate students,” he said, “where they can come and learn and connect to one another.”

Each of MGA’s five campuses plays a critical role in community engagement, Blake said.



On the Dublin Campus, more than \$6 million in renovations have transformed that location into a nursing degree hub.



The Macon Campus's facilities, including the Georgia Premier cross-country course, are supporting Macon-Bibb's growing tourism economy by hosting special events that draw visitors from around the state.

The Macon Campus's facilities, including the expanding Georgia Premier cross-country course, is supporting Macon-Bibb's growing tourism economy by hosting special events that draw visitors from around the state, he noted. MGA is proposing athletics enhancements, which should create a more vibrant Cochran Campus and better engage that community. Eastman, MGA's aviation campus, is on the verge of potential expansion to produce more pilots and other aviation professionals for one of Georgia's largest industries. On the Dublin Campus, more than \$6

million in renovations have transformed that location into a healthcare degree hub. And the Warner Robins Campus is being shaped into an innovative STEM center for various student populations, including dual-enrolled high school students.

"We are at a good place," Blake said. "Middle Georgia State University has never been stronger, but we need to put our shoulder to the wheel to get it to an even higher level. That's what we're called to do. Our work is not a one-time effort, it's not a one-year cycle. It's a vision of change." ■



Eastman, MGA's aviation campus, is on the verge of potential expansion to produce more pilots and other aviation professionals for one of Georgia's largest industries.



WHY I GIVE WHY I SERVE WHY I LEAVE A LEGACY



Donors share why and how – through giving, serving, or both – they support students and the mission of Middle Georgia State University through the MGA Foundation.

Retired Navy Commander **Earl “Butch” Beatty III** attended Middle Georgia College (now MGA) in Cochran between stints as a student-athlete at the University of Tennessee and Auburn University. He moved back to his hometown of Fort Valley a few years ago and is an assistant track and cross-country coach at Peach County High School. The retired naval health care administrator also volunteers at the American Red Cross in Macon. Beatty has

invested in MGA for decades, including through the cross-country program.

“Cross country is a way to build up a student-athlete,” he said. “It teaches them about life. **I give to MGA because I like the history and tradition of the school combined with it being on the cutting edge.** The career degree programs, diverse curriculum, the phenomenal expansion on the Dublin Campus – I think it’s fantastic.”

Isaac Ramsingh is assistant vice president of Learning and Organizational Development (human resources) at Atrium Health. A 2003 graduate of MGA with a bachelor’s degree in IT, he serves on the University’s Alumni Board.

“I serve on the board to represent and advocate for past and current students as well as for Middle Georgia State University itself,” he said. “My purpose is to learn as much as I can and to help advance causes and pro-

grams that benefit learners, who in turn benefit the communities we all serve. Collectively, the different organizations represented on the board offer a powerful avenue for positive change. Together with the rest of my amazing colleagues on the board, **we serve to have a positive impact on education, economics, and wellbeing.**

"It's also very important to me that I help build awareness of how easy it is to support the University and in turn help create opportunities for students to have the experiences and growth I had. For example, one easy and affordable way is for alumni to give \$18.84 monthly through the amazing 1884 Giving Society. The impact on the future of others is significant and rewarding."

Dr. Carolyn Bradley is MGA professor emerita of biology. After many years of teaching chemistry and biology, she retired from Macon State College (now MGA) in 2006. She established a scholarship to honor the memory of her parents, the Jessie S. and H. Grady Bradley Memorial Endowed Scholarship, and has planned to increase it through a gift in her estate.

Bradley wanted to leave a legacy by establishing the scholarship. "It's simple, and it goes back to my family," she said. "My dad and mom weren't able to finish high school and education was very important to them. They worked very, very hard in order for me to be able to go to college."

"Throughout my education and career, I made a number of connections to opportunities through people that helped me throughout my life. **Education is something that no one can take away from you.**

"I'm so proud of what MGA is doing for the region. An educated workforce is so important. We need to broaden the educational opportunities for students in Middle Georgia and ensure we provide a strong workforce for Robins AFB and employers here." ■

YOUR IMPACT

BECAUSE OF YOUR GENEROSITY,
WE HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THE POWERFUL IMPACT OF
PHILANTHROPY ON OUR STUDENTS.

\$3.6 MILLION

awarded in the last 10 years

Last year,

338 students

received life-changing
scholarships totaling more than

\$450,000



650+

alumni and friends attended
25+ statewide events.

