Welcome to Campus Weekly

She’s a fighter - and the world is her stage

Musical Theatre BFA student and cancer survivor Molly Oldham in front of UNCG’s Taylor Theatre, October 2020. Photo by Martin. W. Kane, University Communications.

It was an early August day in the Midwest, and Molly Oldham was as excited as she could be to hit the road. She was packed and ready to relocate from Ohio to the UNCG campus, where she’d start her freshman year in the new Musical Theatre BFA program. She and five other students would make up the first cohort for the new program, and they had already gotten to know each other through phone texts and online group chats.

But that same week turned out to be a monumental turning point in her life. After going to the hospital upon experiencing increasingly severe headaches, Oldham received news that she had a brain mass the size of a tennis ball, and that it needed to be surgically removed immediately. Before she left the hospital, she would be diagnosed with Stage Three Anaplastic Ependymoma, a rare aggressive brain cancer that affects 300 people nationwide
each year.

Oldham underwent brain surgery to have the tumor removed, followed by seven weeks of daily proton radiation and months of daily intensive rehabilitation consisting of physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Family, friends, her new cohort, and faculty at UNCG all stepped up to support her in any way that they could. She continued to bond with her new classmates – in fact the diagnosis brought them closer together – as faculty and administrators at UNCG held her place in the program as she continued her treatment throughout the fall semester of 2019.

Classmates even traveled to her hometown of Akron, Ohio, to participate in the “Cabaret for a Cure” benefit that was held for Oldham, headlined by Broadway star Natalie Weiss. She wasn’t even on campus yet, and she had already formed lifelong friendships both inside and outside the BFA program.
After months of hard work and an unwavering determination to get to school, Oldham moved to Greensboro for spring semester 2020, exactly 5 months from the day of diagnosis.

Not only had Oldham missed many of the events and activities that normally await new
freshmen who arrive on campus in the fall, she was still struggling with the strain and challenges of treatment and rehabilitation. But she was finally on campus. She worked hard to keep up with classes and studio work as she dealt with frequent exhaustion, nausea, and a roller-coaster of emotions while she learned to navigate life not only as a new freshman in a strange place, but one who was working to beat back the physical and emotional toll of post-cancer recovery.

But Oldham’s arrival to campus would be short-lived. The COVID-19 pandemic struck early in the spring semester, and by mid-March, the University made the difficult decision to move all classes online, to close dorms, and send students home. She returned to Ohio, and continued to keep up with classwork and pursue rehabilitation. As the end of what would have been her freshman year arrived, Oldham found that she had only been on the UNCG campus for a total of five weeks.

As the looming pandemic began to upend lives, work, and school, Oldham was struggling each day to get through her classes and meetings. At one point she experienced a significant seizure and had to be transported to Duke Hospital in Durham. Being able to go home early in the spring might have been the best thing that could have happened to her.
“Corona happened at a good time for me because I got to go home and rest,” Oldham says. “And that was something I didn’t realize how desperately I needed. I was very sad that college was cut short, but at the same time, looking back on it, I don’t know if I would have been able to make it through the whole semester. I just couldn’t keep up like everyone else could, physically. So it happened at a good time.”

Fast forward to Fall 2020 semester, and Oldham is back on campus and doing well. Along with two fellow Spartan undergraduates with whom she had become close friends, she moved into her apartment in Greensboro on August 15, the one-year anniversary of her cancer diagnosis.

And how did she feel about coming back to campus during a pandemic?

“Because of my past health issues, I was super nervous to come back,” Oldham admits. “But the theatre department has done so much for Coronavirus. They have air filters in our singing rooms. We have special masks they built for us to perform in. I feel like the theatre department has done a really great job of making sure everyone feels safe.”

