THE ASCENT

THE SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT OF MOUNT BAKER
BY PRESIDENT BECKER
AND NINE STUDENTS:
AN ORAL HISTORY

CUBA
LIFE ON THE ISLAND THAT TIME FORGOT

TURKEY
COVERING THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS
LEAVE A LEGACY...
SUPPORT GEORGIA STATE

The legacy left by renowned opera singer Florence Kopleff includes performances with some of America’s greatest conductors and a 30-year teaching career as Georgia State University’s first artist in residence. It also includes an endowed scholarship that helped Melissa Joseph pursue a degree in music. Not only has Melissa found her voice, she has had opportunities to share her talents with her school, her city and audiences around the world.

THE GIFT THAT IGNITED
my adventure

“The Kopleff Scholarship helped me live my dream! It gave me amazing opportunities like performing with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and singing the national anthem at commencement.”

Please contact Laura M. Sillins, J.D., at (404) 413-3425 or lsillins@gsu.edu to discuss a planned gift today.
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The legacy left by renowned opera singer Florence Kopleff includes performances with some of America’s greatest conductors and a 30-year teaching career as Georgia State University’s first artist in residence. It also includes an endowed scholarship that helped Melissa Joseph pursue a degree in music. Not only has Melissa found her voice, she has had opportunities to share her talents with her school, her city and audiences around the world.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

ON THE ROAD

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IS A MAJOR PART OF A GEORGIA STATE EDUCATION.

I REMEMBER WELL when I traveled to Toulouse, France, as a young assistant professor to speak at my first international conference. It was the first time I had traveled internationally on my own, and I can remember the nervous excitement I felt. Navigating my way through French customs and the Paris subway system, taking the train from Paris to Toulouse, I was by myself and in a country where I had only minimal facility with the language.

It was an opportunity to experience a new culture first hand, and I relished the chance to soak it all in. It was an eye-opening experience, and a chance to learn how others see the United States from afar as much as it was to learn about France and French culture.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to travel to dozens of countries and hundreds of cities in my professional and personal life. Every new city and country is a terrific learning opportunity.

To me, working and playing outside of my comfort zone, beyond what is familiar and safe, is the key to true growth. Climbers who attempt to summit the world’s highest and most challenging peaks don’t do so because they are easy. Professors engaged in pioneering research don’t rest on their past discoveries. They push beyond what is comfortable and continue to strive and achieve.

Experiential learning — whether an internship at a company across the street or a study abroad trip on the other side of our planet — has become a key component of a Georgia State education. We want students to be challenged in new environments and pushed out of their comfort zones. Those experiences lead to personal and professional growth, and new levels of confidence. As graduates and friends, you know about our enterprising spirit and the adventurous nature of our community.

Around the world, our faculty, students and alumni are pursuing their own passions and adventures. Our professors are leading research projects from Taiwan to Turkey. They are teaching high school students in China and helping to craft governmental policies in the Republic of Georgia. A record number of our students are studying abroad, taking the opportunity to travel overseas for international experiences that will help shape their worldview and give them perspective.

This summer, I had the great privilege of leading a team of students up Mount Baker in Washington. It was a challenging and transformative experience for us all. The group came back with an appreciation for the wonders of mountain climbing, but more important they developed a deeper appreciation for life itself. In conversations after the climb, I have heard time and again that one of the most rewarding outcomes of the trip was the experience of accomplishing a goal once thought to be beyond their mental and physical limits.

Like those young mountain climbers, we must all strive to take chances and push ourselves beyond our comfort zones. That’s when we truly discover who we are and what we are capable of, and find out all that life and this world have to offer.

Sincerely,

Mark P. Becker
President

"We want students to be challenged in new environments and pushed out of their comfort zones."
LETTERS

NO MAGIC BULLET

I am an alumna and doctoral candidate in English at Georgia State. I’m also someone diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) who has had to navigate the prejudices, misinformation and discrimination against people like me in both the academic and corporate worlds. I found the article “The New Normal” to be incredibly one-sided. It trivializes our difficulties and perpetuates stereotypes about people with invisible disabilities. Some people are under the misguided assumption that stimulant medications — which unfortunately pose other long-term health risks like cardiovascular damage — are a magic bullet for last-minute “multitasking.” If only it were as simple as taking a magic pill. I and many other people with ADHD know it’s not. ¶ ADHD is a learning disability. Highly intelligent, undiagnosed students compensate, often instinctively, by putting in far more hours than other students doing the same task and creating systems like color-coding or filing papers in piles. Over time, compensating becomes harder. ¶ Many of us with ADHD are high achievers. But we’re high achievers because we have to work much harder at everything neurotypical people take for granted — everything from managing the bills to finishing our research — not because we took some non-existent “high achiever” pill. ¶ Conflating so-called “performance-enhancing” drug abusers with those of us who have traveled a long, difficult, painful road with our doctors and families is gratuitous and ill-informed. Medications level the playing field. They do not grant superpowers. ¶ Here’s an analogy: Imagine an article positing the supposition “Do we really want to live in a world with carbon-fiber prosthetics?” or “Do we really want to live in a world with cochlear implants?” ¶ The alternative smacks of eugenics. ¶ Now imagine being the person with ADHD who had to read this article. Robin Kemp (B.A. ’94)

SPREAD THE WORD

The article, “Marketing Poison” is a terrific story about Monica Swahn’s efforts in Uganda. I highly recommend the author do further writing about Professor Swahn and get this word out. It would be wonderful to see the substance of this article in Reader’s Digest and/or Time! I usually read the GSU magazine from cover to cover. Thanks for your excellent work. Esther Truesdale (M.Ed. ’72)
CONSOLIDATION UPDATE

Work continues on the Georgia State and Georgia Perimeter College alliance.

In January, the consolidation with Georgia Perimeter College will make Georgia State the largest public institution in Georgia. The 40-person implementation committee has been meeting regularly to approve hundreds of consolidation recommendations emerging from operational working groups from both institutions.

A new organizational structure has been formed, and the consolidation plan will be submitted for review to the University System of Georgia and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for accreditation approval in December. It will be reviewed by the Board of Regents in January, and students will be admitted to the new Georgia State University in fall 2016.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

New student housing complex set to open in fall 2016.

Georgia State broke ground on a new student housing and dining hall complex expected to admit students in fall 2016.

The complex is at the intersection of Piedmont and John Wesley Dobbs avenues and will house about 1,100 students.

It’s the first student housing facility in the University System of Georgia to be built and operated under a new public-private partnership between the system and Corvias Campus Living.

“This project is hugely important to Georgia State because the opportunity for students to live on campus provides a richer, more supportive academic environment,” said Mark Becker, president of Georgia State. “With this project, we will get to what has been a long-term goal for Georgia State, which is to

PARENTS, YOU’RE RIGHT

RESEARCH SHOWS TODDLERS KNOW THE SOUNDS THEY MAKE INFLUENCE OTHERS.

IT’S TRUE: Confirming what many parents already know, researchers at Georgia State have discovered that toddlers understand how the sounds they make affect people around them.

THE STUDY: Children had a chance to play with two toys, a quiet toy and a loud one. A researcher then introduced a doll and gave the children one of two goals, either to wake up the doll or let the doll sleep. The children, however, were not given instructions on whether to be quiet or make noise.