Alumni activities and
programs not only raise the
profile of the University, but
also **increase contributions**
that directly benefit students.

supporting **HUNDREDS**

Foundation funding supports
faculty, staff, programs, events,
schools, community initiatives,
alumni programs, career fairs,
study abroad, summer camps,
executive lecture, experiential
learning, commencement, and
the list goes on and on.

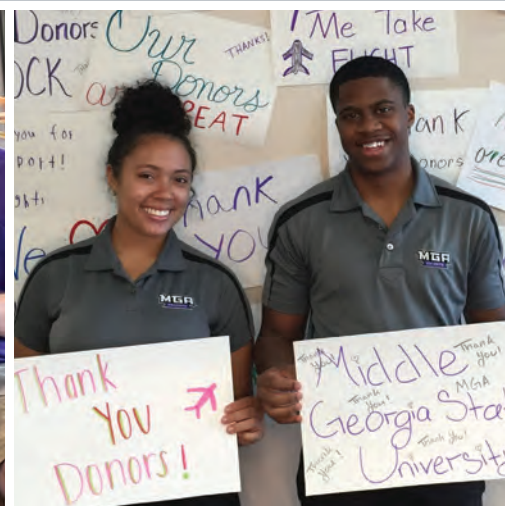


\$9.3 MILLION

invested in the last 10 years in the
University and student scholarships

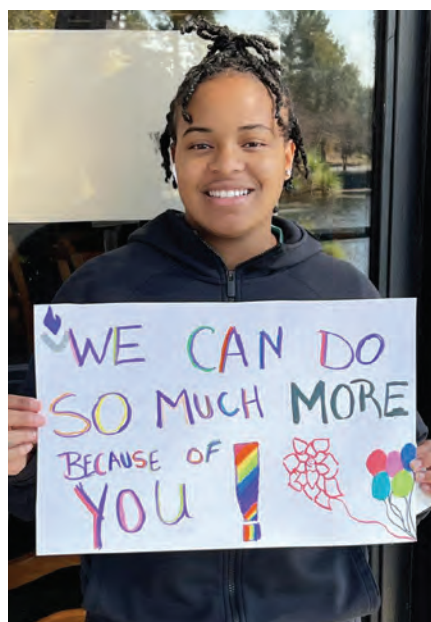
COUNTLESS

students and families benefit
from your gifts each year



EVERY DAY IS THANK-A-DONOR DAY...

...but sometimes we make it even more special! The MGA Foundation, in collaboration with the University's Office of Student Life, held its first "Thank-A-Donor Day" events in 2022 on the Eastman and Cochran Campuses. Students, faculty, and staff took a few moments to express their gratitude to MGA donors – who make many scholarships possible – in their own unique ways. Participants recorded more than 40 short thank-you videos; wrote more than 175 thank-you cards; signed over 250 acknowledgement cards; and had more than 110 photos taken with a thank-you poster they designed.





9th Annual Knights Golf Tournament May 8, 2023

An annual tournament held at Houston Lake Country Club raised important funds for MGA student-athletes. The tournament is a 4-person team, best-ball format. All golfers receive a tournament gift and a swag bag. Prize packages are awarded to the winning teams. All proceeds benefit our student-athletes.

MGA Foundation Recent & Upcoming Events



President's Gala October 20, 2023

The President's Gala is back! Join us for a spectacular event with proceeds benefitting MGA students.

Meet some of the students who have received scholarships through the MGA Foundation!



Christopher Kelley
Aviation Science &
Management



Buhle Ndmande
Respiratory Therapy



Addison Barron
Media & Communications



Romaine Hinds
Aviation Science &
Management



Delma Lopez
Nursing



Middle Georgia State University

100 University Parkway
Macon, GA 31206-5145

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

MGA was honored to have **U.S. Sen. Jon Ossoff** of Georgia visit the Macon Campus earlier this spring to announce new resources for the University's School of Aviation. Ossoff secured bipartisan support in Congress for funds to add two simulators to MGA's Eastman Campus, where the School of Aviation is based. Aviation is one of the state's top industries and employers. The senator, center, is shown with aviation students, L-R, **Bennett Delaney, Aaron Miller, Hannah Brown, Ben George, Hannah Holton, Thomas Fausett, & Patrick Johnny**. mga.edu/aviation. IMAGE: TYLER WHITE



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