Currently, Oldham is taking one of the busiest semesters of the BFA program, and continues to deal with the lingering effects of her treatment and rehabilitation, including extreme fatigue which is typical for radiation patients. But she’s only a phone call or text away from her roommates, teachers, friends, and family who can come to her aid if she needs it. A network of classmates have a plan in place if Oldham needs to be taken back to Duke Hospital – her local post-cancer care facility – for emergencies.

Throughout Oldham’s difficult journey to becoming a Spartan, many family, friends, fellow students, and faculty have stepped up to help. But three Musical Theatre faculty members in particular, including Dominick Amendum, Erin Farrell Speer, and April Hill, have gone above and beyond to help her through these tumultuous times – all while working extra hard to develop the new Musical Theatre BFA, deal with the immense pedagogical challenges of the pandemic, and going through the process of recruiting for the second-year cohort. And on top of these challenges, Amendum was splitting his time between UNCG and working tirelessly as music supervisor for the opening of “The Prince of Egypt” in London’s West End Dominion Theatre.

Oldham and her faculty mentors all agree that one of the unique strengths of the program – and a big factor in what influenced Oldham to decide on coming to UNCG – is the emphasis on an individualized culture of care for the students, and a program that encourages a sense of family and community.

“So not only has the musical theatre family been an incredible support, but the School of
Theatre and UNCG as a whole has provided an incredible culture of care that could not have happened for Molly anywhere else,” says Oldham’s mother, Bunny.

Oldham’s mother has been instrumental in her daughter’s success both in terms of recovery and her performance as a student, but she is also a stalwart supporter of the new musical theatre program and UNCG more broadly. Speer and Amendum both note her significant role in helping to recruit other outstanding students and to help spread the word about the burgeoning BFA program.

“Molly has come so far in her work here at UNCG,” says Hill, who teaches voice in the program. “Being away from home for the first time is a huge adjustment for most freshmen, and since Molly was still recovering as she arrived at UNCG in the spring, she had huge obstacles to overcome. Singing is challenging physical work and stamina was a real issue at first, since students are expected to practice on a daily basis. It has been amazing to see Molly regain her strength and really apply herself.”

While Speer, Amendum, and Hill go extra miles to help their students, they also hold them to high standards and expectations. Even Oldham. While they took special care to accommodate Oldham’s late entrance into the program and her unique needs as she deals with recovery and survivorship, they also have held her to the same high standards as others in the program when it comes to pushing their students to grow, learn, and adapt. Professional musical theatre is not an easy business to be in and is highly competitive, so it is important to UNCG musical theatre faculty to prepare their students as best they can for what lies ahead.

In addition to continuing to support Oldham’s recovery, Speer and Amendum know they must also move forward with encouraging her full immersion into the Musical Theatre’s BFA program. “I think our job is also to consider how we celebrate that she’s on the other side of this,” says Amendum. “And train her like it never happened, in a way – train her like she’s one of the group and give her the same attention. We want to continue to work on finding normalcy for her and for our program, and get her to a place of being just one of the gang.”

Oldham’s experience with cancer has given her a new perspective on life, and ample raw emotion to draw from as a performer.

“Because of my cancer, I realize that I don’t take things for granted anymore,” she states. “At this point last year, I was re-learning to walk. I feel like now everything that I do has a lot more purpose. And there’s a lot more meaning behind the things I do. When I’m acting, I don’t feel like I have to pull as hard to get those emotions out – they just come to me.”

Oldham has plans to eventually land on Broadway, but she’s keeping her options open and
taking her mentors’ advice to push herself to move out of her comfort zone, to try new things, and to learn the many different aspects of professional musical theatre.

“You just need to be open to different possibilities,” she says, “because you’re not guaranteed anything in this life.”

Amendum and Speer note that they look to recruit students who have strong character, a personal story to tell, and who can grow and develop as human beings as well as professionals. And Oldham is well on her way down the path to thinking beyond just the acting, the singing, and the technical skills.

“I want to be someone who other people want to work with,” she says. “And when they think about someone they want to collaborate with, I want to be that kind of person.”