WAKE UP: Children who were told to wake the doll produced louder sounds, while children who were told not to wake the doll were quieter. In addition, children who were told to wake the doll more often than others chose to play with the loud toy first.
POSITIVE ACTION

At Hewlett-Packard, Gabi Zedlmayer (B.A. ’83) taps the power of technology to promote human, economic and environmental progress.

BY BEN AUSTIN (B.A. ’08, M.A. ’13) PHOTOS BY JEFF SINGER
In a rainy September morning in San Jose, Costa Rica, Gabi Zedlmayer is trekking through the La Selva rainforest, catching up with scientists monitoring the region’s ecosystem.

Zedlmayer, vice president and chief progress officer at Hewlett-Packard, guides the company’s sustainability efforts ranging from healthcare to education and job creation to conservation.

The sun rises on the 90-minute drive from San Jose to the rainforest as Zedlmayer is briefed by one of La Selva’s conservationists. Travel is a regular part of her job and traveling deep into a wilderness like this is not uncommon. Months earlier, on a trip to India she met with the National Skills Development Foundation in Delhi before hopping in a car to jounce over rutted roads two and a half hours to a rural medical center in Payradanga.

“It was quite an adventure — streets are narrow, traffic is heavy, everybody is honking all the time and people don’t pay much attention to which side of the street they are driving on,” Zedlmayer recalled. “Between the crazy traffic, the cows that cross the street every now and then, and the people who cut their way across the street you end up thinking that it seems impossible to arrive all in one piece. But we did it!”

As a young woman, Zedlmayer made one of the most important trips of her life, traveling from her native Germany to the United States. In a breakneck year and a half, she earned her MBA at Georgia State, pushing herself on 17-credit-hour semesters.

Since graduating, she has brought her expertise back to the college, serving on the Robinson College’s Board of Advisors and helping develop Panthers Accelerated Consulting Experience, an experiential learning program in which student teams solve business problems. Students in the program have worked to increase donations to the Georgia Food Bank Association, for example. The increase was due in large part to the students’ recommendations, which included ways to better leverage current food sources. Those recommendations have an economic impact of $7 million.

This year, Zedlmayer came back as a guest lecturer for an Operations Management class. “I loved seeing the students,” Zedlmayer said. “They were so impressive, and they made me reflect on how much I had learned here. The diversity — so obvious in the faces of the students — made me happy.”

Then it was back to the airport to return home — briefly — to Zurich, Switzerland.

Since joining Hewlett-Packard, Zedlmayer has traveled to New York, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, China, Cuba, India and Dubai.

But La Selva is her first rainforest. Spider monkeys chatter in the canopy when the party arrives, and owl butterflies hang from dripping branches. Zedlmayer has her poncho on, hood up and hair streaming down the sides. She is smiling.
have on-campus housing for more than 20 percent of our undergraduate population.”

The Corvias partnership allows for a quicker, more efficient way to move forward with student housing projects than previously possible, Becker said.

“The University System of Georgia and Georgia State are taking a fresh approach to student housing that includes short-term solutions, like this new residence hall, but also invests in the long-term prosperity of its assets through a partnership model that ensures no facility falls into disrepair,” Becker said.

CITYSCAPE CHANGES
Several other campus building projects ongoing this summer.

Construction crews worked on a variety of developments and renovation projects this summer as the university adds offices and science laboratories across campus.

The university expects several projects to be completed in 2016, including the addition of the Science Park Phase II Building being built next to the Petit Science Center, and the expansion of the fourth and fifth floors of the Science Annex at the corner of Hurt Plaza and Peachtree Center Avenue.

The Science Park Phase II building will significantly increase the amount of research labs and lab support space on campus, and the Science Annex expansion will add two 25-seat science-teaching laboratories to the building.

Construction is complete at the new College of Law building at 85 Park Place NE, and the college moved in July 22.

NEW TITLE
Welcome the new College of Education and Human Development.

Georgia State’s College of Education changed its name to the College of Education and Human Development. Founded in 1967, the college has ex-

CONT’D ON P.10

GOLF GONE GLOBAL
WOMEN’S GOLF COACH CATHY MANT, A FORMER LPGA TOUR PRO AND FIVE-TIME CONFERENCE COACH OF THE YEAR, LEADS U.S. JUNIORS IN WORLD GOLF COMPETITION IN NAGOYA, JAPAN.

How was Japan? It was great. This is the first official time that girls have been included in the World Junior Golf Championships, so it was a real honor to have been asked to do this. It was also a good way to give Georgia State some visibility.

How was the course? Interesting to say the least. It was in great shape. It also had four escalators because of the elevation changes. It’s not everyday you see something like that. The girls played really well, but the Japanese girls played tremendously and won the tournament. We finished fourth.

Your teams have always had some great international players. Were you able to do some scouting? Yes, I got to see some great players and meet coaches from national teams; it’s invaluable to make those contacts.

There were 23 countries represented. The U.S. did a presentation for all the coaches, and I was able to talk about college golf in the U.S.

What was the highlight of the trip? Walking on stage during our national anthem was a really special feeling. To experience their culture and try all the food was fun, too.

Read more at magazine.gsu.edu
IN THE CITY

Panned its degree offerings, faculty and student populations and dedicated itself to preparing students for careers in the education and human development fields.

“The new name better represents the full scope of the teaching, research and service of this very important and successful college,” said Risa Palm, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost.

“The college prepares not only teachers and administrators, but also a variety of other professionals in human services.”

The college graduates about 900 students a year and prepares about 400 new teachers annually.

“This name change more fully represents the disciplines our college teaches and the research and community outreach our faculty, students and staff conduct,” said Paul Alberto, dean of the college.

“OUR NEW AGENTS CAN OBTAIN BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONTRAST IMAGES WITHIN ONE APPLICATION, PROVIDING DOUBLE THE ACCURACY AND CONFIDENCE OF LOCATING CARCINOMA TUMORS,” said Jenny Yang, Distinguished University Professor and associate director of the Center for Diagnostics and Therapeutics at Georgia State.

The research is supported by the National Institutes of Health.

ENHANCING ACCURACY

Georgia State researchers discover new early-stage liver cancer detection.

Researchers at Georgia State have developed the first robust and noninvasive detection of early-stage liver cancer and liver metastases, in addition to other liver diseases, such as cirrhosis and liver fibrosis.

To more effectively detect cancerous tumors at an early stage, researchers from Georgia State, in collaboration with researchers from Emory University, Georgia Tech, the University of Georgia and the University of Virginia, have developed a new class of protein-based contrast agents and an imaging methodology that provides robust results for the early detection of liver cancers and other liver diseases.

The researchers’ newly developed agent allows for imaging liver tumors that measure less than 0.25 millimeters. The agent is more than 40 times more sensitive than today’s commonly used and clinically approved agents used to detect tumors in the liver.

Our new agents can obtain both positive and negative contrast images within one application, providing double the accuracy and confidence of locating cancerous tumors,” said Jenny Yang, Distinguished University Professor and associate director of the Center for Diagnostics and Therapeutics at Georgia State.

The college prepares not only teachers and administrators, but also a variety of other professionals in human services.”

The research is supported by the National Institutes of Health.

URBAN CESSATION

School of Public Health partners with Chinese cities to stamp out smoking.

Georgia State’s School of Public Health is partnering with five major municipalities in China to help reduce smoking in a nation that produces more tobacco and has more smokers than any other in the world.

The project, China Tobacco Control Partnership—Tobacco Free Cities, will focus on the following cities: Chongqing, Chengdu, Wuhan, Xi’an and Xiamen, whose leaders have shown a willingness to support tobacco control efforts and where public health organizations are in a position to lead the efforts.

