A Friend at the Front of the Room

Faculty members already play a significant role in how college students feel about their work and themselves. A trio of engineering deans is arguing they also can play a key role in supporting a generation of students struggling with mental health.

Their argument, made in a new opinion piece published by Inside Higher Ed last week, is that students feeling anxious or overwhelmed have a friend at the front of the classroom who can help.

Led by Georgia Tech College of Engineering Dean and Southern Company Chair Steven W. McLaughlin, the deans propose a series of tools and training to help equip faculty members to get involved when they see a student at risk.

Like many other higher education institutions in the United States, our three colleges (Georgia Tech, the University of Michigan, and the University of Colorado) are in the midst of a student mental health crisis. And while some may wonder why colleges are feeling the impact

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What to Read during the Holiday Break

VICTOR ROGERS
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

The guests are gone, the dishes have been cleared, and you have some quiet time to yourself. So, where’s a good book when you need one?

We asked several avid readers for recommendations. The books range from a story of the reflections and adventures of a failed novelist to a how-to on bullet journaling.

Less
By Andrew Sean Greer, Little, Brown and Company (2017)

“This national bestseller and winner of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction is the story of Arthur Less, a failed novelist about to turn 50, who responds to an ex-lover’s wedding invitation by embarking on a trip around the world for a series of literary events. Regrets and reminiscences of past loves are interspersed with new adventures both endearingly awkward and deeply graceful. This was the perfect novel to read in my 49th summer. I recommend it for anyone who has ever been in love, or who wonders what a year of saying yes could be.”

—Marlee Givens, librarian for Modern Languages and Psychology

Gods of the Upper Air: How a Circle of Renegade Anthropologists Reinvented Race, Sex, and Gender in the Twentieth Century
By Charles King, Doubleday Publishers (2019)

“An inspiring group biography told within the context of the social, cultural, and political events of the 20th century. Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ruth Benedict developed revolutionary methods and theories that

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DRESSING FOR THE OCCASION

Commencement week is here. With three ceremonies and other celebrations, campus will be abuzz with activity and festivities throughout the week. Visit news.gatech.edu for ongoing stories and coverage.

This will be the first Commencement weekend under President Ángel Cabrera (above, left), who shows off his regalia from la Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. Also pictured are Casey Gomez, a Spring 2019 graduate in Georgia Tech bachelor’s regalia; Charles Isbell, dean and John P. Imlay Jr. Chair in the College of Computing, wearing his regalia from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Karen Head, associate professor and associate chair of the School of Literature, Media, and Communication, wearing regalia from the University of Nebraska; and details of Georgia Tech’s doctoral regalia, modeled by Spring 2019 graduate Iris Lu.

DRESSING FOR THE OCCASION
Staff Council Welcomes 8 New Members

Virginia Sheppard, Staff Council

As its fifth year winds down, the Georgia Tech Staff Council is looking forward to eight new faces.

October’s elections brought these tech employees onto the Council to serve three-year terms beginning January 2020:

Administrative and Professional
- David Bamburovski, director of academic and research faculty affairs
- Faculty Affairs
- Alex Gutierrez, marketing specialist, Parking and Transportation Services

Skilled Trades
- Juan Archila, director of facilities and capital planning, College of Sciences
- Jonathan Eres, senior facilities manager, H. Milton Stewart School of Industrial and Systems Engineering
- Michael Williams, roofer, Facilities Development

Science and Research
- Rusty Taylor, research technician, College of Design

Information Technology
- Mir Mohammad, IT support professional, Georgia Tech Manufacturing Institute

Byron Fitch from Strategic Consulting will serve as Council chair, succeeding David Brown. Quinca Ford, administrative manager in Facilities Management, will succeed Ryan Lisk as vice chair, and Alex Gutierrez will be the new Council secretary, succeeding Tonia Valeck. The rest of the 2020 Staff Council leadership team includes:

- Chris Walker, assistant director of marketing, Georgia Tech Professional Education – chair, Communications Committee
- Will Jimerson, director of human resources, Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts – chair, Compensation and Benefits Committee
- Juan Archila, director of facilities and capital planning, College of Sciences – chair, Campus Physical Environment Committee
- Candice Bovian, benefits specialist, Office of Human Resources – chair, Employee Engagement Committee

As Council chair, it is my honor to welcome our newly elected members,” said Brown, electrician II, Facilities Management. “We have reached several milestones in our previous years and look forward to a year of high energy in successful ventures. It is also an honor to continue working with our returning members. Together, each of us contributes to accomplishing new goals as others make it through the system. I appreciate everyone’s willingness to make this institution the great place we know it is.”

In accordance with the Council’s bylaws, members are permitted to serve up to two consecutive terms. The following members have completed their elected service as of this month:

Administrative and Professional
- Tonia Valeck
- Wansley Denis
- Rudy Paratchek

Science and Research
- Ryan Lisk

Skilled Trades
- Johnny Stewart
- Kyle Richardson

Information Technology
- Karla Gibson

Development
- Virginia Sheppard

The Staff Council’s role is to give a formal means for more than 3,700 staff members to communicate their perspectives to the Institute’s executive leadership. To learn more about the Staff Council, its work, and ways to get involved, visit staffcouncil.gatech.edu.

