How We Are Going to Handle the Success from Our Growth

6 Month Goals! More

+ internships
+ co-ops
+ recruitment opportunities
+ scholarships

A Step Ahead of the Competition! Cross-sector Partnerships!

President Sam Olens Q&A

New Day for KSU

Leader
Student Focused
Can-do Attitude
Listener
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 14   | New Day For KSU  
President Sam Olens Q&A |
| 18   | Securing Careers  
Interdisciplinary program focuses on future of cybersecurity |
| 20   | Making College Affordable  
University initiatives help students save money |
| 24   | Driving Innovation  
Mechatronics engineers explore autonomous vehicle technology |
| 28   | Learning Connections  
Program gives students pathways to involvement |
| 30   | Premier Impact  
Fifth Third Bank Stadium a showcase of community connections |
| 32   | Telling Truth in a Virtual World  
Project takes students to journalism’s frontier |
| 5    | Around Campus |
| 34   | Owl Country |
| 36   | Class Notes |
Dear Friends of Kennesaw State University:

In the short time since I began my tenure as president of Kennesaw State University, I have seen the potential for this institution to reach new heights. It is a privilege and an honor to have the opportunity to lead an institution that has earned a reputation as one of Georgia’s top universities. Every day, I see how Kennesaw State has helped transform the local community through the continued growth of its campuses in Kennesaw and Marietta.

As the president, I want to help continue that transformation. I have a passion for this job that is rooted in a belief in education – the life-changing impact education has on students and the impact it has made in my own life. I view the presidency of Kennesaw State as a form of public service that affords the opportunity to influence generations to come.

Because of this, I have ensured that my initial focus has been on students, specifically on improving graduation rates and providing more financial support. With that as a foundation, I expect the University will make great strides forward in the years to come.

In keeping with a focus on making college accessible for new generations, this issue of Kennesaw State University Magazine highlights current efforts on campus to ensure students can cut costs for higher education. “Making College Affordable” brings into sharp focus how efforts by KSU and University System of Georgia are providing opportunities for students like never before.

Also in this issue, in “Learning Connections,” we examine Kennesaw State’s strength in developing learning communities, which provide students with common interests the opportunities to connect and help to boost enrollment retention rates.

This issue provides several stories of how many of our faculty are innovators in areas of cutting edge technology. In “Driving Innovation,” mechatronics engineering professors and students are exploring new avenues of autonomous vehicle technology. “Securing Careers” shows how a new interdisciplinary program will keep students on the cutting edge of cybersecurity. And in “Telling Truth in a Virtual World,” technology is used to discover innovative approaches to journalism.

In “Premier Impact,” we tell the story of how the stadium on campus has enhanced Kennesaw State’s involvement with the community.

As always, this issue of the magazine includes stories of successful alumni, faculty and students who continue to build on the strength of our outstanding institution.

Thank you for reading Kennesaw State University Magazine. Join me in celebrating everything the University has to offer.

Sam Olens
President, Kennesaw State University
Kennesaw State University’s Division of Global Affairs received the Novelis International Commerce Spotlight Award from the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce. The annual Novelis International Commerce Spotlight Award recognizes Cobb-based organizations that positively impact their communities while helping expand Cobb County’s international presence. Chamber officials chose the Division of Global Affairs as the 2016 recipient because of the Division’s wide array of international activities, both educational and cultural.

KENNESAW STATE TO OFFER NEW DEGREE IN CYBERSECURITY

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved an online Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity. The new undergraduate degree adds to Kennesaw State’s portfolio of technology and security programs. The cybersecurity major includes elements of information technology, information security and assurance, and criminal justice, giving students a combination of technical knowledge and information security management skills. The B.S. in Cybersecurity, set to begin in fall 2017, is the first major initiative of Kennesaw State’s Institute for Cybersecurity Workforce Development, a combined effort of the Coles College of Business, College of Computing and Software Engineering, and College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

ONLINE PROGRAMS AMONG NATION’S BEST

U.S. News & World Report has named Kennesaw State University’s online learning programs among its “Best Online Programs” for 2017. Among the eight categories evaluated by U.S. News & World Report, Kennesaw State ranked in the top 100 for four of its graduate degree programs in business, engineering, computer information technology and nursing. The Master of Business Administration ranked No. 21, earning it the top spot for online MBA programs among Georgia colleges and universities; engineering graduate degree programs ranked at No. 56, making it the only Georgia institution named to the graduate online engineering programs ranking; the Master of Science in Information Technology ranked 38th in the nation; and the graduate nursing degree programs broke into the top 100 ranking this year at No. 97.

MICHAEL A. LEVEN ENDOWED CHAIR ESTABLISHED

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia approved the establishment of the Michael A. Leven Endowed Chair at Kennesaw State University. The $500,000 endowment is part of a $5 million commitment Leven made in 2015 to name Kennesaw State’s School of Culinary Sustainability and Hospitality. The endowed chair, a premier scholar and teacher in the field of culinary sustainability and hospitality managements, will conduct research, develop and teach courses, mentor students and faculty, and will represent and promote the Leven School to the community and hospitality industry.
It was all smiles when students in the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth and their supporters recently gathered for the first “Inclusive Post-Secondary International Student Symposium,” an opportunity for Academy students to share their experiences in an inclusive post-secondary environment.

Each fall and spring semester, many of the nation’s top companies come to the Marietta Campus in order to meet brightest science, technology, engineering, architecture and mathematics students and alumni during the STEM Career Fair.
In this “Year of Russia,” Kennesaw State’s 33rd annual country, no one could have predicted that U.S./Russia relations would claim such a dominant role in America’s new political reality.

Though not intentioned — “Year of” studies are selected on average three to four years in advance — program planners seem to have a knack for scheduling wide-reaching, yearlong studies of a country or region at the most auspicious times.

The 2014-15 “Year of the Arabian Peninsula” coincided with the political realignments and fallout that followed the “Arab Spring.” The untimely death of Ghana’s president in 2012 opened the way for an unprecedented opportunity for Kennesaw State to host his successor during the 2012-13 “Year of Ghana.” In 2005-06, the “Year of China” launched on the heels of the groundbreaking for a massive new U.S. Embassy in Beijing, capping off a new era of U.S.-China relations.

“The timeliness of our country studies are just an indication of why it’s so important to maintain a focus on global education,” said Dan Paracka, director of campus internationalization in the University’s Division of Global Affairs and longtime coordinator of the country study program. “The countries we choose are always in the news; we just pay more attention to their significance in the world during the yearlong study. With Russia, we really got it timed right.”

The “Year of Russia” continues throughout the spring 2017 semester, highlighted by a two-day international symposium on the global context of U.S./Russian relations and featuring leading experts on Russia’s foreign policies in the Cold War and Post Cold-War eras up to the most recent developments.
Alumnus: Matthew A. Finn

With a passion for the intersection between architecture and health, Matt Finn (Architecture, ’07) is working to understand how design affects people.

“As an architect, I need to understand how the spaces I design affect people who use them,” said Finn, who gained his start studying how the built environment could facilitate psychotherapy for U.S. combat veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

“When we look at the military’s observational techniques for how to enter a dangerous area and assess it for threats, it serves as a great template for understanding how human beings use their whole body to gather information about their surroundings,” he said. “There are lessons in this that we can apply to any number of situations.”

Partnering with a Veteran Affairs psychologist and a Marine Corps veteran, Finn first began the PTSD research while at Perkins+Will, the design firm he joined after completing his bachelor’s degree in 2007.

“Architecture’s role is to facilitate the activities within,” Finn said. Finn is currently collaborating with the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to understand how design can influence childhood obesity in America, and with the Green Health Partnership on ways the built environment can influence issues of public health.

Healthcare Design recently named Finn the 2016 HCD 10 Researcher, making him one of the first practicing architects to receive this distinction. One of the projects noted by the magazine was Finn’s consultation on the design of ICU patient rooms for the University of Virginia Health System. Finn and his transdisciplinary research team’s findings were featured at the 2014 Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture Conference and the 2015 American Institute of Architects Convention.

“Matt’s work has provided important insight on the correlation between human health and environment design, specifically how design can facilitate healing and progress for individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and childhood obesity,” said Tony Rizzuto, chair of the department of Architecture at Kennesaw State. “His research has had a transformative impact on the field of healthcare design, one that we can all benefit from.”

In 2014, Finn founded his own consulting and design firm, Cognitive Design, LLC. In 2016, he left Perkins+Will to pursue his own practice full time.
Kennesaw State University student Charles Conley was expecting to get his “usual” 30 to 40 likes from his small group of Facebook friends last fall when he shared a story about meeting a young boy at Dragon Con in Atlanta.

Instead, Conley’s post went viral, and the early childhood education major got a lesson in just how powerful the influence of a role model – or teacher – can be.

Dressed head to toe in his homemade Batman costume, Conley was attending the popular sci-fi convention when he caught the eye of a young boy, about 5 or 6 years old, who was with his mother. With only his cheeks and chin exposed under his mask, Conley saw the little boy pointing at his skin, then pointing at him.