“Cities have an important role to play in changing the landscape of tobacco use, and may be the driving force to change the social norms of tobacco use in China,” said Pam Redmon, the program’s executive director and the administrative director of the School of Public Health’s Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science.

“We look forward to partnering with our Chinese colleagues to support tobacco control work aimed at protecting non-smokers from exposure to harmful secondhand smoke, preventing initiation of smoking and promoting cessation among smokers,” she said.

The efforts expand previous work in China through partnerships with China’s National Health and Family Planning Commission and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

Institutions nationwide, including Georgia State, that received funding through a U.S. Department of Education grant competition to support projects that prepare STEM teachers.
Georgia State runs in the family for Anna Boswell. The travel-loving junior wasn’t the first in her family to attend Georgia State. Boswell’s great-grandmother graduated with a bachelor of commercial science degree in 1938. Boswell is a recent recipient of the Alumni Association Legacy Scholarship.

Given her strong familial ties to the campus, you might think Boswell would stay close, but her classes have taken her across the globe to Hong Kong, South Korea, and Macau. Boswell’s recent travels included a trip to Europe.

“Europe was an indescribable experience. I traveled alone, taking trains to the countries I went to, stayed in hostels, slept on couches, kept up with my classes and had a great time,” she said.

While Boswell’s travels in Europe helped her become more independent, she says her experience in China helped her in the classroom back home.

“I spent a semester in China, and that experience enhanced my leadership skills and my ability to succeed in a group,” she said.

Boswell encourages other students to study abroad for the transformative experience.

“I traveled Europe alone. I have never spent so much time by myself and truly learned who I was,” she said. “I explored my limits, the things I am passionate about, and my social and life skills increased.”

Boswell says her upcoming travel plans include exploring more of the United States while she finishes up her coursework.

LEGACY IN THE MAKING

World traveller Anna Boswell makes the most out of her studies abroad.

BY SARAH JOY RICHARDS (B.A. ’15)  PHOTO BY BEN ROLLINS
CRACKING THE CODE
Crim Center starts first Girls Who Code chapter in southeast.

The College of Education and Human Development’s Alonzo A. Crim Center for Urban Educational Excellence has partnered with Georgia State’s Department of Computer Science to establish the first southeastern chapter of Girls Who Code, a national nonprofit organization that teaches 21st-century computing skills to middle school and high school girls.

Students from the Early College programs at Booker T. Washington and Carver Early College high schools in Atlanta come to campus for weekly sessions on building mobile apps and websites.

“The girls in our Early College program have varied interests, and until this point, we haven’t been able to accommodate their interests in this field,” said Tene Harris Davis, associate director of the Early College program. “We want our students to be able to explore all possibilities in the science, technology, engineering and math fields.”

The Early College program brings high school students to Georgia State to take courses and earn college credit before graduation.

SET THE STAGE
Buena Vista Social Club “Adios Tour” highlights Rialto Series.

The Rialto Center for the Arts at Georgia State will kick off the 2015-16 season with two big-name acts. The Mark Morris Dance Group and Music Ensemble, led by Morris, a contemporary of Mikhail Baryshnikov, will open the season with a modern dance performance Oct. 17. The legendary Cuban musicians, the Buena Vista Social Club, will perform Oct. 24.

Other upcoming performances include guitarist Paco Peña’s flamenco dance music program in November and the biennial contemporary dance festival Off the Edge in March 2016.

The Rialto Center is the home of Georgia State’s School of Music performances and is downtown’s go-to venue for other arts performances, visiting companies and independent film screenings.

Visit rialto.gsu.edu to see the schedule.

MUSEUM QUALITY
Welch School well represented at High exhibition.

Twenty-four Georgia State artists had drawings acquired by the High Museum of Art for display during the museum’s exhibition titled “Sprawl! Drawing Outside the Lines.”

Faculty, students and alumni affiliated with the Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design make up almost one-third of the 75 Georgia artists selected for the exhibition, which runs until Oct. 4.

A sequel to the successful 2013 exhibition “Drawing Inside the Perimeter;” which featured work by Atlanta-based artists, Sprawl! includes drawings by artists who live and work in Atlanta, other cities in the metro area and beyond.

Visit magazine.gsu.edu to see the roster of Georgia State artists in the exhibition.

LEGENDARY STORIES
Georgia State leads Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives.

As a former Georgia governor, the 39th U.S. president and a global peace representative, Jimmy Carter’s life story is anything but dull. But when asked to recount how he learned to read and write, he replied, “I don’t think I have a very good story.”

That reaction is typical of the many contributors to the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (DALN), an online repository of memories and stories about reading, writing and literacy. Yet all narratives are worth telling, said Michael Harker, assistant professor of English and co-director of the DALN.

“To have someone of President Carter’s stature sharing his story not only speaks to his generosity, it also raises the significance and visibility of the DALN generally,” Harker said. “And it’s wonderful to have this insight into a former President’s life.”

While Carter is a high-profile contributor, most of the stories are logged by folks of all ages and backgrounds. “The goal is to get narratives from everyone — not just famous people,” said Harker. “The stories don’t have to be long, epic narratives. They can also be text, audio or video files. We even have some that are just images of literacy-related objects, like maps, poems, art and books.”

Since starting in 2007 at Ohio State University, the DALN has been the face of the project on thedaln.wordpress.com, where visitors can read Carter’s contribution. Every — not just famous people,” said Harker. “The stories don’t have to be long, epic narratives. They can also be text, audio or video files. We even have some that are just images of literacy-related objects, like maps, poems, art and books.”

Since starting in 2007 at Ohio State University, the DALN has been the face of the project on thedaln.wordpress.com, where visitors can read Carter’s contribution.

1,995
International students enrolled at Georgia State, a record high.
Panthers’ football kicks off on national television.

Georgia State will face the University of North Carolina at Charlotte live on ESPNU Friday, Sept. 4 at 3:30 p.m. at the Georgia Dome. It will mark the second straight season the Panthers open the year with a nationally televised game.

Georgia State has opened each of the last five seasons with a weekday home game, a tradition that started with the inaugural game in 2010. Georgia State home games will air on the ESPN Family of Networks this season.

Two road games will also be televised. The Sept. 12 Sun Belt Conference opener at New Mexico State will kick off at 8 p.m. EST and air on ESPN3, and the Sept. 19 game at Oregon has a 2 p.m. EST kickoff on the Pac 12 Networks.

FIRST FIRST-ROUNDER

The Boston Celtics pick R.J. Hunter with the 28th pick of the NBA draft.

Following an amazing three-year career at Georgia State, R.J. Hunter will play professionally in the NBA for the Boston Celtics. Hunter became the highest draft pick in Georgia State history and first since Joe Brown went to the Cleveland Cavaliers in the ninth-round of the 1983 NBA Draft.

A two-time AP All-America Honorable Mention honoree and two-time Sun Belt Player of the Year, Hunter finished his career as the all-time leading scorer in Georgia State history with 1,819 points. He also earned three-straight first-team all-conference honors, the only player in program history to accomplish the feat as well.

“This is a dream come true,” Hunter said. “I look forward to getting to Boston and starting the next chapter of my career.”

“I am extremely proud of R.J.,” said Georgia State head bas-

THE BAT MAN

REAL-LIFE SUPERHERO CHRIS CORNELISON (M.S. ’11, PH.D. ’13) HAS DISCOVERED A WAY TO SLOW DOWN WHITE-NOSE SYNDROME, A DISEASE THAT’S KILLED MILLIONS OF BATS.