But her fight to survive now extends beyond campus, her major, and even her own life. Through her advocacy for pediatric cancer, Oldham has been able to use her voice to raise awareness and funding for others battling cancer.

She has had the opportunity to sing for a variety of cancer awareness events from Utah to Washington D.C., including singing the National Anthem in front of 20,000 people for the NHL Hockey Fights Cancer night. She has helped to raise thousands of dollars in her first year of survivorship and will continue to do so through her next project, “TMI, The Molly Impact,” which will bring awareness and funding to patients 18 to 24 years of age, an under-served age group.

*Story by Matthew Bryant, University Communications*
*Photography by Martin W. Kane, University Communications; Bunny Oldham, and Betty-Lin Fisher*

‘Bridge Ahead Initiative’ helps Weatherspoon weather pandemic
UNCG men’s basketball team visits “To the Hoop: Basketball and Contemporary Art” (February 6, 2020), Weatherspoon Art Museum, photography by Martin W. Kane, University Communications. Artwork: Jeff Koons, “One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series),” 1985, glass, steel, sodium chloride reagent, distilled water, and basketball, 64 ¼ x 30 ¾ x 13 ¼ in. Art Bridges, Bentonville, Arkansas. © Jeff Koons.

The Weatherspoon Art Museum has received a generous award of $40,000 from the Bridge Ahead Initiative, a project of the Art Bridges foundation.

The vision of arts patron Alice Walton, Art Bridges is dedicated to expanding access to American art by providing support to museums for exhibition development, collection loans, and programs. The Weatherspoon became an Art Bridges partner early this past year when it worked with the foundation to borrow artist Jeff Koons’s “One Ball Total Equilibrium Tank (Spalding Dr. J Silver Series).” The mesmerizing sculpture features a basketball hovering inexplicably at the center of a tank of water, and earlier this spring, it was the first artwork visitors saw as they entered the Weatherspoon’s exhibition, “To the Hoop: Basketball and Contemporary Art.”

That exhibition, like so many others across the country, went dark in mid-March as the Weatherspoon closed its doors in the wake of COVID-19. Not long after, Art Bridges announced its Bridge Ahead initiative, a direct response to closures and challenges brought on by the pandemic. The initiative allowed the foundation’s partner museums with budgets
under $30 million to apply for funding to offset financial needs created by the pandemic. Awarded in two phases, the grants support both activities pursued while museums are closed and projects undertaken as the museums open.

The Weatherspoon’s Phase 1 award has been used in multiple ways. It has supported additional photography of our exhibitions so that we can share them online, provided honoraria for arts and writing teachers to produce summer educational activities shared digitally, and allowed the museum to purchase its own Zoom webinar license in order to host live programs remotely. When the museum re-opened, Bridge Ahead funds for Phase 2 helped WAM equip the museum with protective equipment, social distancing signage, additional outdoor seating, and enhanced cleaning measures. In addition, the funding will allow us to build a custom mobile audio-visual cart for providing remote tours of the galleries in real-time for those groups that are no longer able to visit in person.

The overall support of Art Bridges is truly transformative. Because of this support, the Weatherspoon is able to continue sharing Jeff Koons’s incredible sculpture in the museum’s extended run of “To the Hoop,” and to make this exhibition, as well as other shows and programs, accessible in multiple ways both in and outside the museum.

**UNCG announces updates to spring calendar**

_The following message was sent to the campus community on Tuesday, Oct. 13._

Dear UNCG Community,

As we continue to move through our Fall 2020 semester at UNCG, we are also solidifying our plans for what comes next in the Spring 2021 semester. Today, we are announcing adjustments to the UNCG Spring 2021 calendar. We have reviewed our academic requirements and examined the best practices for maintaining our physical and mental health as we move through the year. We are following similar strategies that have worked well, while also making changes based on what we have learned. Based on discussions with faculty, students, and others across the higher education landscape, we have made decisions with a few key principles in mind:

- Maximize the time students have between Fall and Spring semesters so they can recharge, regroup, and have an extended winter break after a stressful fall.
- Avoid extending the length of the semester, pushing back exams, or changing the date of our Spring Commencement.
- Offer courses with maximum flexibility in mind. As in the current term, students will be able to enroll in a range of online, in-person, and hybrid options. This will allow
students to choose schedules that best fit their learning, living, and working lives.