“I approached and he was a little intimidated at first as any little kid is when meeting a life-sized armored character,” Conley wrote in the post, which as of the first of the year had garnered 8,000 likes, 1,100 comments and 5,700 shares. “I knelt down and reached out my hand for a high five.

With all the force he could muster, he slapped my hand, with the biggest smile on his face. He told me he wanted to ask me something so, still kneeling I leaned in with my ear. ‘Batman,’ he said timidly, ‘You’re brown, just like me! Does that mean that I can be a real superhero someday, too? I don’t see a lot of brown superheroes.’"

Conley was so touched by the little boy’s reaction, he broke his No. 1 “Batman rule,” and removed his cowl to show the boy his face.

“When he told me he was so excited to see a brown Batman that touched me,” he said. “That I could be a positive influence, not only because I’m Batman, but I’m just being me as a person of color for another kid who is a person of color. I told him, ‘You can be whoever you want to be and don’t ever let anyone tell you differently,’ and that will be a main lesson I bring into the classroom as a teacher.”
Emma Gough began taking karate lessons at age 13 simply to have a physical education activity while being home-schooled.

In the few years since, she has become a decorated athlete in national and international karate competitions.

Gough, a Kennesaw State freshman and University Honors student, earned a bronze medal at the World Traditional Karate Championships in Poland in November. She took third place in the youth women’s individual (18-21 years old) division in kata, a martial art involving detailed, choreographed patterns of movements.

“It was the experience of a lifetime,” Gough said. “Being around so many people from around the world, we all speak different languages – but we have this common ground that we’re all there for the love of the art.

“Then on top of that, I was able to perform for my country and perform well. That’s an amazing feeling.”

Gough was in KSU’s Dual Enrollment Honors Program as a high school senior when she won her first karate medal, a gold in a national team competition. Now enrolled full time, she balances her competitions and training with her coursework in the University Honors Program.

“KSU was my college of choice from the beginning,” Gough said. “The Honors faculty and the classes they offer are amazing. I am living in the Honors residence hall and loving campus life.”

Competitions have taken her to places such as Brazil, where she won two silver medals in the 2015 Pan-American Championships, and Switzerland. Gough’s travels for karate have inspired her to pursue a degree in international business.

“All that networking with people around the world and getting to experience their cultures has given me a heart for international affairs,” she said. “I want to work to connect different cultures and serve to build bridges.”
The year 2016 may well be remembered as the year that Kennesaw State University and the KSU Research and Service Foundation, Inc. (KSURSF) was awarded its first scientific patent by the U.S. Patent Office.

The patent was issued to the late John Salerno, the Neel Distinguished Chair of Biotechnology.

Salerno, aided by his student lab assistants, invented special mutagenic plasmids — tiny, independent, self-replicating deoxyribonucleotide (DNA) molecules at the center of life.

If DNA represents the building blocks of life, plasmids may be the tiny individual bits of each block.

According to Salerno’s patent filing, “The methods are useful to introduce one or more desired mutations into a gene-containing plasmid. Each new copy of a nucleic acid sequence can be a template for additional copies, and millions of copies can be made in a single reaction vessel from a single template molecule and low amounts of polymerase enzyme. The copies are used in numerous applications, e.g., sequencing, gene analysis, forensic identification, biological taxonomy, detecting and diagnosing genetic disorders, infectious diseases, etc.”

What Salerno accomplished by creating these mutagenic plasmids, was nothing short of amazing to the scientific community because it “show(ed) substantially improved efficiencies in transforming cellular microorganism that are exposed to them,” according to his patent application.

“John was instrumental in filing several inventions over the past six years before his untimely death in December,” said Charles Amlaner, KSURSF vice president for research. “He was a scholar and significant force behind much scholarship and grant activity at KSU during his tenure as a distinguished researcher in the College of Science and Mathematics.

Salerno not only created the mutagenic plasmid but he was working on the development of a test kit that other scientists could use to speed up their genetic experiments.

“He worked with us to begin the process of developing a model of inventorship that all faculty and students could engage in and gain from once their intellectual property (IP) was successfully and safely filed with the U.S. Patent Office through financial help by KSURSF, Inc.,” Amlaner said.

“Beginning with John’s application, we now have several patents pending, over 24 provisional patents filed and over 50 IP (intellectual property) disclosures filed in our office, and more coming in every month. We also have two startup companies, one from John’s IP. All of this progress evolved over the past six years.”
Living in New York is beautiful, ugly, inspiring, intimidating and very cold all at once,” says “Sweet Charity” percussionist Janna Graham, but who’s quick to add, “I am so grateful to have this opportunity.”

To earn a living as a professional musician is the dream of a lifetime for many College of the Arts students, and Graham achieved it even before graduating in December with a Bachelor of Music – Jazz Performance.

As fall semester was getting underway, the gifted jazz percussionist won an orchestra position playing drums for the pre-Broadway production of “The Prom” at Atlanta’s Alliance Theater.

In a stroke of good luck, the conductor, Mary-Mitchell Campbell, just happened to be putting together a band for the 50th anniversary off-Broadway revival of “Sweet Charity.”

Graham was one of five selected for the band, which performs on a balcony above the stage for the New Group’s production at the Pershing Square Signature Center.

“I never dreamt of living in New York,” she says, “but I always dreamt of making a living as a musician and I am doing that in an awesome way right now!”

One of the most well-known tunes from the show is “If My Friends Could See Me Now,” which also could serve as a window into the 24-year-old’s rapid ascent in the competitive show business world.

“The best part is getting to work with people who are the best at what they do. Our director, choreographer, music director, and orchestrator are all creative geniuses, and I’ve learned so much from them,” Graham says.
IN THE NEWS...

Kennesaw State faculty experts are frequently tapped by the news media for commentary on current issues.

HELPING STUDENTS ADAPT
Many colleges have instituted extended first-year programs in hopes of drawing students together to discuss their common experience. Stephanie M. Foote, director of the master’s program in first-year studies, told the Boston Globe that such discussions can help students learn and appreciate about the different paths that brought them together. "A lot of what we’re doing now is to respond to the uniqueness that exists in our students," she said. "We have to be very aimed in our response to that diversity, and to create these environments where students feel included and feel they can thrive or flourish."

SUSTAINING RESTAURANT CAREERS
Christian Hardigree, director of the Michael A. Leven School of Culinary Sustainability and Hospitality, talked to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution about food sustainability. "One in 10 Georgians works in the restaurant industry, and eight out of 10 restaurant owners started in entry-level jobs," she said. "The dynamic opportunities in the restaurant industry are unparalleled, and it’s key that we prepare students for these careers. Sustainability of food through sourcing is going to become more and more important as the population grows."

DEBATE ON SCHOOL SPENDING
There is a split in public opinion about spending on schools. Economics professor Ben Scafidi told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that Georgia has increased school spending without raising teachers’ salaries. He said that the usually reported figure of per-pupil spending is far below the actual total, and that there was a difference of $3.5 billion last year between what was reportedly spent and the actual amount. The larger figure includes capital projects, debt service and a host of smaller programs, he said.

HELD BACK BY OPPOSITION
Socially conservative legislation pushed by Republicans in Southern states faces opposition from some business groups worried about the potential economic fallout. Kerwin Swint, chair of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, told the Wall Street Journal that legislation Georgia has faced opposition from businesses in the past. "Social conservatives have a lot of influence, but there’s a ceiling in certain states," said Swint. He said in Georgia, where Atlanta is a crucial business engine, social conservatives are held back by business opposition.

GETTING INTO THE GAME
Lawmakers in Georgia are beginning to see the need to develop regulations addressing the operation of autonomous vehicles. Assistant professor of mechatronics engineering Kevin McFall talked to the Atlanta Business Chronicle about how other states have already created legislation regarding testing of self-driving vehicles. Georgia lawmakers “see the writing on the wall and are trying not to get left behind,” McFall said. Allowing for testing of autonomous vehicles and laying the regulatory and legal groundwork would attract automakers, suppliers and academic research to the state, he said.

AN APP LOSES POPULARITY
A popular social media mobile app used on college campuses began to see slow growth and face backlash from users protesting bullying. Then the technology start-up had to lay off half its staff. Communications assistant professor Amber Hutchins talked to WABE about the decline in interest in the app. "As many apps try to monetize, they oftentimes have to take a look at the things that are most popular about the site, anonymity and hate speech and some of the other things are not really congruent with attracting advertisers and building a business model," Hutchins said.
After serving as Georgia’s attorney general for the past six years, Sam Olens was selected by the Georgia Board of Regents to lead Kennesaw State University as its fourth president, on Nov. 1. As 2017 began, Olens shared with Kennesaw State University Magazine his thoughts about the state of the University and his plans for the future.
Since taking the reins of leadership and becoming president, what has impressed you the most about Kennesaw State?