Since 2006, white-nose syndrome has killed an estimated seven million bats in the eastern United States. Last year, the deadly fungal disease was discovered in Georgia. The plague is responsible for the steepest wildlife decline in the past century in North America, according to Bat Conservation International.

“Bats are tremendous consumers of pests and insects, and if we continue to see declines, there may be consequences for agriculture and human health,” said Chris Cornelison, a microbiologist at Georgia State.

To attack this epidemic, Cornelison is using a patented discovery by Georgia State scientists George Pierce and Sid Crow who found that a naturally occurring bacterium, Rhodococcus rhodochrous, slowed down ripening and mold growth on fruits and vegetables. Cornelison reckoned that if it stopped mold growth on food, Rhodococcus might be able stop the fungus responsible for white-nose syndrome.

He found the bacteria slowed fungal growth and eliminated spore germination on the bats’ wings. Best of all, it works to prevent the spread of fungi on bat skin without ever touching the animal. Cornelison and researchers conducted field trials last fall in four cave sites in Missouri and Kentucky and found many of the bats treated during those trials experienced increased health and survival.

ATHLETICS

GO LIVE

Panthers’ football kicks off on national television.

Geas already

$50B

The estimated amount that bats save the country’s agriculture industry by eating bugs.

DAA Winners

This year’s winners of the Alumni Association’s Distinguished Alumni Awards are David Adelman (M.P.A. ’95), former U.S. Ambassador to Singapore; Jeff (M.B.A. ’86) and Sherry (M.B.A. ’85) Hwang, CEO and president of Pyramid Systems, Inc.; and William Pate (B.A. ’81, M.A. ’85), president of the Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau. Visit magazine.gsu.edu for more.

CONT'D ON P.15
Jess Hinshaw (M.F.A. ’10) builds a creative community in South Korea.

IN PRINT

BY WILLIAM INMAN  PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER COTE

Jess Hinshaw and his wife Beth (M.Ed. ‘10) needed one last adventure before entering the professional world.

“I was worried that my life was moving in the direction of permanence, and I wanted to travel before I got settled,” Hinshaw said.

The couple had an old friend in Joshua Warlick (B.F.A. ’08) who taught English in South Korea and recommended the Asian country as a destination. So the Hinshaws moved from Atlanta to Daegu, the country’s fourth largest city.

“We thought we could go over for a year before [Beth] started her career,” he said. But their wanderlust stopped in Daegu and the Hinshaws are now going on year five in South Korea. Jess Hinshaw, a respected member of Atlanta’s art scene who designed posters for Methane Studios, felt an obligation to create a community like the one he was part of back home.

“In Atlanta, I was surrounded by artists, most of whom I knew from Georgia State. We met weekly to network. There was a real community there. When I got here, I couldn’t find artists to meet with,” he said. “Little by little, I started meeting people who were creative, and we decided that what the city needed was something to connect artists to each other.”

So Hinshaw and a handful of friends, including another Panther expat Lisa Highfill (B.A. ’10), put out a magazine. Called [b]racket, the publication quickly took off, and its pages became a proxy gallery for emerging artists. Through the magazine, Hinshaw and crew worked closely with international artists, hosted art exhibitions and managed a gallery.

Hinshaw recently handed the publishing reins to his Korean partner and is now playing a more advisory role to focus more on his own art. He’s started a studio for screenprinting and has found a niche doing specialty print and brand design for the city’s burgeoning craft brew scene.

“So many artists I met here were really discouraged in creating,” Hinshaw said. “The magazine allowed them a chance to be a published artist, adding bullet points to their resume and gaining exposure.”
Basketball coach and father Ron Hunter. “I have said it all along that he is an even better son than he is a basketball player, and he is an incredible basketball player.”

Hunter led the Panthers to a second-straight 25-win season this year after averaging 19.7 points, 4.7 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game.

Jen Liam (B.S.W. ’01) competes for the title of American Ninja Warrior.

Jen Liam is a family-oriented social worker by day, but for the past several months, the 40-year-old mother has been training to be a ninja warrior.

Liam was selected to compete on national television on NBC’s hit reality competition series, “American Ninja Warrior.” Competitors on the show must finish a grueling obstacle course with stages of increasing difficulty.

“Competing makes me feel alive and focused,” she said, and Liam is no stranger to competition. She finished a half-triathlon shortly after turning 40.

To prepare for the show, Liam trained on her self-constructed obstacle course at her home, often cheered on by Blaze, her 7-year-old daughter.

“The quality time paved the way for conversations about the importance of one’s commitment to a goal,” Liam said.

Though Liam failed to finish the course, she had this to say, “It feels so important to me. That whole idea of doing something because you love it, not because of the outcome. Not because it’s guaranteed.”

Liam says she encourages her clients to take risks and challenge themselves everyday, a standard to which she takes care to hold herself. One of her biggest challenges was taking ice baths for sore muscles after her training.

Would she do it again? “Absolutely! I’m in!”

Liora Manné’s textile design hobby became an art and a booming business.

Liora Manné’s passion for creative expression first began to blossom at Georgia State. Her fabrics and apparel can today be found everywhere from exclusive hotels in Miami and Los Angeles to the pages of House Beautiful and the New York Times.

Manné, whose family moved from Israel to Atlanta when she was 16, was still learning English when she started college.

“It was just a time of jumping into a whole new world, a new country,” she said. “It was a very exciting stage of my life.”

“Not your average obstacle course”

Jen Liam (B.S.W. ’01) competes for the title of American Ninja Warrior.

“LIVING COLOR”

Liora Manné’s (B.A. ’74) textile design hobby became an art and a booming business.

Liora gravitated toward home fashions, and rugs in particular. Her bold, contemporary colors became a hit, and today her trademarked Lamontage line of products is sold worldwide.

Just because she’s doing what she loves, though, doesn’t mean it isn’t hard work.

“The upside to juggling roles as designer and businesswoman is both your right and left brains keep working all the time,” she said.

In her spare time, Manné continues to enjoy working with clay and ceramics. And she still has some of the pieces she created while she was at Georgia State.

Got a promotion? A new addition to the family? Go ahead, brag a little. Visit magazine.gsu.edu for news from your classmates and fellow Georgia State alumni.
LIFE ON THE ISLAND THAT TIME FORGOT

BY WILLIAM INMAN
Velazquez started his academic career at Georgia State in 1998 but left for Los Angeles to work in the film industry. A filmmaker, he sold his first screenplay to an Australian film company and is now editing his directorial debut. He returned to Georgia State last year to finish his degree in political science, and he’s eyeing law school after graduation. As diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba thaw, Velazquez hopes to have a role, somehow, in the forthcoming détente.

“I want the people here to have a better life,” he says. “I want to be able to help with this transition.”

Velazquez traveled to Cuba with a Georgia State study abroad trip led by Richard Laub, director of the university’s Heritage Preservation Program — the first time a member of his family has been there in almost 50 years.

For Laub, who has led study abroad trips here five times since 2002, Cuba represents an important case study for architectural preservation and culture, especially now as Cuba’s economy opens up to private enterprise, foreign investment and tourism.

“There are so many misconceptions about Cuba,” Laub says. “It’s my hope that students will see what it’s really like, to see the beauty of the culture and people, as well as understand the challenges they face.”

