



# THE WHISTLE

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## Staff Member Using Art and Microsoft Grant to Improve STEM Accessibility

BEN SNEDEKER  
COLLEGE OF COMPUTING

Birney Robert is challenging local artists and researchers: find new ways of collaborating to expand access to science and technology for the Atlanta community.

This is no idle challenge. Robert, an event planner with the College of Computing, was recently awarded a \$40,000 Georgia Tech/Microsoft Accessibility Research Seed Grant through the Center for 21st Century Universities to make these collaborations a reality.

She earned the funding for her



Photo by Terrence Rushin

Birney Robert, an event planner in the College of Computing, will use a \$40,000 grant for two exhibits that include new and existing work from different collaborations between artists and researchers.

see **GRANT**, page 4

### Don't Miss Staff Appreciation Day This Week

Thursday, Oct. 14 • 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Tech Green

Join the Georgia Tech Staff Council for food, fun, and giveaways during Staff Appreciation Day. You can also participate in friendly competition with colleagues in the Staff Appreciation Day Games. To sign up for a team, email [erik.johnson@stucen.gatech.edu](mailto:erik.johnson@stucen.gatech.edu) or [timothy.mention@finaid.gatech.edu](mailto:timothy.mention@finaid.gatech.edu).

Registration is required to attend the event.  
Register at [bit.ly/StaffAppreciationDay](https://bit.ly/StaffAppreciationDay).

## Registration Open for Fall Citizens Police Academy

VICTOR ROGERS  
INSTITUTE COMMUNICATIONS

Georgia Tech's Citizens Police Academy is a five-week program designed to educate and inform the Tech community about issues related to law enforcement efforts on campus and how the Georgia Tech Police Department (GTPD) operates. The Academy, which is accepting applications for fall, is open to all Tech faculty, staff, and students.

"If you have questions about the operations of the department, the type of training the officers receive, the day-to-day function of the department, or if you just want to have a

see **ACADEMY**, page 2

## Claim Your \$200 Credit for Getting the Covid-19 Vaccine

Effective Aug. 30, 2021, the USG well-being credit maximum will be increased to \$200 from \$100 and employees/spouses who receive the vaccine will be eligible for the full \$200. Employees/spouses must be registered on the USG well-being platform to receive the credit. USG will waive the current requirement for employees to complete a health assessment to become eligible for well-being credits for 2021.

For instructions on how to claim your credit, visit [c.gatech.edu/vaxcredit](https://c.gatech.edu/vaxcredit).

If you have not yet been vaccinated, visit [mytest.gatech.edu](https://mytest.gatech.edu) to make an appointment at Stamps Health Services.



## ACADEMY, from page 1

better understanding of law enforcement — this academy is for you,” said Georgia Tech Sergeant Jessica Howard, Academy coordinator.

The training, which begins Oct. 21, includes classes on investigations, the Clery Act, K-9, law enforcement technology, firearms, emergency preparedness, and crime prevention. All classes are held from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Georgia Tech Police Department on Tech’s campus. The program is free, but participants must commit to attend all sessions.

Class size is limited. Applicants must submit an online application by Oct. 18 and undergo a limited background investigation.

Howard believes the Academy helps to develop and foster positive relations between the community and GTPD through education.

“I believe giving people the opportunity to gain insight into how and why a law enforcement agency operates the way it does — from administra-



Photo by Allison Carter

The Georgia Tech Police Department headquarters is located at the corner of 10th Street and Hemphill Avenue.

tive positions to the officers in the field — brings better understanding and, ultimately, long-lasting positive relationships,” Howard said.

For schedule details and to register for the Citizens Police Academy, visit [police.gatech.edu/citizens-police-academy](https://police.gatech.edu/citizens-police-academy).



# Graduate, Staffer Has Documentary Debut at Out on Film

MICHAEL PEARSON  
IVAN ALLEN COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

Steven Norris graduated in Spring 2021 with a master's degree in global media and cultures, one of the newer programs offered in the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts. For his research project, he made a documentary film called *Euromerica*, about America's multifaceted relationship to the Eurovision Song Contest. The film recently debuted as part of the Academy Award-qualifying Out on Film festival in Atlanta. Watch the trailer at [c.gatech.edu/eurotrailer](https://c.gatech.edu/eurotrailer).

We talked with Norris, Georgia Tech's director of media relations and social media, about the spectacle that is Eurovision, why he chose it for his research project, and his advice for anyone considering the GMC program.

## Tell us about the film.

It's about American superfans of the Eurovision Song Contest, which is wildly popular in Europe but hardly known here. I think it tells a fascinating story about how America is tied to the contest, how America has influenced the contest over the years, how the contest has changed, and where it may be going in the future.

## For those who don't know, what is Eurovision?

Eurovision started in 1956 as a sort of double-pronged event. The contest celebrated new, original songs in an attempt to help reunite a postwar Europe fractured by decades of conflict. It also allowed the limits of broadcast technology to be tested. Eurovision was one of the first live broadcast signals to be shared across multiple national borders. In short, each competing nation submits a song to be performed live. After these performances, viewers cast votes to help determine a winner. The winning nation hosts the contest the following year. It's not just one of the world's longest running live broadcasts; it's also one of the most



Photo by Allison Carter

Steven Norris earned a master's degree from Georgia Tech in Spring 2021. He has been a Tech staff member since 2012.

watched television shows worldwide.