Sam Olens: There are so many positive things happening at KSU but what has impressed me the most is the “can-do” attitude of the faculty, staff and students on both campuses. No one is complacent. Often in organizations, there’s a period of complacency – especially when you’ve had the type of growth Kennesaw State has – but here there’s a desire for improvement, a desire to maximize the experience for everyone, and you don’t see that in every organizational structure. Or you don’t see it in most.

What do you see as some of Kennesaw State’s greatest opportunities?

Olens: Certainly one of our greatest opportunities are the partnerships we have developed both internally and externally. Since the consolidation with Southern Polytechnic, we have been working on developing degree programs that involve multiple colleges such as our new bachelor’s in digital animation, and you’re going to see much more of that over the next decade. I think we are being really creative in providing opportunities for our students through these types of degree programs, and that will serve them very well in the future.

We’ve also been ramping up our external partnerships such as our involvement with IgniteHQ, a startup incubator and business accelerator, which is already serving our students and the community.

But frankly, there’s a lot going on here at every level and all of them provide opportunities for our faculty, staff, students and the community. I truly believe the sky’s the limit and this University is on the precipice of greatness.

What areas you plan to focus in the immediate future?

Olens: First and foremost, scholarships. We need a significant increase in needs-based scholarships, scholarships for first-generation college students, scholarships to recruit female STEM students on the Marietta campus, and scholarships to fund a vibrant Honors College.

Another area I have been and plan to continue to focus on is reaching out to employers. I’ve been working with our Career Services group and meeting with companies to stimulate more internships, co-ops and recruitment opportunities. One firm told me the graduates they have hired in the past two years are excellent. And they want to increase the number of graduates from Kennesaw State. This speaks well for our students and it also speaks well for the academic side of the house. A couple of years ago several of those companies said we needed more soft skills, which is a common criticism given to many universities. They are now telling us that we’ve done a much better job in that area, and it shows in our graduates.

What’s been your administrative focus during your first 100 days?

Olens: I’ve been spending a lot of time creating a really strong leadership team. We have filled several key positions already, and we’ll have other positions filled during the spring semester with new deans and other administrative roles. One of our strengths is that we have a lot of talent here so I see a lot of opportunity for advancement within. We simply need to put the individuals in the right place, and they will help lead us to our potential.

As you have met with people both on campus and in the community, where are some of the biggest challenges?

Olens: Clearly, we have some significant infrastructure issues. We need more faculty, more advisors, more classrooms, more residence halls. We have not been able to keep up with the growth. I think part of that will be handled through the recent agreement with the chancellor’s office to have a fixed-seat incoming freshman model for fiscal year 2018, where we’ll have early admission and a wait-list to assist us with enrollment management. We greatly need that to catch up with that growth for both campuses.

Prior to being elected attorney general, you served as chairman of the Cobb County Board of Commissioners. What did you learn in these leadership positions that has prepared you to be president of Kennesaw State University?

Olens: Leaders have to listen. They have to listen well. They need to seek to constantly learn. There’s a quote from Martin Luther King, Jr., to that point: “A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.” Because when you’re listening, you’re learning. You also need to be willing to make the hard call, the tough decision.

You are known for being pragmatic in your approach to managing organizations that you lead and improving their performance. What is your long-term strategic vision for the University and your highest priority goals for the next few years?

Olens: When I was attorney general, it was very reactive. A long timeframe was maybe two years. Higher education is a bit more similar to the role I had as chair of Cobb County.
I get to look at that 5-10 year timeframe. So, one of the goals is really putting in place the strategic plan for the University, the master plan for the University so that we know where we’re going to put future buildings, how we’re going to handle problems like parking in the future and how we’re going to handle the success from our growth, which will lead to an even greater University.

You've said you are studying and listening to students, faculty and staff to try to implement best practices. Can you share some of what you’ve learned?

Olens: It’s interesting when you talk to folks and say you’re interested, for instance, in eliminating redundancies, they will immediately tell you where they think they are. You just have to ask the question. So, I’ve asked the questions and I have gotten the answers. Many people are surprised I’m even asking.

Also, we’re not a one-size-fits-all organization. So what works in one college may not work in another college. Similarly, we have outstanding teaching faculty and outstanding research faculty. Together, their individual strengths make us a much stronger and better university.

Outside of your family, what has been your greatest accomplishment?

Olens: I’m not big into personal accomplishments; everything takes a team. You don’t succeed by yourself. I think the accomplishment is when you help people along the way and you watch them succeed. As attorney general, I’ve relied on a lot of great staff and my fellow commissioners, and as president of this University I’ve got to rely on the students, the staff and the faculty. You’re not a success due to what you did; it’s what everyone does together.

What do you think you'll enjoy the most as president of Kennesaw State?

Olens: The ability to make a difference, especially for young people. That’s why I was interested in issues such as food insecurity, drug abuse and sex trafficking as attorney general. This is a position unlike many others, where you can actually make a difference with young people and where you can lead, along with the faculty and staff, to really improve someone’s life in the long term.

Down the road, I would like to co-teach a course in the area of the Constitution or local government, consistent with my past opportunities. So I want to spend some energy there.

If you had not become a lawyer, what would you be doing today?

Olens: I would have become a professor of international affairs.

What would you like your legacy to be either at KSU or for your life in general?

Olens: I would simply like for folks to know I worked hard and tried my best. That's all that you can ask.
Kennesaw State University alumnus Chris Lohnes (MBA, ’98) appreciates that his alma mater is addressing the rapidly increasing demand for cybersecurity professionals.

As the director of business development for a technology company, Lohnes sees first-hand the need for qualified workers in cybersecurity, the field of protecting networks, computers, programs and data from attack, damage or unauthorized access.

“My company needs to hire at least two more information technology security staff members, and we have been searching for candidates for months,” he said. “The current candidate field is sparse, and there is going to be a greater dependency on university programs to produce graduates."

The cybersecurity field will need 6 million workers by 2020 but is projected to fall 1.5 million short of that, according to the 2015 Global Information Security Workforce Study. Recent data shows that more than 200,000 cybersecurity jobs in the U.S. are unfilled.

Kennesaw State University is helping meet the demand through its new Institute for Cybersecurity Workforce Development. The institute’s first major initiative is an online interdisciplinary Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity program, which is slated to be offered online beginning this fall.

“The exciting thing about this degree is that it has the potential to produce graduates with the skills companies need
to address their cybersecurity challenges,” said Dr. Traci Carte, chair of Kennesaw State’s Department of Information Systems.

**ELEGANT IN ITS SIMPLICITY**

The cybersecurity institute is a combined effort of three of KSU’s colleges: the Coles College of Business, College of Computing and Software Engineering, and College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Students pursuing the cybersecurity degree will take courses offered in the Information Security and Assurance, Information Technology and Criminal Justice programs.

“The new degree will combine various strengths from each program, providing a unique experience for students choosing this major,” said Dr. Becky Rutherfoord, chair of the Department of Information Technology.

Students will concentrate on one of three tracks – systems security, network security or cyber crime. While future demand may require additional resources, the Institute for Cybersecurity Workforce Development and online B.S. degree were developed entirely with courses and faculty members that Kennesaw State already has.

“The beauty of the institute and this degree is how elegant it is in its simplicity,” said Dr. Elke Leeds, Kennesaw State’s associate vice president of technology-enhanced learning. “We are doing more with existing resources as we develop highly sought-after skills in the next generation of workforce professionals.”

**CHANGING WITH THE TIMES**

Carte credits Dr. Herb Mattord, assistant chair of the Department of Information Systems and associate professor of information security and assurance, with leading the effort to establish the new online major.

It’s the latest evolution in KSU’s cybersecurity offerings since Mattord joined the faculty in 2002. That same year, Kennesaw State launched Georgia’s first certificate program in security. Three years later, the University rolled out the state’s first Bachelor of Science in Information Security and Assurance, which later was retooled into a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in the Coles College of Business.

“We made the degree probably the best of its kind in the country, in terms of a targeted, niche offering to future chief information security officers,” Mattord said. “We have been doing a good job of producing business-focused graduates.”

The new degree program will combine that business management commitment with an increased technical focus. That was made possible by the addition of information technology faculty from Kennesaw State’s consolidation with Southern Polytechnic State University.

Kennesaw State University has been a Center of Academic Excellence in Cybersecurity Education since 2004, as designated by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security. The programs at the former Southern Polytechnic also were built under this designation.

“Here is our opportunity to do something new, and to do it in a way that builds on past excellence and delivers a one-of-a-kind experience,” Mattord said. “The students will be equipped with skills and techniques to make them productive immediately, and at the same time have that foundation in security that is going to lead them to careers that are durable and have a long-term impact.”

**THE EXCITING THING ABOUT THIS DEGREE IS THAT IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO PRODUCE GRADUATES WITH THE SKILLS COMPANIES NEED TO ADDRESS THEIR CYBERSECURITY CHALLENGES**

**MORE TO COME**

A key element Carte plans for the cybersecurity institute is to conduct applied and academic research to push faculty and student knowledge beyond textbooks. She envisions students engaging with faculty in research projects to further cybersecurity proficiency.