CUBA ON THE CUSP

Narrow and car-free, Calle Obispo is one of Havana’s main thoroughfares. Throng of tourists mix with the locals as they shuffle past restaurants, art galleries and shops. The visage of Ernesto “Che” Guevara is seemingly everywhere, emblazoned on shirts, posters and paintings. The comandante is a cult of personality here. A large swath of the old brick street is also ripped up — a sign of progress. Workers are laying new water and underground electrical lines to replace dilapidated distribution systems that likely predate the 1959 revolution by decades.

“It was like this last year,” Laub says.

Indeed, things move slowly here. Even though the country has seen a surge in tourism (the government reported a record of more than three million tourists in 2014), structural decay of the country’s once grand neoclassical and Art Deco architecture is brutally evident.

But Laub points out that, despite the lack of tools, building materials and, most important, money, Cuba is taking baby steps to better care for itself.

“With limited resources, they’ve created a sophisticated system of architectural conservation,” he says, “including a significant university program to train preservation professionals.”

While most of the architectural rehabilitation has used government money, Cuba introduced improved legislation last year to attract foreign investment to help rebuild its crumbling infrastructure. And now, a French firm is working on a major hotel rehabilitation project on the Manzana de Gómez building, constructed as a shopping mall in 1910.

Patricia Andino, a historian in the Havana City Historian’s Office, which operates the city’s historic preservation program, says that while Cuba will do business with foreign companies, building rehabilitations must adhere to strict design guidelines, and the property will be owned in perpetuity by the Cuban government.

Andino is optimistic the influx of foreign capital, and someday, American dollars, will help preserve the historic fabric of Havana. She hopes this will lead to an improved cityscape and more tourist money, as well as better housing conditions.

“There isn’t a specific plan for American investment yet, but it is legally feasible for us,” she says.

From a Cuban standpoint, much of the
blame for the country’s economic woes falls squarely on the U.S. economic embargo that has blocked the flow of goods to the island since 1960. Cuba is one of the only places in the world where American companies are completely absent.

But what happens when, or if, American money comes pouring in?

Pedro Quetara, who also works in the City Historian’s Office, bristles at the notion that, if the embargo is lifted, McDonald’s, Starbucks and Walgreens will overrun Havana.

“Money will always be necessary, and restoration implies using large sums of money,” he says, “but we’ll fiercely protect our heritage. Businesses will have to comply with our local regulations.”

Clare Higgins Morton is vice president and director of administration of the World Affairs Council of Atlanta, an organization housed within the Robinson College of Business and led by Charles Shapiro (M.Ed. ’77), former United States ambassador to Venezuela. In July, Morton and Shapiro traveled to Havana with Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed and several prominent Atlanta businesspeople, including Rene Diaz (B.B.A. ’87), chairman and CEO of Diaz Foods, who fled Cuba with his family in 1967 when he was just six years old. The council brought the group to get a feel for the reality of doing business on the island as relations between the U.S. and Cuba normalize.

While the group was in Havana, it was announced the United States and Cuba plan to reopen embassies in Washington and Havana for the first time since the severing of diplomatic ties after the revolution. The embargo still remains in place and only the U.S. Congress can end it.

Morton notes that in the last several years the Cuban government has permitted the emergence of a small private sector for restaurants (called paladares), guesthouses and shops, but says ending the U.S. embargo won’t change the country overnight.

“There are so many arguments about ending the embargo,” she says. “But it won’t make a big difference for the Cuban people because the people here are so poor they can’t buy things.”

Casa de Papa

In June, it was announced that almost $900,000 worth of American construction materials would be sent to Cuba to preserve and maintain writer Ernest Hemingway’s house and documents.
For Laub, Velazquez and the 14 other Georgia State travelers, life as an American in Cuba is humbling. On Laub’s itinerary of historic buildings to visit in Havana was the Hotel Nacional, a grand hotel that was once the playground of movie stars and mobsters overlooking the Malecón, the popular avenue that runs along the sea.

At the Hotel Nacional, built by famed New York architects Mead, McKim and White and opened in 1930, flip-flopped European and Canadian tourists puff on Cuban cigars, sip mojitos and update Facebook on their smart phones.

“All I want to do is geotag my photos on Instagram,” laments Lauren Bohn (M.P.A. ’15).

Internet access here is onerous. Havana’s upscale hotels provide one of the only wi-fi hotspots for American travelers, and that’s only if you buy a pre-paid card from the government at around $10 for an hour’s use. There’s no roaming on your cell phone, and dialing home from your hotel costs $2.40 a minute.

And because there’s no access to U.S. bank services or U.S. credit cards, Americans have to carry cash. Further complicating matters is a frustrating dual currency — the Cuban convertible peso (CUC), which tourists on the island use, is pegged to the dollar and worth about 25 times as much as the Cuban peso (CUP), which most Cubans are paid in, and poorly. Cuban state workers make the equivalent of about $20 a month.

Visit magazine.gsu.edu to see more photos from the study abroad trip to Cuba.
“People working for the state have an impossible time getting by,” Morton says. “There’s a lot of wasted resources in human capital, and the government has put a lot of money into educating people. But sometimes there’s just not any jobs for them.”

Because of these hardships, Morton says many of the educated Cubans leave. And many of those who stay behind try to find work in the burgeoning tourism sector — where they make tips in CUCs — or a pervasive underground economy and black market.

On the streets of Havana, as the familiar 1950s Buicks, Fords and Chevrolets, affectionately called “Yank Tanks,” mix with bicycle taxis and tour buses, “jineteros” (jockeys in English) hustle everything from cigars to a personalized performance of the Cuban folk song “Guantanamera.”

At a Havana hotel, Velazquez had a conversation with a security guard about working conditions there.

“He said he was a teacher. He pointed across the room to the bartender and said he was an engineer,” Velazquez says. “They made more money working nights at the hotel.”

Morton says that until the Cuban government makes more substantive changes to its economic model, the country will remain an uninviting place for foreign investment no matter the U.S. policy. In 2018, when President Raul Castro resigns, Morton says she’s hopeful for more significant change.

“It’s difficult when the people who started the revolution are still in power,” she says.

UNHEALED WOUNDS

The Georgia State students crisscrossed the island in two weeks. From Havana, they traveled south to the Caribbean port city of Cienfuegos, then west to Trinidad, a colonial settlement trapped in amber since 1850. Next it was Santa Clara, the site of Guevara’s 1958 victory over then-president Fugencio Batista’s forces and the revolutionary’s final resting place. Then back across the island to the Viñales Valley in the west, where the famous Cuban tobacco is grown and home to the otherworldly “mogotes,” steep, dome-like limestone formations that loom over the agrarian landscape.

In the countryside, the tour buses and American “Yank Tanks,” omnipresent in Havana, give way to horseback riders and mule-drawn buggies. Propaganda signs lionizing the victors of the revolution and extolling socialism dot the roadways.

After the 45-minute return flight from Havana to Miami on May 21, Velazquez stayed in South Florida for a family reunion. He worried there may have been tension about his trip, but was relieved when there was more curiosity than animosity.

“Everyone was really excited to talk to me,” he says.

Velazquez says it’s understood among his family members who lived through the Cuban revolution that they won’t return until there is a change in the current administration.

“They hate the regime, but they want the embargo lifted,” he says. “They hear what life is like firsthand — my aunt’s best friend is there, and they talk. They want things to improve there, and they feel like they’re not going to get it as long as the Castro brothers are still in control.”