Specifically:

- The first day of classes will be January 19. Starting one week later than planned provides an extended winter break (55 days), helps housing facilitate a safer environment for bringing students back, and respects and honors the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday.
- Like many campuses, we will eliminate the traditional Spring Break in order to limit mass movement of people to and from campus, which has been proven to fuel the spread of the virus here and among our home communities. We know that this is disappointing, but the evidence from the fall clearly dictates this decision is necessary.
- We have added a Health and Wellness Day on Wednesday, March 3. While we need to meet mandated guidelines for class hours in a compressed time frame, we also know students are facing significant pressures, and we hope this day without classes will be helpful.
- The Spring Holiday will remain Friday, April 2, and Reading Day will remain Thursday, April 29, as currently scheduled.
- Finals will remain Friday, April 30 to Thursday, May 6 as currently scheduled on our published calendar.

A more detailed calendar is available here. We will continue to provide updates in terms of course scheduling, housing, and other plans related to Spring 2021. You can expect to see additional communications on expanding our COVID-19 testing capabilities, evolution of our safety protocols, and ongoing updates to our operations as the situation merits. We ask for continued patience and kindness across our community, continued adherence to all policies and community standards, and continued vigilance as we navigate the remainder of this semester. Our goal is to make the UNCG experience as vibrant, valuable, and safe as possible for our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and visitors.

For the most up-to-date information, please monitor your email frequently, regularly visit the UNCG COVID-19 website, follow our @uncg social media channels, and download the UNCG Mobile app from the Google or iTunes app store app to receive push notifications directly to your phone.

Thank you.

Doing theater differently: ‘Marisol’ opens at UNCG
Two UNCG students in a scene from “Marisol”

This year’s UNCG Theatre season is anything but typical.

The challenges imposed by the pandemic might have, at first, made a live theater production seem like an impossible goal. How could actors, directors, designers, crew, and audience members participate in a production when the very act of being in the same space together – an essential part of theater – was not possible?

However, this week the season’s first show “Marisol” opens at UNC Greensboro, with a live performance for 25 UNCG students in a strictly socially-distanced Taylor Theatre, and available streaming for viewers at home Oct. 15-17, through www.uncgtheatre.com, with tickets priced at $5.

In the story, Marisol Perez, a young Puerto Rican woman, balances her Manhattan copy editing job and a life at home in her Bronx neighborhood, with a Guardian Angel by her side. But, the angel leaves her on her own, facing homelessness, prejudice, sexuality issues, and loss of faith. In a near-apocalyptic world, Marisol’s story unfolds as a journey through injustices of class and caste, race and gender, and economics.

Professor of theater Jim Wren, who has overseen more than 30 UNCG Theatre productions, is the director for “Marisol”, UNCG Theatre technical director Chip Haas is the production manager, and senior theater student Amber Bidwell is the stage manager. Read their words
below from several interviews about their production process, what they've learned, and what it means for theater students and for theater as a whole.

How did UNCG Theatre approach the production season for a pandemic era?