“This research will be fed back into the curriculum so that our students constantly are benefitting from the efforts of this institute,” Carte said.

Also, the institute is pursuing community and industry partnerships, in endeavors such as executive education programs, cybersecurity roundtables and fundraising efforts. SunTrust Bank already is on board, committing to give the Department of Information Systems $40,000 in each of the next five years toward academic research related to cybersecurity.

“It’s an exciting place to be, in terms of having a plan and having some amazing faculty, to be part of the solution to meet workforce demand,” Carte said.
The ability to pay for college is eclipsing success in college among students’ most pressing concerns, national polls by *Time Inc.* and suggest students’ fears about the cost of college appear justifiable, considering the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education’s College Affordability and Transparency Center. College tuition increased an average of 6.6 percent nationwide from academic year 2012-13 to 2014-15, with four-year public colleges reporting the greatest spikes ranging from 21 to 55 percent.
At Kennesaw State University, a dynamic conversion of strategic initiatives powered by enhanced learning technology has created multiple ways for students to save on college costs, from textbook alternatives to assessments that evaluate prior knowledge to online offerings.

SETTING THE TONE
To Elke Leeds, associate vice president of Technology Enhanced Learning at Kennesaw State and chief strategist for the University’s affordability initiatives, the convergence of several developments created a perfect opportunity to take aim at the escalating costs students pay for higher education.

“The University System of Georgia (USG), in conjunction with the Board of Regents’ Administrative Committee on Distance Education, provided strong leadership regarding affordability, access to education, reducing textbook costs and the creation of alternative pathways to degree completion, especially for adult learners,” Leeds said. “The USG’s Complete College Georgia initiative motivated institutions within the system to incorporate mechanisms to make college more accessible and affordable.”

Additionally, Leeds said, the consolidation of Kennesaw State and Southern Polytechnic State in 2015 presented an opportunity for the University to “re-imagine” a structure that capitalized on the relationship of different units while accommodating the needs of a changing, growing institution.

The synergies resulting from the USG’s initiatives and the consolidation continue to drive Kennesaw State’s affordability strategies, which focus on creating multiple pathways to earning on-campus and online degrees. Those pathways include eCore, the USG’s online offering of general education courses; existing agreements with associate degree-granting institutions; and the assessment of students’ prior learning as an avenue to college credit. The University also has targeted the rising cost of textbooks as a way to reduce students’ college expenses.

TEXTBOOK ALTERNATIVES
A U.S. Government Accountability Office study found that the average annual amount students spend on textbooks is 26 percent of the cost of tuition at a public, four-year institution. Lumina Foundation reported that about 30 percent of college students choose not to buy their textbooks, with nearly 65 percent citing that textbooks are too expensive.

Through the statewide Affordable Learning Georgia (ALG) initiative, 36 KSU faculty members received textbook transformation grants in 2016. The grants allow faculty to produce Open Educational Resources (OERs), which are copyrighted course material. As a result, text material for a growing number of KSU courses are available online to students and the public for free or less than $25.

Sarah Muncy, 23, who worked full time to pay for college and graduated from KSU in December, said textbooks could cost $500-700 per semester. Last summer, Muncy took an online class that used OERs, saving her some $200. “Every little bit helps,” said Muncy.

Creating OERs is a win-win for students and faculty, said Tamara Powell, director of distance education in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, English professor and Kennesaw State’s ALG champion. Replacing expensive textbooks with OERs created by some 40 Kennesaw State faculty members working in teams has saved KSU students nearly $900,000 each year.

Powell has led the charge to recruit and support faculty members who are developing OERs. She is hoping to increase the number of faculty producing the free online text material and the number of courses using them.

Kennesaw State’s “Affordability Team” includes, from left, Laura McGrath, prior learning assessment coordinator; Darrin Theriault, Testing Center director; Elke Leeds, associate vice president of Technology Enhanced Learning; Jim Cope, executive director of the Distance Learning Center; and Tamara Powell, director of distance education in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.
“It’s so much easier for faculty to order a course textbook, but when appropriate and possible, creating OERs is the ethical thing to do,” Powell said. In an article she published last year, Powell cited research by the Journal of Computing in Higher Education, which found that in three key measures of student success — course completion, final grade of C or higher and course grade — students whose faculty used OERs generally performed as well or better than students whose faculty assigned commercial textbooks.

COLLEGE CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING

Often referred to as prior learning assessments (PLAs), an increasing number of testing options allow students to earn college credit for learning gained outside of the traditional academic setting.

In fall 2016, 7,580 or 22 percent of students enrolled at KSU, earned the equivalent of 67,290 credit hours through prior learning assessments. That amounts to a savings of about $1,575 in tuition costs per student. The majority of those hours result from Advanced Placement exams taken in high school, but the number of credits offered through prior learning assessment options at Kennesaw State, including CLEP exams and military equivalencies, are rapidly on the rise. The number of students taking advantage of tests that assess their prior learning has increased 7 percent (from 7,091 in fall 2015 to 7,580 in fall 2016).

Under the direction of Darrin Theriault, testing centers on Kennesaw State’s campuses in Kennesaw and Marietta offer students prior learning assessment exams like CLEP, faculty created credit-by-exam tests, as well as certification exams for non-KSU students in the surrounding communities. In addition
to standardized assessment tests, 18 of Kennesaw State's 49 academic programs have developed discipline-specific prior learning assessments, and 21 more are under development.

The assessments are leading to substantial cost savings for students. The fee for a CLEP exam, for example, is $80 versus $540 in tuition for a three-credit course at Kennesaw State. Current and potential Kennesaw State students can access 24 of 33 available CLEP exams at any time during their collegiate careers.

Alex Gunter has earned 13 credit hours — the equivalent of four courses — through CLEP testing. Gunter is paying for college on his own. Although he has a state-funded HOPE scholarship, he wants to save money by cutting the amount of time it takes to graduate.

“For me, it’s about having more earning power,” said Gunter, who expects to complete a bachelor's degree in business management in three years. “The earlier I can complete my degree, the sooner I can be out there starting my career and making money.”

Kennesaw State is exploring additional ways to promote student savings on PLAs. In fall 2016, the University became the first Georgia institution to launch a pilot of “Freshman Year for Free.” The program is an initiative of Modern States Education Alliance, a nonprofit in partnership with edX, the leading online learning platform founded by Harvard and MIT. It offers no-cost online courses to prepare students for the major AP or CLEP exams. Successful completion earns students vouchers for CLEP and AP exams that can lead to credit for up to six courses.

**REPLACING EXPENSIVE TEXTBOOKS**

**WITH OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

**HAS RESULTED IN KENNESAW STATE LEADING THE USG IN SAVING STUDENTS MONEY – NEARLY $900,000 EACH YEAR.**

Laura McGrath, a professor of English and prior learning assessment coordinator, updates and maintains the site to reflect the ever-expanding assessment options available to students. “I’m working closely with academic departments as they make decisions about offering PLA options, which range from departmental challenge exams to portfolios, McGrath said. “We’ve also created an inquiry form for credit seekers on the website, and I work one-on-one with those students to identify available assessment opportunities. The portal really is the place to start to take advantage of these cost-saving options.”

Kennesaw State’s focus on affordability reflects an institutional willingness to work towards better outcomes for potential and current students, and to utilize available resources to accomplish them, Leeds said. “The faculty’s support and willingness to innovate have been especially critical to the successes we’ve seen to date with these affordability initiatives.”

“From the beginning, things just lined up and progressed organically, allowing us to continue imagining and evolving solutions to meet our students’ needs,” she said. “All the while, we remained focused on the University System’s affordable college initiatives. They were central to our planning and actions, and will help guide continued innovation and collaboration that will help make education at Kennesaw State more affordable.”

**THE BENEFITS OF ECORE**

As participants in the USG’s eCore program, Kennesaw State is providing students another cost-saving alternative. eCore offers low cost/high quality online general education courses through a system-wide collaboration.

Adding these additional eCore courses to Kennesaw State’s catalog helps to ease bottlenecks as students progress toward graduation, said Leeds, noting that eCore is offered at a lower per credit hour cost and fits well with Kennesaw State’s growing online offerings, which serve 7,000 students each year on average.

**A ONE-STOP SITE FOR SAVINGS**

In the past, finding information about cost-saving alternatives was a real problem, especially for adult learners, Leeds said. “It almost didn’t matter what we were doing if students and prospective students couldn’t find the information easily and quickly.”

The University created an online portal to provide students, faculty and community members with information on how to take advantage of PLA options, earn credit and reduce college costs.
Autonomous vehicle technology – which allows navigation without human input – is already mainstream, explained Kevin McFall, assistant professor of mechatronics engineering at Kennesaw State and an artificial intelligence researcher. Every leading car manufacturer – such as Tesla, Mercedes, Subaru, Ford and Chevrolet – has some form of this technology integrated into their vehicles.