For Velazquez, the trip’s busy schedule kept him from Calle 18, No. 312 in Havana’s leafy Vedado neighborhood.

“Honestly, I was so swept up in everything that I kind of forgot about it,” he says. “But, my dad wants to go now, and I want to go back with him.”

And now he has an excuse.

“I have to see the house.”

Cuba’s Pastime

If there’s one thing Cubans and Americans can agree on, it’s the love of baseball. Before the study abroad trip, Georgia State head baseball coach Greg Frady donated some lightly used gear to a lucky youth baseball team in Cuba.

Frady is also head coach of the German national team and has coached the Germans against the Cuban national team.

“I hate playing them,” Frady says, laughing. “They’re always tough.”

The baseball equipment was given to a grateful team, called the Pioneers, in Santa Clara.

William Inman is editor of the Georgia State University Magazine and a master’s student in the Heritage Preservation Program.
Georgia State President Mark Becker, Touch the Earth Coordinator Carson Tortorige and nine students successfully summited Mount Baker in Washington State. Here are their stories.
Mount Baker is an active glaciated volcano in the North Cascades of Washington State. At 10,786 feet, it’s the third-highest summit in the state and the iciest mountain in the Cascade Range. Crevasses are a major danger. So are avalanches. The mountain’s capricious weather can make the snowpack unstable, even on its smaller slopes. In May, Georgia State President Mark Becker, an avid mountaineer, invited a handful of students to join him and Carson Tortorige, program director for Touch the Earth, Georgia State’s outdoor recreation program, as they climbed the mountain. More than 75 students, alumni and staff applied to make the climb, and from that pool 10 students were brought together to form Georgia State’s Team Baker. After three months of training and gear preparations, the team flew to Seattle to begin their adventure. Shortly before the trip, a student had to drop out for personal reasons. Mickey Luckovich (B.A. ’14), a former Touch the Earth guide living in Seattle, filled in. They hiked uphill for hours straight, slept on snow and worked as a team. Injuries, weather and an extra-long hike to the summit threatened to derail the climb, but on May 31, every member of Team Baker reached the mountaintop.

CHAPTER 1: PREPARATION

The climbers had a physically demanding regimen to get them in shape for the climb. In addition, they had to familiarize themselves with the gear they would be carrying up the mountain — items such as crampons, spikes fixed to a boot for walking on ice or rock climbing. Most importantly, the busy students had to find time for the rigors of physical preparation.

CARSON TORTORIGE: A lot of the kids met Dr. Becker for the first time at our first practice. We met at 6:45 a.m. at Touch the Earth to drive out to Stone Mountain to hike it twice with our packs.

MARK BECKER: We gave them a schedule of four required training hikes. Each one included time discussing preparation for the trip in terms of logistics, and each hike got progressively more difficult.

MAYA KELKAR: As a nursing student taking 18 hours, it was very hard to find the time to hike and to put in all the hours at the gym.

ALEXANDRA “ALEX” NGUYEN: My schedule was already overbooked and managing to fit in a physical training schedule was overwhelming.

NAYAB MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH: Forcing myself to stay on a schedule regardless of where I was and during finals was one of the hardest things for me.

BECKER: They were preparing to be on their feet and climbing for 10 to 12 hours, but we didn’t do 10- or 12-hour training hikes. Everyone would have quit if we did.

JAMES SUPREME: Preparing for the trip
was actually the most challenging part.

**SHARON MURPHY:** My biggest challenge in preparing for this trip was understanding what gear I needed, how to use it and how to pack it. I also could not fathom how it was possible to stay warm while sleeping on snow.

**SOON “MAC” KWEON:** The sheer amount of gear I needed to purchase was a much more costly part of the trip than I expected.

**NATE ANTHONY:** One of the challenges for me when preparing for this trip was to not over pack for the hike.

**CHELSEA ZAKAS:** I thought our training was perfect, but no matter how much or how hard you train, it’s not the same as actually being there, in the snow, on the mountain.

**BECKER:** I tried to do as much as I could to prepare them mentally for what to expect. There was a lot of learning, and everyone got into it.

**TORTORIGE:** I don’t think I could have prepared them as well as Dr. Becker. He was militant.

**NGUYEN:** As I was doing the climb up Mount Baker, I didn’t want to stop even though I was having a hard time breathing. Ringing through my ears were Dr. Becker’s wise words of “You sweat, you die. You stop, you die. You slip, you die.”

**BECKER:** People die on mountains, but we chose Mount Baker because it’s one that people rarely die on. I exaggerated by saying “You’ll die,” but I wanted them to understand it wasn’t like a walk up Stone Mountain. Breaks were infrequent and brief and their responsibility was to take care of themselves.

**TORTORIGE:** We said, “Look, it’s a good possibility a few of you won’t make it up the mountain.”

**CHAPTER 2:**
**HIKING IN, CAMPING OUT**

The group hit the trailhead and trekked onto Mount Baker’s Easton Glacier. They hiked in with backpacks weighing up to 40 pounds on a trail system of varied terrain, including snow, ice, mud and rocks. The climbs involved elevation changes of up to 5,000 feet and the group lodged in tents, often on snow.

**TORTORIGE:** There were people who thought the hike in was the hardest part.

**BECKER:** All of a sudden we’re getting close to this really big mountain. We’re carrying 40-45 pound packs, so we’re all pretty wobbly, and the path is narrow and off to one side — if you fall you’re going to get hurt pretty bad. I think that’s when it got real for everyone.

**NGUYEN:** Surrounding me were these beautiful mountains covered in pure white snow. To my left were green grass, vibrant flowers, dirt, rocks and these beautiful, tall majestic trees. To my right was a steep drop off and the team’s biggest opponent, Mount Baker.

**TORTORIGE:** It was a four-hour hike into camp. It was hard.

**KELKAR:** I’ve never spent a week camping, never carried everything I needed for four days on my back, and certainly never camped on snow before.

**SUPREME:** I had never camped before this trip. As the only one who had never...
assembled a tent before, I appreciated the extra time everyone took to help me.

**BECKER:** I asked some of them if they ever thought they would sleep on snow for four days, eat freeze-dried food and sleep in a tent in a place with no bathrooms and walk 12 hours mostly uphill.

**ANTHONY:** The most surprising part of this trip was how good dried-up astronaut food is. I was impressed.

**BECKER:** I shared a tent with James and Nayab. James was the man in the middle. He gave me plenty of room.

**SUPREME:** We gave him the presidential suite.

**STEFFENS:** The day before our summit push, I dislocated and reset my left shoulder. The pain was overwhelming at first, but seeing my teammates get down about it really hurt.

**BECKER:** It pops out and he puts it back in. You could see that he’s in quite a bit of pain. He bit the bullet. He wanted the team to stay strong, and he didn’t want to bring the team down.

**STEFFENS:** In the moment right after the injury witnessing negative body language from the trip leaders and team for the first time struck a chord in me and brought me back to Earth.

*Because of a threat of bad weather, the team chose to move the summit day up to the third day. Typically, the climbers would have moved higher up the mountain, camped and hiked to the summit on the fourth day. This decision added an additional two hours to the final day of climbing.*

**TORTORIGE:** We all needed that second day of training to prepare for the crevasses and everything that presents itself during summit day, but we had to go to bed that night and summit really early from the lower elevation. We did have exceptional weather, but we had a lot farther to go.

**BECKER:** In the world of mountaineering Mount Baker is not considered to be a big challenge. But 4,600 feet of elevation gain in one day is a lot no matter what. It turned out to be a much longer summit day.