An Ipsos poll in 2020 found that less than 6% of Americans had heard of or seen Eurovision. So, I wanted to find those Americans who have been following the contest passionately and why it means so much to them, and then explore the contest from that lens.

## How did you decide on Eurovision as the focus of your research?

I wanted to look at how culture and language played into this global media event, which is up there with the Olympics and World Cup soccer in viewership. Still, there aren't a lot of documentaries about it, and there aren't a lot of researchers outside of Europe investigating this. It was exciting to be part of something that feels like it hasn't gotten its due. Also, Eurovision offers a unique intersection of global media and cultures, so it really makes sense as a research subject for this degree, which is all about the interplay of language, culture, and technology. When I attended the contest in Lisbon in 2018, it was hard for me as a former journalist not to want to put my reporter hat on and ask questions about how this keeps going. So, I knew I wanted to do it, and then I just kept pushing forward.

## Can you talk about how it was to pivot because of Covid-19?

I had planned to attend the contest as part of my research project, one of just a handful of researchers worldwide selected to work with the European Broadcast Union. Then Covid-19 hit, and the contest was canceled for the first time since it began in 1956. So, I had to come up with a backup plan. And I started thinking, "Well, I've got video editing experience, and I have access to some archival materials. Let me see if I can put together something that way." One thing I tried to remember is that I wasn't alone in going through this. You had an entire campus in the summer of 2020 trying to figure out how to retool and how to adjust. The more people you talk to at Tech, you realize that learning how to be adaptive, how to adjust, how to solve problems is just something that you pick up going through programs here. And, yeah, I'm a little bummed I didn't get to go in person. But I think the bigger lesson that I learned was how to take something really complicated and figure out how to come out on the other side with something successful.

Read the full interview at [c.gatech.edu/eurovision](https://c.gatech.edu/eurovision).



## Open Enrollment Coming for 2022

University System of Georgia (USG) Open Enrollment is Oct. 25 through Nov. 5. Now is the time to review plans and consider your healthcare needs for next year.

All plans will have an increase in price in 2022. A tobacco surcharge of \$100 will continue for users of tobacco. The offering of a \$100 well-being credit will also be available next year. More information is available at [oneusgconnect.usg.edu](https://oneusgconnect.usg.edu).

View the complete booklet of plans and information for next year at [c.gatech.edu/usg-health-2022](https://c.gatech.edu/usg-health-2022), and view a rubric of plans and premium costs at [c.gatech.edu/usg-2022-premiums](https://c.gatech.edu/usg-2022-premiums).

A virtual benefits fair will take place Oct. 25–29 via [usg.vfairs.com](https://usg.vfairs.com). Attendees will be able to view presentations and chat with vendors every day. View an agenda of presentations at [usg.vfairs.com](https://usg.vfairs.com).

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proposal, “Accessible Exhibits at the Intersection of Art, Science, and Technology.” It spells out plans for two exhibits, one per semester possibly starting next fall, that include new and existing work from different collaborations between artists and researchers.

Robert says one of the project’s goals is to break down existing silos that limit access to science and technology, especially for people from underserved communities.

“Not only will the exhibits be ADA compliant, but also free to enter and done in a way that cultivates community, involves artists with disabilities, and challenges existing notions of who gets access to and representation in the space,” said Robert.

The exhibits will last six to eight weeks and be located in accessible public space at Georgia Tech. They will include audio translations, braille signage, and a website featuring the work, artist profiles, exhibition statements, and video interviews with the artists and researchers.

Along with taking on physical and economic access, Robert is working to expand intellectual access as well. The hope is to use the power of art as a way to demystify science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

“By contextualizing STEM through art, these exhibits will promote inclusivity, accessibility, and civic engagement, and will hopefully be seen as a form of cultural brokering between Georgia Tech and the Atlanta community,” said Robert, who holds a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Birmingham-Southern College.

Once the exhibits are complete, Robert will document her experiences as a feasibility study. Visitor surveys and other methods will be used to gauge interest in this type of exhibit in the Georgia Tech, Midtown, and broader Atlanta communities.

Ultimately, she hopes this project will serve as a step toward a permanent space on campus dedicated to accessible exhibits that serve to demystify STEM and promote inclusivity.

“Art is an avenue where we can understand more than the written word. It’s a discipline that I identify

closely with,” said Robert, who is pursuing a master’s degree in museum anthropology at Georgia State University.

“I believe a permanent museum and residency program on campus to display Georgia Tech research in new and exciting ways in a public space would be an incredible opportunity to open critical dialogue with the community.”

Robert has been with the College for nearly seven years. As an event planner, she has a critical role in ensuring events like College graduation celebrations, hall of fame ceremonies, and high-profile speaking engagements happen without a hitch.

From time to time, she is able to incorporate her artistic side into her event planning. A great example was the launch of the Institute for Data Engineering and Science. Not content with simple floral arrangements for the luncheon tables, Robert handmade centerpieces with old motherboards, wires, and light bulbs.

“It’s because of the College of Computing that I am where I am today. It’s given me so many opportunities that help me along this path.”