Students at Kennesaw State are learning how to build these various technology systems and integrate multiple assist systems to create an autonomous vehicle.

“Assist technology is where the car is doing some of the functions autonomously but still requires constant attention from the driver,” he said. With parking assist, lane-keeping assist, or adaptive cruise control, the autonomous system can control steering and speed or both simultaneously, but a human is still needed to engage or disengage the autonomous system and take control when necessary.

Each semester, graduating students are required to produce a “functional, working, real-life prototype” as part of their senior capstone projects.

“This is a great opportunity to practice and keep up with the field,” said Edward
Sheeran, a mechatronics student. “We have to start somewhere – even with a shoestring budget of $300.”

According to McFall, self-driving cars epitomize what mechatronics students create in their degree program.

“They are really pushed and their project will fail if, on demo day, it doesn’t do as it is supposed to,” McFall said. “Mechatronics is really ‘sense, think, act.’ Take information from your surroundings and make some decision based on that information to make some action happen in real life. That’s a self-driving car.”

INDUSTRY CONNECTIONS

Chan Ham, chair of the Mechatronics Engineering department, explained there will be a huge demand for self-driving car engineers in the future.

“Our students will be confident facilitators in the real engineering world,” Ham said. That future industry is growing as more and more car manufacturers adopt new technologies in their vehicles. Carmakers Kia and Atlanta-based Wheego already have provided cars to the university’s mechatronics program.

In a recent string of external donations to the mechatronics department, Wheego donated $15,000 for student scholarships and provided a vehicle, which will be used in developing car drive-by-wire capability that can be controlled remotely from a call center.

EXPANDING RESEARCH

Besides teaching how to develop various autonomous systems, research in this field at Kennesaw State is expanding.

McFall and Ying Wang, associate professor of mechatronics, are finding their niche in the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology for developing and understanding autonomous vehicle technologies. Several of their research projects have involved graduate and undergraduate students interested in working and researching in the field.

“Autonomous vehicle technology is an emerging multidisciplinary system that will significantly contribute to our synergistic collaboration between faculty and students,” Ham said.

McFall’s interests lie in artificial intelligence and artificial neural networks, and his latest project relates to the speed information of the car and using that to control the pedal to maintain the car at a given speed.

“There is so much data there, and it needs to be analyzed to improve these sensor systems,” McFall explained. This data is important even in practice, as the students use “artificial neural networks to extract useful information and possibly give a steering command for the car to be able to stay on track.”

McFall has published research on detecting road boundaries from camera images. Upcoming technologies are now
using lidar – a light, distance and ranging system in which a laser scans in all directions to generate a 3D map of what’s surrounding the vehicle.

Wang is working on a more interdisciplinary research project with several KSU engineering faculty to develop the Slim Modular Flexible Electric Bus (SMFe-bus), a viable solution to make Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) more appealing to commuters and more cost-effective for communities.

The SMFe-bus is an electric-powered bus that has a lead module with a human driver and a few driverless modules, strung together without being physically attached to the lead vehicle or each other. Each module is self-propelled by in-wheel electric motors.

Wang is specifically working on the virtual coupling technology that blends camera and sensor technologies with intelligent control technology.

“Our prototype explores the neural network and benefits from artificial intelligence technology, and how a machine, or robot, learns how to accept information from humans,” said Wang.

He explained that significant progress in computer vision technology, such as cameras to classify objects, and the speed of today’s graphics processing units are improving high-level decision-making for the autonomous vehicle industry.

Beyond cars and buses, the university’s Autonomous Underwater Vehicle (AUV) student competition team also designs, manufactures and programs an AUV. Using autonomous technology, the team builds a robotic submarine that can perform a series of commands without any human interaction, and competes nationally against other collegiate teams at the RoboSub competition in San Diego. In 2015, the team took home a top prize for “Best Innovation on a Budget.”

McFall said Kennesaw State is finding its niche in researching this new technology.

“We can nibble around the edges where we can until we are able to be more of a power player,” he added.

That time may soon be here as the technology becomes more common in the marketplace.

“It’s fun to drive, it’s a big part of our culture, but that could shift,” McFall said. Today, we ride horses for fun; maybe we’ll only drive cars for fun in 50 years.”

Kevin McFall, assistant professor of mechatronics engineering, is part of the team developing and understanding autonomous vehicle technologies.
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#owlalum
Katie Tomlin was admittedly shy when she began her first year as a Kennesaw State University student this past fall.

However, she overcame her shyness and became more outgoing during her initial semester of college. She credits her involvement in a learning community titled The Pursuit of Happiness, one of the dozens of learning communities Kennesaw State offers to students each year.

“I love my learning community,” said Tomlin, who plans to major in nursing. “I gained four new best friends, and I am so grateful for it. I started going to more campus events and started getting more involved, which made my first semester in college so positive.”

Tomlin’s success story epitomizes what learning communities are all about. A learning community is 20 to 25 students, typically in their first semester, who co-enroll in two or more courses that are linked with a common theme. The faculty members who teach in learning communities collaborate on assignments and activities that help KSU’s newest students develop the thinking and study strategies necessary for success in college.

“Students start to see their classes as being connected,” said Dr. Hillary Steiner, Kennesaw State’s associate director of learning communities. “It really becomes a little community, where the students get to know each other well, get to know the faculty well and are able to incorporate this larger theme into several different classes.”

Learning communities began at Kennesaw State in 2000 as a method to improve student retention. It paid off, as data since then shows that KSU has increased its percentage of students who return for a second year of college.

“One thing we hear over and over from faculty is that students in learning communities are more engaged in class,” said Learning Communities Director Cathy Bradford. “The real purpose is to help with deeper levels of learning. If you can see how what you’re learning in English connects with what you’re learning in history, it helps you not only retain that information, but it helps you make meaning of what you’re learning.”

Students in learning communities have fewer absences than those who aren’t, Bradford said. They also tend to be helpful and caring within their group, whether it’s by giving a ride to a fellow student whose car isn’t working or sending a text message to a student who is absent from class.

“The things that go along with forming a friendship also foster success in the classroom,” Bradford said. “Students are more likely to stay in school if they feel connected to the campus. Well, how do you feel connected to a campus? It’s usually through other people.”

Communities of all kinds
Approximately 1,500 students are enrolled in learning communities at Kennesaw State each year. Some learning communities are for specific academic majors, such as business, nursing, education or dance. Others are open to all students and cover topics ranging from “green” living to social justice to gender studies.

A number of the learning communities delve into serious subject matter. An annual one, Hunger Games, studies the
issues of hunger and homelessness while also collecting
donations to help homeless people in the Atlanta area.

“I learned there are 58,000 homeless college students
nationwide, which surprised me so much because you don’t
think about your peers not having a place to sleep every night,”
first-year student Cydney Breedlove said.

While many participants in learning communities are
traditional first-year students straight out of high school, non-
traditional students also benefit. Holly Bailin, 29, enrolled at
Kennesaw State last year and said she took on “kind of the
mom” role to the younger students in her Pursuit of Happiness
learning community.

All of Kennesaw State’s learning communities are
proposed by the University’s faculty. More than 100 faculty
members teach in learning communities each year.

A popular one that always fills up quickly is Everyone’s
a Fan, taught by Tyler Pede and Amanda McGrew. They
incorporate books, movies, shows and games they love into
assignments and activities, such as attending the Dragon
Con parade and taking students to read at a local elementary
school for Star Wars Reads Day.

“Our students have found a place where they fit in and
belong,” Pede said. “The transformations have been amazing.
I love to see the students come out of their shell and become
who they really are.”

A national leader
Kennesaw State has earned national recognition for its
efforts to help first-year students succeed. U.S. News and
World Report consistently ranks KSU’s First-Year Experience
Program as one of the best in the country, and Kennesaw
State hosted the National Learning Communities Conference
in November.

The wealth of expertise at Kennesaw State also is being
shared through a first-of-its-kind online course, which is being
offered for the first time this spring to learning communities
faculty nationwide. The six-week course created by Steiner
provides learning communities strategies on topics such as
developing assignments and conducting research on student
learning.

“This is another opportunity to bring recognition to our
learning communities,” Steiner said. “By opening this up to
faculty outside of KSU, we are doing something that ultimately
will benefit students throughout the country.”

While several schools offer learning communities, the
concept is thriving particularly at Kennesaw State. Bradford
gives much of the credit to faculty members who have taught
learning communities courses and then told their colleagues
what a positive experience it was.

“One thing that is really special about learning
communities is there are so many benefits to different groups
of people,” Bradford said. “The primary benefit is to the
students, but faculty say they benefit from getting to work with
colleagues outside of their discipline and from really getting
to know the students in their classes. Most people want to be
involved with something that is proven to help students.”