**KELKAR:** Growing up in Georgia, I never knew how much trouble I would have walking on snow. During our training days on Baker I kept slipping, sliding and falling down into the snow, and I’ll admit it was pretty hard to have to keep pulling myself back up.

**CHAPTER 3: THE CLimb**

The team split into three groups of five — four climbers and a trained mountain guide. Teams were tied together with rope to mitigate crevasse falls. The groups were staggered on the approach to the summit. The first group left at 1 a.m. The following two groups left at 2 a.m.

**TORTORIGE:** There is a cut-off time — you can’t be climbing a mountain for 16 hours. If you can’t reach a certain level then the concern is getting back to camp safely before dark. I started worrying about the third group, the last rope team.

**ABDULLAH:** As the saying goes, “You are only as good as your weakest link.” Your body would want to press hard and fast, but that would lead to slack in the rope, which is a dangerous thing in mountain-eering. Slack in a rope could lead to losing an entire rope team in a crevasse.

**STEFFENS:** Mountaineering is as mentally challenging as it is physically. You can’t be the “Are we there yet?” person.

**ZAKAS:** I was experiencing “shin bang” and had hot spots and blisters occurring on my feet and ankles from the boots — it’s normal when you’re on your feet all day. It was a challenge for me to say to myself, “Yeah, you have a blister, but keep walking up this mountain and don’t pout because at this point that blister is going to be there whether you make it to the summit or not.”

**BECKER:** Nate started cramping midway up, and literally fell.

**BECKER:** Nate is a tough guy, a football player. He will just tackle anything. Nate’s cramps became an issue, I would say. But he worked them out and powered through.

**ANTHONY:** My legs started to cramp up and they did not stop until I got to the top of the mountain.

**CHAPTER 4: THE SUMMIT**

After six hours and 20 minutes, the first team arrived to spectacular views and a mild wind on the summit of Mount Baker on Sunday, May 31. Because of a tricky snow bridge, the second and third teams were forced to traverse the base of the Roman Wall before ascending the slope.
When they finally reached the summit, Team Baker shared in the magnificence of being on top of a giant, glaciated volcano.

**TORTORIGE:** Dr. Becker and I both looked at each other and said, “That was a lot harder than we thought!”

**ZAKAS:** Throughout the summit hike I felt nervous, anxious, happy and at peace — times of self-doubt, worry, excitement and then an overwhelming amount of accomplishment when we made it to the top.

**BECKER:** Chelsea, in my opinion, is a natural-born mountain climber. When she got to the summit. I think the word “awesome” was used a few times. Nate just collapsed on the ground. It was sheer joy.

**ANTHONY:** The best experience of my life, by far.

**KWEON:** There is a huge payoff view. I was as giddy as a kid in a ball pit filled with Sour Patch Kids and Pokemon cards.

**BECKER:** They committed to the training and did everything we asked of them for months, and that’s on top of everything they have going on in their lives. This was their reward. And it was powerful to share in their joy.

**ANTHONY:** One thing I will take away from this trip is to go travel the world and experience all the beauty it has to offer. I also learned that I can go days and days without taking a shower and be perfectly fine with it.

**MURPHY:** The support for one another throughout the entire process of training and execution was amazing.

**ABDULLAH:** The fact that I had a team with me was a comforting factor as we were all dependent on each. This was a motivational factor for me, knowing that the teammates I was with cared about one another.

**KWEON:** Everyone in the group now feels like family. I’ve known for years.

**SUPREME:** I was most surprised at how positive and reassuring the team remained. We spent one week eating freeze-dried foods, pumping and then purifying our own water from rivers, and laying our heads wherever our tents would fit.

**NGUYEN:** We laughed together, we felt pain together, we ate and slept in tents together. But most importantly, we all summitted Mount Baker together.

**BECKER:** I was incredibly proud of all of them for how they came together, and they came away with the lesson that you can set goals for yourself — if you take the goal seriously, you can accomplish it.

**ZAKAS:** We all had the same goal in mind and we all came together and accomplished that. I find it meaningful the amount of support our whole group had for each other.

**KELKAR:** I think the thing I can take away from this experience is that I can do more than I give myself credit for.

**STEFFENS:** I’ve come to the realization that my body and mind are a lot stronger than I previously believed.

**TORTORIGE:** The greatest success for me is the way the group formed and performed. They kicked themselves in the pants and made it to the top. And that was awesome.
Students trek across Turkey to analyze the impact of refugees who have fled the violence of the Syrian Civil War.
ERAR IS A YOUNG, stocky Syrian with penetrating eyes and an abrupt urgency. He is also a refugee involved in “the uprising” since Syrians first began to petition for reforms to the government. He was imprisoned and beaten — with the scars to prove it — before fleeing to Turkey for safety.

Would he go back?

“Definitely. It is my home,” Derar says. “But Syria is a destroyed country. Even in safe places, I couldn’t earn money.”

Derar, who wished not to give his last name, now works for a charity helping refugees in Gaziantep, a border town perhaps best known as a gateway to ISIS for Western fighters. Like many of the estimated two million Syrian refugees in Turkey, he wonders what the future holds for his homeland.

Derar is one of dozens of Turkish and Syrian citizens who spoke with Georgia State students during a study abroad course that traveled across the country to examine the plight of Syrian refugees and their impact on the Turkish economy and society.

Students in the three-week course, called the Turkey Study Abroad Think Tank, created 20 podcasts with Turkish and Syrian analysts, educators and aid workers, as well as brief synopses of key organizations and in-depth papers examining refugee issues. The students also blogged to chronicle their sweep across Turkey, producing materials on the run during the course and posting almost daily to a website.
“We hit the ground running our first day in Turkey with two stage-setting meetings with key institutions. Still jet lagged, I was relieved to have LOTS of Turkish tea throughout the day. Following breakfast, we took a long, long ride through the tortuous traffic that clogs Istanbul’s streets. I never thought I’d see traffic worse than Atlanta’s.”

— MONIQUE TIBBS, RELIGIOUS STUDIES
GRADUATE STUDENT

A joint project between Abbas Barzegar, associate professor of religious studies, and Rashid Naim, senior lecturer and director of the undergraduate program in the Political Science Department, the class was composed of undergraduate and graduate students at Georgia State, as well as students from Georgetown University, Georgia Tech and the University of London.

For Barzegar, the course was designed to create an educated leadership class cost-effectively while providing students with practical skills.

“The environment we created has allowed students to gain the experience of being in a workplace, working on a collaborative project and delivering under stressful conditions,” he says.

“This was a unique opportunity to do more than the usual study abroad trip,” says Naim. “We were able to approach the Syrian refugee questions from two sides, the NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and the policymakers. We were able to get a bottom-up view and to see a top-down approach.”

Students met with officials from a dozen high-profile organizations such as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, or IHH, a prominent Muslim emergency-response agency, and the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), a policy think tank closely connected to the Turkish government. The officials provided first-hand accounts of how they are dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis and the surrounding regional turmoil.

“It was great to go from theory to a real-world situation,” says master’s student Annie Charif. “You don’t get the opportunity to meet people like this unless it is part of your job. This was a whole new twist to study abroad.”

“We’re getting our hands dirty,” says Georgetown student Sonia Kikeri. “The content we’re producing has moved from academic writing to writing for the person who reads the news.”