THE JOURNAL FODDER 365: DAILY DOSES OF INSPIRATION FOR THE ART ADDICT

By Eric M. Scott and David R. Modler, North Light Books (2012)

“Start 2020 by doing creative work that does not require extensive training. This paperback book shows how to be artistic with collage, simple stencils, watercolors, and markers. Each activity has a writing prompt, recommended page layouts, and step-by-step instruction on how to achieve a cohesive look. And you don’t need to start on New Year’s Day; the work can happen at any time.

It’s also perfect to have this book on hand if the electricity goes out during an ice storm. If children complain that they’re bored you can entertain them with the techniques found in this book.”

Some of these books are available by searching the Library’s online catalog. Visit library.gatech.edu. You can also search other libraries using Tech’s interlibrary loan system. Visit library.gatech.edu/borrow-other-libraries. Or, visit your local book store. Happy reading!”

*Passion* is the next topic in the *What to Read series, scheduled for February 2020. We’re looking for books about great romances, unrequited love, or a passion for work or hobbies. If you have a book to submit, send recommendations to editor@comm.gatech.edu.
so dramatically, the fact remains that the age group where these symptoms often first manifest is the 18- to 21-year-old range — our undergraduate student population. The young people in our classrooms today are more anxious and overwhelmed than ever. National studies demonstrate the significance of mental health challenges among our students. Last year, the American College Health Association reported that two of every five college students felt so depressed they had difficulty functioning, and one in five students had contemplated ending their life. Nationally, suicide is the leading cause of death among men of college age. During this last academic year, the loss of students in each of our own communities reminded us that these are not mere statistics but real people with real struggles. We found ourselves too often commiserating with each other over these tragedies and brainstorming about new ways to help our students. We realized that conversations about the problems were no longer enough; we wanted to make a statement that all of us in higher education must take a stand to assist with student mental health.

To their credit, universities like ours are responding with a broad range of awareness campaigns, expanded counseling services, and cultivated peer support. Some colleges are embedding counselors inside academic departments to bring them closer to students. But studies make clear that counseling centers are not enough.

Now it’s time for those who already play a vital role in the development of our students — those of us who are professors — to get even more involved. As deans and professors of engineering, we’ve personally experienced the distinct vantage point of faculty members. We see the demeanor of students, week in and week out. We’re in an exceptional position to spot rising absenteeism or declining performance; to recognize signs that a student is struggling or that something isn’t quite right. And we often have an outsize role in a student’s feelings of self-worth, value, and growth.

Many faculty members are happy to embrace this added role of responsibility. But spotting personal struggle and taking action isn’t usually in the job description. In addition, intervening doesn’t come easily. But here’s the reality: the classroom is the one place where
The northwest sector of campus has been a continuous hub of activity with the construction of the new Georgia Tech Police Department Building, the Dalney Building, and The Kendeda Building for Innovative Sustainable Design—all of which opened their doors in the past few months. The next highly anticipated project in this area is the renewal of 8 acres of land located at the corner of Hemphill Ave. and Ferst Drive, which will extend and enhance the campus Eco-Commons.

A lush green space will soon emerge from what was formerly the Beringause Building and two surface parking lots. This renewal project will be purposely located due west of The Kendeda Building and will complement the regenerative principles of the Living Building Challenge. Georgia Tech’s overall Eco-Commons project envisions 80 acres of green spaces throughout campus that follow what were the original, naturally occurring stream paths of this region before urbanization. These revitalized green spaces are being designed and engineered to reduce stormwater runoff by 50%, while also supporting increased living learning labs and biodiversity on campus.

This particular section will mimic a traditional piedmont woodland that was located on campus before the city grew up around it. Currently, the majority of acreage is covered by oak, pine, and hickory trees along with crepe myrtles and redbuds. The trees have been surveyed and range from specimen trees (those with high historic or ecological value), to trees in fair or poor condition.

According to Jason Gregory, senior planner in Capital Planning and Space Management, more than 60 trees will be temporarily relocated to the tree farm by the Roger A. and Helen B. Krone Engineered Biosystems Building while significant grading of the space is completed.

“It’s pretty neat that we have the ability to relocate these trees on campus while this project moves forward,” explained Gregory. But before planting can begin at the site, extensive amendments such as compost and biochar will be added to the soil. Installation of utilities, water infiltration cells, and drainage infrastructure will also take place before any planting can begin.

After the site is prepared, more than 600 new trees will be planted in addition to the relocated trees. This increased tree canopy will support a display of perennials such as flowering dogwood, yellow daisies, and ferns. This recreated piedmont woodland will feature a grove of tupelo trees, a prairie-like area of grasses, a manicured lawn, a granite outcropping, and seepage wetlands. It is expected that by mid-year 2020, students, faculty, and staff will be able to meander the walkways and bridges and enjoy the natural beauty of this revitalized sector of campus.

The creation of this performance landscape helps demonstrate Georgia Tech’s thoughtful stewardship of land development by including smart infrastructure to facilitate a balanced flow of stormwater.

In addition, this naturalized ecological and educational environment supports Georgia Tech’s commitment to fostering sustainability initiatives well into the 21st century. To learn more about this distinctive campus initiative, stay tuned for the next article in a three-part series.