**CH:** June, I guess, is when we started having meetings. Several of us pulled together and formed a “what the heck are we going to do next semester” meeting. We knew that if there was any possibility of us doing live performances, it was important that we were going to do it mainly for the students. Our theater performances are for us to provide opportunities for our students, both the performers, but also for our design and production students. We have a very large BFA in design and production here, with over 60 students in the program, and doing online Zoom performances can work okay for actors, but does nothing for the design and production students. So we knew we had to take advantage of whatever opportunities would be presented to us, and we were determined to try to do something. Otherwise, there’s just no purpose for being here, because design tech is all hands-on. It doesn’t work well, just talking to them - they need to be practicing and doing it and all that. And once it became clear to us that the University would have opportunities for on-campus and face-to-face learning, we started figuring out our protocols and how we’re going to actually make this whole thing work. And a lot of us belong to different organizations across the country that are also working to find solutions, since this is a new world for everybody. So, I’ve sat in on many forums and meetings and, and emails and stuff from people saying “how are you
doing? And how are you running your theater program?” And everyone’s got a slightly different approach. But it was, you know, our concern was, how are we going to do this safely. And by the time we got to August, we pretty much dialed in what we were going to do.

**AB:** At our first design meeting, Chip really laid it down. He said: we’re trying to do all these things and have a season, but it’s going to have to be different. And at the very beginning I knew we had a new big challenge to overcome. I’m so glad we got to do a show and plan a season, but it’s with more caution, and we have to be much more aware of all our actions. It was unclear for a while if we’d get to have a show, but we’ve made it and we’ll do the performances and streamed production safely.

(What they did? For one thing, they decided on a one-week run for the shows, where at each performance 25 UNCG Theatre students would be allowed as audience members, and the production would be filmed for streaming for all other viewers. Seats for students are clearly labeled for spacing and masks are mandatory, for audience members and actors. The plan was approved by a consultant that reviewed CVPA procedures. For the streaming version, they’re running a two-camera shoot, with the ability to zoom in at certain moments, and to do some light editing before the production is made streamable. Despite the ability of the cameras to focus on certain actors at certain times, the technical aspects beyond the camera are still focused on the live production, in order to train theater students in staging and blocking for their craft. The result will be a high quality film of a live production.)
What has been different about staging and designing “Marisol” during COVID, as compared to how you would have done it pre-pandemic, and what have the biggest challenges been?

**JW:** There are multiple challenges, but I think perhaps the biggest challenge I’ve experienced is simply creating the world where the mask and distance is not a struggle, but a given. How can we, in a sense, relax into these restrictions and not – to use an acting term – “play the obstacle”? Interestingly, “Marisol” contains a theatricality and takes place in a world where the “new normal” of the pandemic is easily navigated. The most obvious physical challenges deal with both the intimacy and violence contained in the script. We, as a company, have hopefully created a theatrical convention and language that conveys both in this world.

**CH:** A lot of meetings, a lot of prep time... Fortunately, the show “Marisol” is a fairly contemporary show, so we’re able to pull a lot from previous shows, and for costumes, things from actors’ personal wardrobes as well as from the costume inventory. When a show’s contemporary, we can often pull it together from what we have, and that’s going to be our theme for the whole academic year. We’re working with tight budgets and therefore motivated to get more creative. We tell the students: It’s not a problem; it’s just a different challenge. For students, it puts them in a tighter budget world, which is probably what
they’re going to be working in when they graduate. Sometimes you have to do something on a small budget and make it look good. And once again, they’ve stepped up to the challenge really well. I want to give a lot of credit to our students and how they’ve handled this.

For safety, we’ve limited costume changes. Normally, this show would have had a lot more variety of costume changes, but since we’re reducing person-to-person contact and maintaining social distancing, costuming was simplified – very few costume changes over the course of the show.

Jim Wren did some interesting blocking on the show. For some of the stage combat moments, it’s a more stylized fashion. So the actors are physically separated even though they’re fighting. And then, one of the debates we had was how we were going to handle masking. The costume designer ultimately decided that the masks are part of their costume. They fit with their characters, and are part of their character. We had the discussion of ‘do we go with the uniform mask on everybody? And kind of hope they just kind of aren’t noticeable? Or do we just embrace the fact that they’re wearing masks?’ And for this show, we decided to embrace it. We may do differently for another show, but for this one, they are part of the action of the show. The show is set kind of in a post-apocalyptic moment, so the mask fits that. It does create vocal challenges but it still blends well into this show.