Native Daughter

It always helps to have good local connections when traveling overseas. When the Study Abroad Think Tank went to Turkey, it didn’t have to look far.

Gulcan Saglam is a Turkish citizen working on her Ph.D. in international relations and comparative politics with an emphasis on state responses to forced migration.

“This trip was very helpful to my dissertation,” Saglam says. “We saw different approaches to the Syrian refugee situation.”

While managing her own research, Saglam also acted as an unofficial tour guide, ordering nearly all the meals, tweaking arrangements at the last minute and helping her colleagues see the best of her home nation.

While she was happy to pitch in, Saglam acknowledged her role took a toll.

“It was a challenging trip for me, too,” she says.

In addition to her role as a student researcher, she coordinated with the travel agent, personnel at the various agencies and hotel and restaurant staff.

Her best suggestion? “You have to try the food in Gaziantep! It is the best in all of Turkey!” she says.

Between being in close quarters on planes, trains and automobiles, the foreign cuisine, and long days of meetings, it seems half the group is feeling at least somewhat under the weather. Count me among them. Knowing the difference between being dangerous to the rest of the group and able to push through is critical, and I walked that line today.

I am thankful that I did because the meetings with the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, Ankara Strategic Institute and SETA afforded us a unique opportunity to hear similar, though nuanced perspectives, on the future of Turkey, specifically Turkey’s role as a leading power in the Middle East and its policy towards Syrian refugees.

— ERIC JOSEPH VAN HOLM, PUBLIC POLICY
PH.D. CANDIDATE
Officials were forthright when they met with the students. They told how, when the crisis first started, the reaction among Muslim-based NGO charities was similar and nearly instantaneous. Organizations such as IHH and the International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation immediately began shipping food and other supplies to aid the refugees. At the same time, the Turkish government funneled Syrian refugees into camps near the border, spending an estimated $5.5 billion to assist them over the last four years. Blue Crescent still provides a steady stream of food packages to 2,000 refugee families outside the camps today.

There is a third source of charity, one that remains nearly impossible to quantify. Turkey is a largely Muslim country, one that adheres to the Five Pillars of Islam, including the admonition to give “zakat,” or assistance to the needy. Throughout Turkey, individual families “adopt” refugee families, providing them with rent and food while they struggle to build a life after fleeing Syria.

Several sources report the refugee situation is likely at a turning point. When the refugees first started pouring into Turkey four years ago, the city of Ankara greeted them warmly. About 250,000 were diverted into camps near the border with the belief the political issues tearing up Syria would resolve quickly.

Now, with those same refugees still living in camps — and another 1.5 million living scattered in cities and towns throughout Turkey — a new consensus is emerging. The discussion now is turning to issues of refugee integration into the broader Turkish society, due in part to concerns Syrian children will find it very difficult to compete because of the war’s disruption.

“Syria lost four years of education,” says Huseyin Oruc, administrative board member of IHH. “They lost a generation.”

**MAY 19**

Turkey was on a little bit of a pause today because of the Commemoration of Ataturk holiday. Roads were closed for a parade and huge Turkish flags hung from buildings. We made our way over to Anitkabir, Ataturk’s memorial tomb, which was packed with people coming to view and lay roses along his tomb. Today was unusually hot for this time of the year. But watching tiny Turkish toddlers wave around even tinier Turkish flags while chasing each other made things slightly better.

— IMAM NAIM, JOURNALISM UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

While various agencies, including governmental departments, are working to create education and employment options for the Syrians, some Turks are chafing at the drawn-out situation. Despite the need to help the Syrians, others acknowledged that tensions between long-time citizens and recent arrivals have led to isolated clashes.

Syrians who flee the fighting in their home country are initially classified as “guests.” As guests, they lack the rights of refugees and are often unable to work as a result. Skilled Syrian workers usually can find employment while others, desperate for an income, offer to work for less than Turkish employees.

Even as some aid organizations and think-tank analysts are reaching the conclusion that large-scale integration is inevitable, other Syrians are methodically planning a return to their homeland, even if it takes years.

The Syrian Forum is laying the groundwork for democracy in Syria, a nation with a long history of top-down government, by going into individual towns and teaching local leaders how to form civil governments. Starting with instruction on how to form city councils, Syrian Forum member groups are teaching local leaders how to supply services such as water and power to their neighbors.

About 140 local councils have been formed, even though the back-and-forth fighting in Syria has sometimes overrun towns with functioning civil society institutions. In those cases, the newly structured civil society — so-called to avoid suspicion of a link to western-style democracy — either goes underground or is wiped out.

Syrian Forum leader Ghassan Hitto acknowledges the difficulty of building a new society in the midst of war. “It’s a vision,” he says, a vision of a new, self-governing Syria.

Aid officials also say that differing ideas of how to deal with the Syrian refugees is typical of the Turkish approach to social and political issues.

“Nothing gets done in Turkey without some screaming,” says Yisser Bittar of Ihsan, a relief and development agency.

The course took in far more of Turkey than its politics, though.

In addition to the crush of meetings, the trip blended in cultural forays to historic sites such as Ufar, legendary birthplace of Abraham; the Topkapi Palace, home to the Ottoman Sultans; and Konya, a city whose history stretches back to the Copper Age.
We began our day with an early departure to walk and see the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Grand Mosque. I've had the pleasure of visiting some of the most beautiful cathedrals in Europe but I had yet to experience the sense of humility and unity found inside a mosque. We arrived when the space was unoccupied, but I could only imagine the presence of energy during worship. I was especially moved by the beautiful Byzantine architecture, and I was overwhelmed by a sense of smallness yet oneness with a higher power or a presence with God.

— JOHN BARLOW, HISTORY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

The itinerary took students to well-traveled tourist hotspots such as the Blue Mosque, the Hagia Sophia and the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, but it also covered less-known sites such as the Museum of the Siege of Istanbul, which gave a panoramic view of the 1453 conquest of the city by Mehmet the Conqueror. A tour of the Topkapi Palace gave a sense of the wealth and taste of the Ottoman Empire, as well as a look at sacred Muslim artifacts, including the staff of Moses and swords of the founding members of Islam. At the palace, the Koran is being recited at all times, as it has been for years.

Students had assignments and deadlines to meet during their three weeks in Turkey. At the end, most students were responsible for producing an essay outlining what they had found, written in a style more akin to a news article than an academic paper.

Several of the articles are being picked up by Muftah, a respected website devoted to close observation of developments in the Middle East. Ameer Muhammad, a religious studies graduate student and documentary filmmaker, produced a video project detailing the course.

Barzegar, the Georgia State religious studies assistant professor, felt the group achieved its goals of producing media that covers Syrian refugee issues in Turkey.

“Overall,” he said, “I would say that, as a group, we pioneered a new pedagogical model [that] hopefully will take a small step in addressing a difficult humanitarian challenge.”

Ed Van Herik returned to school after retiring and is now working on his master’s thesis in religious studies at Georgia State. Van Herik is a former award-winning journalist and public relations practitioner.
CULTURE CHANGE ➤ "The coaches can only be around a small percentage of the time, especially in the offseason. In order to be great, you have to have those leaders on the team who push those other guys. Players have to manage that," says senior safety Bobby Baker on bringing a winning attitude to Georgia State football. Baker is one of a handful of players who transferred to Georgia State after the program at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) was shut down. Visit magazine.gsu.edu for a special feature story on Baker and the UAB transfers.
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2014 Sun Belt Conference leader in passing yards (273.6 per game) and touchdown passes (23).