Students at Kennesaw State have opportunities to take
part in any one of dozens of learning communities that
link multiple courses with common themes.
Fifth Third Bank Stadium a showcase of community connections

BY JENNIFER HAFER
While originally built and billed as the home of the Owls women’s soccer team, Kennesaw State University’s Fifth Third Bank Stadium has become so much more.

From hosting athletic events, concerts and festivals to providing jobs for students, the KSU Sports & Entertainment Park, of which the stadium is a part, has become a gathering place for the community.

“When venues are built, they’re the opportunity to be the front door and welcome mat for the community,” said Marty Elliott, director of the KSU Sports & Entertainment Park. “We believe our responsibility is to use our assets to connect with the community.”

Fifth Third Bank Stadium is the signature athletics landmark on the Kennesaw Campus. The 8,300-seat facility was completed in the spring of 2010, and since then has garnered national recognition as one of the premier multi-use outdoor athletics facilities in the country.

The stadium is home to the Kennesaw State women’s soccer and lacrosse teams, Owls football, and in April 2016, it became home to Atlanta’s newest professional team, the Atlanta Blaze lacrosse.

It’s all part of a bigger picture that requires innovative ideas and community collaborations. The stadium, located on a 88-acre parcel of land, lies between George Busbee Parkway and the I-575 overpass on Big Shanty Road.

“It’s a strategy of exposure, using our venue and assets to fly the flag for KSU,” Elliott said. “That’s how Major League Lacrosse came to be here. It was a very intentional process that we went through to aggressively pursue the fastest-growing sport in the country.

“The stadium was built with soccer in mind, but with the commitment to football, we knew we would be maxed out in the fall. What other sport could we look to that would make sense for this venue? Lacrosse was the perfect answer.”

Elliott and her team worked closely with Cobb Travel & Tourism’s Sports Alliance and Atlanta’s Sports Council to land the Blaze and they continue to work together to identify opportunities and attract events.

“Sports are a big part of overall tourism in Cobb today, and we expect it to increase exponentially over the next few years,” said Holly Quinlan, CEO of Cobb Travel & Tourism and the Cobb Sports Alliance.

According to Quinlan, sporting events held at KSU’s Fifth Third Bank Stadium in 2015 and 2016 had an economic impact of $16.9 million. The KSU football program alone had an impact of $4.1 million in 2015.

Working with Cobb Travel & Tourism, as well as local hoteliers, Fifth Third Bank Stadium hosted the 11th Annual Offense-Defense All-American Bowl on Dec. 29. The bowl is a culmination of a week’s worth of events, including showcasing 88 of the top high school seniors in the country.

“It takes a village, obviously, to host something like this,” said Paulette Greaney, senior sales executive at the Renaissance Atlanta Waverly hotel. “For that event, we booked 500 rooms here every night for seven nights, and those rooms would not have been booked otherwise.”

In addition to KSU Athletics, the park supports KSU events, intramural teams, club sports and student programs, as well as community events including concerts, tournaments, festivals and additional sporting events.

“Festivals and events are a big part of overall tourism in Cobb, and KSU's Fifth Third Bank Stadium plays an important role in the impact that tourism has on our community through festivals and events,” said Cobb Travel’s Quinlan. “KSU’s Fifth Third Bank Stadium has played a significant role in tourism growth within Cobb County. We value the impact and visibility that the KSU's Fifth Third Bank Stadium brings to our community.”

One of the biggest feathers in the stadium’s proverbial cap is its annual Owl-O-Ween Hot Air Balloon Festival. The attendance at Owl-O-Ween has been record-breaking every year, and in 2016, the event exceeded all expectations hosting more than 36,000 attendees and creating an estimated $6.8 million in economic impact for the Cobb community.

“One of the reasons we’re so proud of this event because it is truly homegrown,” Elliott said. “We dreamed it, we created it and it continues to be unique in the marketplace, and it continues to get better and better.

“It’s the largest university-run festival in the country, that alone is pretty impressive.”

But at the heart of every event the stadium hosts – from Owls football games to Georgia’s first two-day country musical festival Shaky Boots – are Kennesaw State students.

Night Owl Productions is the student group responsible for the day-to-day operations of the stadium, overseeing everything from marketing and ticket sales for events to facilities, hospitality and beyond.

“The reason we do this, goes back to our core academic purpose,” Elliott said. “We’re doing all these things to provide jobs and opportunities for our students that strategically align with their academic and professional goals.”

In addition to the stadium, the Sports & Entertainment Park also features seven competition fields, a practice facility, NCAA regulation track and sand volleyball courts, a 9-acre lake and 1-mile walking trail, in addition to ample green space for general recreation.

“This is a place here in Kennesaw that’s a space of pride,” Elliott said. “A venue’s role is to create a fan experience that excites people. It’s about being the place where people want to come together.”
TELLING TRUTH IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Inside a virtual-world telling of the story of Christopher Thomas, a child abandoned at age 2 and sentenced to prison for 40 years for his role in an armed robbery at age 14, viewers witness the crime in the actual location it occurred in 1999. They go inside the courtroom to see the young defendant as he hears testimony from family members, school officials, caseworkers and the actual victim of the crime. They see hand-written reports and notes by those who have interacted with the youngster throughout his troubled life. Finally, they see the judge as he renders his verdict and sentencing.

An interdisciplinary team of 11 Kennesaw State student interns, under the auspices of the Center for Sustainable Journalism, have brought Christopher’s story to life, creating an immersive experience using virtual world and virtual reality tools. In addition to the in-depth reporting and careful writing required in sound, ethical journalism, the 16-week project engaged the team in learning how to create mini documentaries in a virtual world, called machinimas. They used 3D objects and animation, props, scenery and talking avatars, and learned how to film video inside the virtual world they created.

Funded under the auspices of the Online News Association (ONA), the project, “Marginalized Youth Voices Amplified on Virtual Worlds,” rides a wave of innovation in documentary-style storytelling that has been embraced by traditional news organizations — The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, ABC and CNN among them — to complement their regular news presentations.

Creating immersive experiences in a virtual world gives journalists a chance to tell stories that may be difficult to tell within the normal realm of reporting, editing and ethics, said Leonard Witt, executive director of the Center for Sustainable Journalism, which publishes the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange (JJIE) and Youth Today, an online magazine. Projects like this also demonstrate the efficacy of teaching the skills necessary for virtual world storytelling within university journalism programs, Witt added.

As dramatic and compelling as the thousands of stories like Christopher’s are, they are rarely told in traditional journalism due to multiple barriers, Witt said. He noted the practical limitations of time and space, limited editorial resources and budgets, a lack of interest in tackling the complexities of the “school-to-prison pipeline,” and legal...
restrictions that protect juveniles’ anonymity.

“At its core, this was an applied research project to
demonstrate if and how university students could use virtual world
tools in producing news stories,” said Witt, who with Kennesaw
State colleagues Farooq Kperogi and Solomon Negash, Honors
College student Claire Bohrer and virtual world consultant
Gwenneth Writer Sinclair, earned top honors from the International
Symposium on Online Journalism (#ISOJ) for a peer-reviewed
article they published about the project.

The project also demonstrated that virtual worlds and virtual
reality are uniquely suited to uncovering and exposing some
realities of the juvenile justice system. In research cited in the
#ISOJ article, 71 percent of criminal justice students surveyed
said watching virtual video of incarcerated juveniles and hearing
offenders’ personal stories changed their perceptions and increased
empathy for the incarcerated juveniles; 72 percent said the video
increased their support for mental health treatment and education.

The human dimension of Christopher’s story and the potential
to create impact drove many of the student interns who worked
on the project. They came from diverse disciplines — journalism,
computer science, new media arts, media studies, English, African­
American studies and public relations. Working as a team with the
CSJ’s professional journalists, they plowed through thousands
of pages of court documents, organizing and adapting them to
tell Christopher’s story. They received instruction and training on
OpenSimulator, a free, open-source server platform used in virtual
world and machinima production, from project consultant Sinclair.

“The driving decision was to make the machinimas to evoke
emotion with the final product, but we also wanted it to be 100
percent factual,” said Cristina Guerra, a new media arts major who
learned to create and edit the machinimas and helped direct some
of the video shots. “We knew there was an emotional component we
could explore due to the fact that the story revolved around a juvenile
that had been through a lot during the early years of his life.”

Telling Christopher’s story is just the beginning for Ann Ondieki,
a senior majoring in journalism. She hopes to build on the skills
she learned on the project to tell better stories as a professional
journalist.

“I had no understanding of what virtual reality was, but the
project has changed the way I think about telling a story,” Ondieki
said. “It has broadened my perspective about how we can tell
important and compelling stories while protecting the identity of
minors, especially if we have no video or no image. You can really
make the story have impact.”

Even though she worked on the technical side, Guerra said the
softer skills learned on the project are as valuable as her newfound
technical skills.