**AB:** We’ve had to do regular temperature checks, and screening questions every single day, for each person involved in the production – actors, directors, anybody who comes into the rehearsal space. There was a lot of “guys, we need social distance; hey, guys, no clumping up in areas.” And I’m always thinking of how we can safely do this, and reminding everyone that you need masks at all times and social distance at all times. Make sure you come in a little early to get your temperature checked. And it still doesn’t change, no matter what else is happening. Everyone working on the stage or backstage has to be checked. We are always implementing all of these safety protocols and cautionary procedures.

This show is very physical, with a lot of fight combat in it. And Professor Wren had to figure out a way that we could do fight combat, but without actors touching each other, or even getting close to one another. It’s strange, and at first, it was like: is this really gonna work? But it really does fit in like, some weird, artsy way. I think it works, and it’s really interesting having the director work with actors who are all six feet apart and everyone’s wearing masks. And for me, the challenge is all about meeting new safety protocols, making sure I’m on top of everything, and making sure I have a lot of communication with my production manager and with the director.
What has surprised you the most, or what are the things you’ve learned or been inspired by?

**JW:** I’ve been most inspired by the energy and determination of the entire community of students and faculty who have embraced all of the safety protocols in order to create their work. Everyone dove into the process with full commitment.

**CH:** Our students have bought in quite well to this. Really. And I’d say overall UNCG students have done really well as far as COVID safety. And our theater students handled what they needed to do to carry out the production and campus life safely. I’m really pleased with how the students at UNCG have done. Because we’re still here, we’re still going.

**AB:** I think of how social distance is something many people consider from the audience perspective. But it’s just as important for the designers and all the people that create a production. And each day we’re building this, we didn’t really know how long we’d be doing it. Would we actually have a show? And every day, it was like, wow, we did this. Just like the character in the show, we worked in the new reality we’re living in. The story turned out to be very relevant to the time that we’re living right now.

Are there interesting or useful things that you have discovered during this process
that you’ll take with you to future productions?

JW: Well, I think everyone jumped to the “Zoom reading” model of performance pretty quickly. I think that’s a quick Band Aid, but not a long-term solution. I myself am having a bit of “Zoom fatigue” and don’t relish the idea of spending more time in front of my computer. I think work that is being done exploring new spaces, outdoor presentations, drive-in productions, etc., are some of the more exciting ideas.

AB: I’m relatively new to stage management, and I think everything that’s happened during the show I’ll be taking with me into the real world. The way that the rehearsal space was created I’ll take with me because it’s like connecting with the actors in a weird social distancing way. Usually I would have snacks for them, so they can come up to my table, and we can chit chat during break. But now, when we have a few minutes, we go outside, so for the connection with the actors that I had to figure out something new. It’s a lot of solving problems differently, trying to think outside of the box with it.

And, even though we’re in this pandemic, I still want theater and rehearsals and performance to be fun. I still wanted everyone involved to feel positive and hopeful that we actually get to do this show and finish the season. I think, even though the world that we’re living in isn’t the best right now, I still want it – some fun, just a little fun. And I think our production of “Marisol” has brought a lot of hope, to the future of theater, and especially for UNCG.

Interviews by Susan Kirby-Smith, Matt Bryant, and Avery Campbell, University Communications
Photography by Jiyoung Park, University Communications

Additional COVID testing added for Thursday Oct. 15

Due to increased interest in testing, UNCG will host an additional COVID-19 Testing Clinic this Thursday, October 15, from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. in the EUC Maple Room. This is an important part of efforts to keep our community as healthy as possible. As a reminder, test results tell you only whether you have the virus at the date and time you get tested, so students and employees are encouraged to take advantage of all opportunities to get tested.