“I got to work with a diverse group of people that were all
knowledgeable in their field,” she said. “It really strengthened my
teamwork skills. That will be useful, whether I find a creative career
challenge in a marketing agency, for a website, magazine or TV
channel. I’m better prepared, and I’m open to many possibilities.”
STUDENT-ATHLETES SCORE WELL IN THE CLASSROOM

Led by strong academic performances from men’s tennis and women’s basketball, Kennesaw State enjoyed another successful semester in the classroom this past fall. The Owls combined for a 2.96 cumulative grade point average, and 13 teams recorded GPAs of 3.0 or better.

The team GPA for men’s tennis of 3.64 was the Owls’ best this fall, while women’s basketball set a new program record with a 3.57 GPA. Football and women’s basketball each had four student-athletes post 4.0 GPAs. Nine programs improved their overall GPAs from the fall 2015 semester.

“Our student-athletes did a great job in the classroom this fall, and I am proud of their hard work,” said Randy Kennedy, assistant athletics director for student-athlete services.

Individually, Kristi Piedimonte from the volleyball team was named to the CoSIDA Academic All-District Team and the ASUN All-Academic Team. Soccer’s Abby Roth also earned a spot on the ASUN All-Academic Team, while football’s Chandler Burks was named to the Big South’s All-Academic Team.

SIX INDUCTED INTO ATHLETICS HALL OF FAME

Six new members were inducted into the Kennesaw State Athletics Hall of Fame this past fall.

The class of 2016 includes Spencer Askew (men’s golf; 1996-2000), Kennesaw State benefactors Carl and Karen Hames, Terrence Hill (men’s basketball; 2002-04), Mackenzie Howe (cross country and track & field; 2007-11) and Stan Sims (Head Coach: cross country; 1994-2010; Head Coach: track & field; 2006-10).

With the addition of the new class, the Kennesaw State Athletic Hall of Fame now features 49 individuals and two teams, dating back to the original class that was inducted in 2003.

Askew, Hill and Howell were inducted under the Former Student-Athlete/Professional Achievement category, while Carl and Karen Hames were recognized for their Distinguished Service to Kennesaw State Athletics and Sims was honored under the Coach or Administrator category.

ATHLETIC DIRECTOR JOINS NIT COMMITTEE

Kennesaw State University Director of Athletics Vaughn Williams was appointed to the selection committee for the NCAA’s longest-running postseason basketball tournament.

Williams was one of eight people named to serve on the National Invitation Tournament Committee, starting with the 2016-17 men’s basketball season. The committee is responsible for the selection, seeding and bracketing of the 32-team NIT postseason championship.

NIT Committee members are appointed to serve a maximum four-year term. The committee is composed of current athletic administrators who are actively working at NCAA institutions/conferences and former head college basketball coaches.

The 2017 National Invitation Tournament starts in March at campus sites, with NIT semifinals and championship game held at Madison Square Garden in New York.

KENNESAW STATE FOOTBALL NAMES FOURTH RECRUITING CLASS

Kennesaw State football head coach Brian Bohannon announced the Owls’ 2017 incoming class on National Signing Day. Sixteen future Owls were introduced, including three mid-year transfers who joined the program in January. Kennesaw State, which just finished the program’s second season with an 8-3 record, welcomed its newest class with an event at the football coaches’ offices.

Of the class, 11 fielded at least one offer from an FBS school during the recruitment process, 11 hail from Georgia, four from Alabama and one – East Carolina transfer RB Shawn Furlow – from North Carolina.

The other transfers included DB Dorian Walker from Georgia Tech and DL Peyton Moore from Georgia State. Those three enrolled at KSU in January are eligible to play in 2017.

This was Kennesaw State’s fourth Signing Day since the program was established in 2013. The class includes five running backs, four defensive linemen, three defensive backs, two offensive linemen and two linebackers.
Spring Up Owls!

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1970s

James Franklin Gardner (Mechanical Engineering Technology, ’74) was ordained a priest in the Charismatic Episcopal Church at The Cathedral of Christ the King in Sharpsburg, Ga. Gardner is a decorated combat veteran of the United States Army who served in Vietnam. He became a deacon in 2009.

1980s

Jeff VanDyke (Civil Engineering Technology, ’85) was named senior project manager for the HNTB Corporation’s Atlanta office in July 2016. VanDyke serves as the primary point of contact for large projects in the Office of Innovative Delivery and coordinates with the Georgia Department of Transportation to develop alternative delivery packages.

1990s

C. Ross Berry (MBA, ’97) joined Stroudwater Associates as a principal. Berry has more than 25 years of strategic, operational and financial leadership experience in healthcare.

Mike Chaffin (Political Science, ’93) was promoted to senior vice president, national sales manager for Fifth Third Bank’s business banking group. Chaffin is responsible for leading the business banking sales force.

Tom Donnelly (Accounting, ’92) was named senior accounting manager for major accounts and special projects at Beacon Management Services in July 2016. Donnelly is responsible for Beacon’s major accounts, client budgets and special projects that require senior-level financial expertise.

Lori Godfrey (Marketing and Professional Sales, ’97) joined the Community Bankers Association of Georgia (CBA) as director of legislative and regulatory affairs. Godfrey, who spent 18 years with the Georgia Department of Banking and Finance, represents the CBA at various events.

John Hensley (MBA, ’94) was named transportation group executive for CHA Consulting Inc., an engineering and construction management firm. Hensley oversees CHA’s initiatives to enhance the United States’ transportation infrastructure by providing design and planning solutions.

Kirk McMillan (MBA, ’96) joined Abraxas Business Services as principal of its business-brokerage office in Charleston, S.C. McMillan also is chief executive officer for RiseWell LLC and chair of Vistage Worldwide Inc.

Patrick Terry (Finance, ’90) was named principal in the audit practice of Windham Brannon, a leading provider of tax, audit,
accounting and advisory services. Terry has experience in a variety of industries, including technology, manufacturing, distribution and professional services.

Diane Daniels Adoma (Marketing, ’01) announced she will run for the Stonecrest City Council District 5 seat. Adoma said she plans to help foster economic development, jobs and environmental efforts in Stonecrest, a new city in DeKalb County, Ga.

Russ Armistead (Exercise Science, ’06) was named head varsity boys lacrosse coach at Woodstock High School in June 2016. Armistead also is a part of the school’s health and physical education department.

Abby Binkley (Health and Physical Education, ’06) was named executive director of the Clarksville-Montgomery County Education Foundation in June 2016. Binkley has administrative experience and taught for nine years in the school system based in Clarksville, Tenn.

Brandon Bryson (Political Science, ’06) was sworn in as chief magistrate court judge for Bartow County, Ga. Bryson is a Bartow County native who earned his juris doctor from Mississippi College School of Law.

Brian Carnes (M.S. Quality Assurance, ’04) was honored as the Cherokee County School District Teacher of the Year for 2017. Carnes has been at Sequoyah High School in Canton, Ga., for 12 years and currently teaches advanced-placement and honors chemistry courses.

Erin Cochran (Human Services, ’02) was named director of co-curricular activities for Sandhills Classical Christian School (SCCS). SCCS is located in Southern Pines, N.C.

Joe Coleman (Accounting/M.Acct., ’07/’11) was named senior tax manager for Moore Colson, a Marietta-based accounting firm. Coleman provides tax compliance and planning services for Moore Colson’s clients and their owners.

Matt Crawford (Construction Management, ’08) was recognized as the 2015-16 Georgia Utility Contractors Association Inc. Committee Chairman of the Year in July 2016. Crawford is the project manager for Crawford Grading and Pipeline Inc. in Luthersville, Ga.


Matt Gorman (MBA, ’08), an administrator for Floyd Polk Medical Center in Cedartown, Ga., was elected to the Georgia Hospital Association’s Center for Rural Health Board of Trustees. Gorman joined the staff at Floyd Medical Center in 2006 and serves the board as an at-large trustee.

Billy Grogan (Political Science/M.P.A., ’03/’08), chief of police for the City of Dunwoody since 2008, was named the 2016-17 president of the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police, an association that serves more than 500 police chiefs and command-staff law enforcement personnel.

Jarrett Hill (M.S. Conflict Management, ’05) joined entertainment outlet The Hollywood Reporter as a correspondent. Hill also served as guest speaker at the Tampa Bay Association of Black Journalists’ annual Griot Drum Awards in November 2016.

Dan Hultquist (MBA, ’01) was named director of learning and development for San Diego-based ReverseVision, the leading provider of software and technology for the reverse mortgage industry, in July 2016.

Dr. B. Rodney Jarvis (Chemistry/Biology, ’09) was awarded a doctorate in the field of genetics from the University of Georgia. Jarvis is participating in a post-doctoral fellowship in the Department of Orthopaedics at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston.

Brad Large (Marketing, ’09) was named dean of enrollment and financial aid at Wayland Academy, a private, coeducational college preparatory boarding and day school in Beaver Dam, Wisc.

Brad Leskoven (Accounting/M.Acct., ’00/’04) was named as a senior manager for Pershing Yoakley & Associates. Leskoven has more than 15 years of experience in public accounting.

Catherine Loftin (M.Acct., ’01) joined the Lucas Group as corporate controller. Loftin is responsible for the timeliness and accuracy of financial data, along with the finance department’s daily operations.

Ben Mallett (MBA, ’09) was promoted to division manager of marine operations and business planning for Yamaha Marine Group in July 2016. Mallett, who joined Yamaha in 2006, is deeply involved in business planning.

John McNamara (Finance/MBA, ’02/’14) serves as the assistant director of consumer lending, reporting and collections markets for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.
Pete Needham (MBA, ’03) was named senior project manager for the Tindall Corporation’s Georgia division. Needham leads the project management team at Tindall.

Bobby Neil (MBA, ’01) was named senior vice president of service delivery for American Traffic Solutions. Neil leads the service delivery organization at ATS, overseeing construction, field services, mobile speed, call center and violations processing.

Brian O’Keefe (MBA, ’01) was named senior business development manager for Steamist Co. Inc.

Nels S.D. Peterson (Political Science, ’01) was appointed by Gov. Nathan Deal as a judge on the Georgia Supreme Court. Peterson previously served on the Georgia Court of Appeals.

Valerie Pool (Music Performance, ’04) was one of six members chosen to participate in the new Atlanta Opera Studio program in 2016-17. Pool, a pianist and vocal coach, appears in featured and supporting roles in a variety of programs and special events.

Jerry Quan (Accounting, ’07) was announced as the 2016 East Cobb Citizen of the Year. Quan has served with the Cobb County Police Department for 28 years and currently is commander of Precinct 4.

John Riggs (MBA/D.B.A., ’00/’12) was named the executive director of the Centurion Sales Program for Stetson University’s School of Business Administration. Riggs will oversee Stetson’s new sales program beginning in the fall of 2017.

Henley Sawicki (Biology, ’04), the 2016 River Ridge High School Teacher of the Year, was presented a gift from Atlanta-based Arrow Exterminators. Arrow made a monetary donation to Sawicki’s classroom to help purchase laboratory resources.

Jennifer Smith (M.S. Nursing, ’07) joined Hamilton Neurosurgery and Spine Center as a family nurse practitioner at its location in Calhoun that opened in July 2016.

Jessica Wyatt Smith (M.Acct., ’08), former mayor of Lyerly, Ga., was named the controller at Redmond Regional Medical Center. Smith is responsible for the supervision and maintenance of accounting and finance records.

Ben Sosebee (History Education, ’08) was named interim head baseball coach for Cherokee High School in Canton, Ga. Sosebee, is in his ninth year of teaching social studies and coaching baseball at Cherokee.

Jack Turnbill (MBA, ’01) was named senior vice president of business development for Professional Aircraft Accessories, a Greenwich AeroGroup company. Turnbill is a seasoned aviation veteran who served in roles supporting commercial airlines worldwide for more than 20 years.

Leanna Wade (Human Services, ’08) was sworn in to practice law in Georgia in 2016. Wade graduated with magna cum laude honors from John Marshall Law School in December 2015.

Rachel Wasserman (M.Ed. Early Childhood Education, ’09), assistant principal at Woodstock Elementary School, was named the Georgia 2016 National Distinguished Assistant Principal in May 2016. Wasserman is in her third year of school administration after being a classroom teacher since 2006.

Jayme Wheeler (Exercise Science/M.A. Teaching Secondary Mathematics, ’07/’11) was named an instructor in the Division of Mathematics at Georgia Highlands College. Previously, Wheeler taught in the Bartow County and Polk County school systems.

Frank Ziller (Computer Science, ’07), vice president of the KSU Alumni Association, was named chief information officer for Intelliteach in June 2016. Ziller is responsible for information technology strategy, security, infrastructure and services.

Jeff Brown (Health and Physical Education, ’11) was named head varsity baseball coach at Woodstock High School in June 2016 after serving for three years as the squad’s pitching coach. Brown also is a part of Woodstock’s health and physical education department.

Alex Chung (Professional Sales, ’16) is co-founder and chief operating officer of StudyHubb, a mobile application designed to connect students with study partners.

Dr. Reid Cummings (D.B.A., ’14) was appointed to the board of commissioners of the Mobile Housing Authority in August 2016. Cummings is an assistant professor of finance and real estate, along with serving as the director of the Center for Real Estate and Economic Development at the University of South Alabama.

Allison da Silva (Finance, ’15) was chosen as a client analyst for Sterling Risk Advisors. Da Silva assists the client executive in managing relationships and providing customer service to the real estate and hospitality accounts.

Mackleen Desravines (M.A. Professional Writing, ’15) was named an instructor of English in Georgia Highlands College’s Division of Humanities.
Andrea Dobbins (MBA, '13) joined the World Floor Covering Association as executive director of the group’s philanthropic arm, the Floor Covering Industry Foundation. Dobbins is responsible for the forward direction, vision and growth of the FCIF.

Patsy Driver (M.S. Nursing, '14) joined Medi-Weightloss as a family nurse practitioner at its location in Marietta that opened in August 2016. Driver has more than 30 years of nursing experience.

Kathryn Fletcher (MBA, '14) was one of 40 professionals named as a 2016 “40 Under 40” honoree by Georgia Trend. Fletcher has been with Draffin & Tucker LLP, which supplies a full range of professional accounting services, since 2001.

Caroline Graham (Communication, ’14) was promoted to account executive for Rountree Group Integrated Communications. Graham’s responsibilities include account supervision, social media strategy, extensive media outreach, and communications plan development and implementation.

Dallas Hall (Sport Management, '13) joined T.G. Scott Elementary School in Forsyth, Georgia, as a physical education teacher. Hall earlier was named the head girls varsity soccer coach at Mary Persons High School.

Micheline Harris (Mathematics, '12) was named as a faculty member at Malden Catholic High School. Harris teaches math at the all-boys school in Malden, Mass.

Taylor Hartshorn (Communication, ’14) wrote and released her first novel just before her 25th birthday. Hartshorn’s Different Walks is self-described as a coming-of-age story.

Anthony Hawkins (Biology, '13) is expected to graduate with his medical degree from the University of Central Florida College of Medicine in May 2017. Hawkins will join Madigan Army Medical Center in Tacoma, Wash., to complete his residency in emergency medicine.

Chiquita Hawthorne (Communication/Early Childhood Education, ’11/’12) was named family/homeowner services coordinator for Habitat for Humanity of Northwest Metro Atlanta in Smyrna, Ga. Hawthorne works with families and future homeowners.

Jonathan Howard (Exercise Science/M.S. Applied Exercise and Health Science, ’14/’16) joined Georgia Highlands College as an instructor of physical education in the Division of Natural Science and Physical Education.

Lindsay Morgan (Communication, ’11) joined the Lucas Group, one of the top executive recruiting firms in North America, as a marketing coordinator. Morgan assists with public relations, content management and social media strategy.

Ashley Nealy (Information Systems/M.S. Information Systems, ’10/’11) was one of five individuals honored with a top government award for innovation at the Next Generation of Government Training Summit in Washington, D.C. Nealy works for the United States Department of the Treasury and is the founder and chief creative officer of Mindly Maven LLC.

Andrew Parker (Civil Engineering Technology, ’10), assistant public works director for the City of Dalton, was one of three individuals to be honored as an American Public Works Association 2016 Young Leader of the Year.

Haley Peterson (Marketing, ’12) joined the property management division of Avison Young, the world’s fastest-growing commercial real estate services agency.

Drew Raessler (M.S. Civil Engineering, ’16) was appointed as director of the Athens-Clarke County Transportation and Public Works Department. Raessler oversees the department’s broad responsibilities, from traffic engineering to stormwater infrastructure.

Eric Skates (Communication, ’10) was named vice president of marketing for Equity Prime Mortgage LLC. Skates maintains brand recognition and consistency for all of the marketing initiatives of Equity Prime’s Atlanta home office and local offices throughout the United States.

Prentice Stone (Exercise Science, ’16) was named one of five national recipients of the John McLendon Minority Postgraduate Scholarship, an award given to students who intend to pursue a graduate degree in athletics administration. Stone was a member of KSU’s inaugural football team in 2015 and the first player in the program to earn a degree.

Michael Touchton (Communication, ’11) was promoted to senior account agent for the William Mills Agency in July 2016. Touchton manages all aspects of client relationships, providing strategic guidance and acting as an advisor.

Chad Wilson (Early Childhood Education, ’11) was named interim head coach of the Coastal Carolina University men’s golf team for 2016-17. Wilson, in his second season at Coastal Carolina, is a former assistant men’s golf coach and student-athlete at KSU.
Kennesaw State University, a unit of the University System of Georgia, is an equal opportunity institution which does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, veteran status or disability.

Students in the Academy for Inclusive Learning and Social Growth and their supporters recently gathered for the first Inclusive Post-Secondary International Student Symposium, which provided an opportunity to share their experiences in an inclusive post-secondary environment.