To provide maximum flexibility, no appointment is necessary for Thursday’s clinic. Pre-registering with the vendor, Starmed, will help minimize any waiting time. You can pre-register by doing either of the following:

- Text COVID to (704) 850-6996
• Visit https://unityphm.com/campaigns/starmed

As a reminder, this clinic is for individuals who:

1) **Do not have COVID-19 symptoms** (are asymptomatic); and
2) **Have not been in close contact** recently with someone who has tested positive.

If you have symptoms, please stay home and contact your health care provider to determine if you need to be tested.

Some important details:

- Participation is completely voluntary.
- A sample will be collected from the nose (nasal swab, not the deeper nasopharyngeal swab) and tested to see if the virus is present (i.e. if you have COVID-19).
- You will receive your results directly from StarMed.
- You will be given the opportunity to sign a waiver that allows StarMed to report their results directly to the **UNCG Case Management Team**.
- By law, StarMed must report all results to the Public Health Department. Public Health, in turn, will inform UNCG if an employee tests positive.
- Information about what to do if you test positive will be provided onsite. Additional information is also available on the **UNCG COVID-19 website**. General information about COVID-19 testing is also available [here](#).
- There is no cost for testing. StarMed will file with your insurance for reimbursement. Regardless of whether insurance pays or not, you will not have to pay anything.

**Employee voting information and policy update**

The early voting period in North Carolina begins on Thursday, October 15. For information on voting sites and hours in Guilford County, including the early voting site at the Kaplan Center for Wellness, visit the [Guilford County Board of Elections website](#).

As we enter the last weeks of the fall 2020 election season, please take into consideration the following reminders. The University fully supports the rights that each of us has as a private citizen to participate in the political process. As a University employee, though, it is important to be aware that public resources may not be used in support of, or in opposition to, partisan political campaigns. The UNC System Office has published a comprehensive memoir that addresses these issues in detail. For quick reference, we have highlighted sections of the memo below that answer several frequently asked questions. If you have additional questions, please contact Nikki Baker at (336) 334-4225 or
No employee may engage in political activity while on duty. Political activity includes any action directed toward the success or failure of a candidate, political party, or partisan political group. This includes campaigning and/or taking an active part in managing a campaign. N.C.G.S. §126-13; State Human Resources Policy (Section 3, page 26, and page 35); Section 300.5.1 of the UNC Policy Manual.

Voting is not allowed as work time. Most polling stations are open extended hours and should allow most employees to vote before or after work. Additionally, employees have other options, such as early voting or voting during their scheduled meal break. Management may allow employees to use available vacation/bonus leave or comp time for hours missed during the employee’s regular work schedule for voting purposes. Management, to the extent business operations allow, may provide employees a flexible work schedule so that they can make up the missed time within the same work week. State Human Resources Policy (Section 5, page 17).

Community Service Leave may be used only for working inside a polling facility in a non-partisan, unpaid role, such as assisting voters with the voting process. If an employee is receiving any payment for such activities or is standing outside the polling facility to distribute candidate information, then vacation, bonus leave, or available comp time must be used. N.C.G.S. §126-13; State Human Resources Policy (Section 5, pages 17, and 18.1).

UPDATE: The North Carolina Office of State Human Resources has recently provided an exception to Community Service Leave to allow up to three days (24 hours) of paid leave for state employees to become election workers during the 2020 election cycle due to the impacts of COVID-19. Use of this leave requires demonstrated need of volunteers from the County Board of Elections where the employee resides, supervisory approval, and proof of time served. More information is available at their FAQ page: https://oshr.nc.gov/community-service-leave-poll-workers-faqs.

In general, no employee may use their position to secure support for, or to oppose, any candidate or issue in an election involving candidates for office or party nominations. In addition, no individual or group may use state or University funds, services (including mail and email service), supplies (including letterhead and postage), equipment (including telephones, computers, photocopiers, and fax machines), vehicles, or other University property to secure support for, or to oppose, any person or issue in any election. This prohibition applies equally to University faculty, staff, students, and to individuals external to the University. N.C.G.S. §126-13; Section 300.5.1 of the UNC Policy Manual.

Students who have questions about the voting process should be directed to the Office of...
Leadership and Civic Engagement with the Division of Student Affairs. They are able to address the particular details that uniquely apply to students’ situations.

**Update on campus and Fall Commencement**

Per the Chancellor’s email message earlier this week, UNC Greensboro been conducting more testing on campus and will continue to expand those efforts. The University is watching the data about our campus daily, knowing that conditions can rapidly change.

Right now, the University is executing plans effectively, thanks to our supportive community. We have reported our first cluster, and impacted students are being cared for while we engage in our contact tracing protocols. As has been previously communicated, if data, including metrics like multiple clusters, indicates we should change plans and move instruction to an online-only environment, or make other operational or academic adjustments, the University will do so without hesitation and communicate plans quickly.

As we look ahead, there are some things you should know:

**Fall Commencement:** Last week, the Chancellor sent a message to our graduating class from last May and our upcoming December graduates to tell them about upcoming commencement plans. Clearly, a large, traditional December commencement is not viable based on current state guidelines and county health directives. So, UNCG will host a virtual commencement ceremony for undergraduate and master’s students at 10:00 a.m. on December 11. A virtual doctoral hooding ceremony will take place in January (date TBD). The University has asked our May 2020 graduates to join these events as well. As you likely know, our May class did not have the opportunity for a traditional graduation ceremony because of the rapid pace of change last Spring. The University is working with student leaders on plans, and will communicate more on this in the weeks to come so you can start planning.

**Events and Operations:** Our facilities will remain operational in their current state, with appropriate increases in access to the Kaplan Center and other shared facilities as state directives dictate. The University will maintain strict limitations on indoor and outdoor events as previously communicated (10 people indoors, 25 people outdoors for social gatherings, not including activities related to instruction or those otherwise regulated by specific guidelines in the governor’s executive orders).

**Shield our Spartans:** The University asks for continued vigilance from our students, faculty, and staff. Don’t host large events. Don’t go to large events. (Students have been doing a great job on this too!) UNCG Police and Greensboro Police will continue enforcing
the governor’s orders. Violations of these orders are criminal offenses and subject to disciplinary action under the Student Code of Conduct. Employees who do not adhere to our community standards may also be subject to disciplinary action. The University appreciates that students are starting to help us identify problem areas and anticipate gatherings. If you have concerns about a rumored event or party, please report it through the COVID-19 Incident Form: go.uncg.edu/covidconcern.

RISE Network events for October

UNCG’s Research and Instruction in STEM Education (RISE) Network is hosting several events in late October as part of its mission to expand networks of research and technology educators. All events are free and open to everyone unless noted otherwise.

- **Oct. 22: “Once Upon a Time: Telling Stories about Science” with Joe Palca** - Joe Palca, NPR’s science correspondent, will share a Zoom lecture on his experience with science and storytelling. 3 p.m. Register here.
- **Oct. 22: Joe Palca Q&A session for UNCG students** - Following his lecture, Joe Palca will host a Q&A session for students. 4 p.m. Register here.
- **Oct. 27-29: “Picture a Scientist” movie screening** - “Picture a Scientist” is a feature-length documentary film chronicling the groundswell of researchers who are writing a new chapter for women scientists. A biologist, a chemist, and a geologist lead viewers on a journey deep into their own experiences in the sciences. This film is available for individual viewing from Oct. 27 through Oct. 29, and will be followed by discussion groups on Oct. 29 at 3:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. RSVP deadline is October 21.
- **Oct. 29: Additional Joe Palca Q&A sessions** - Joe Palca will return to speak to UNCG faculty, staff, and community at 3 p.m. and administrators at 4 p.m. Register here.

UNCG Online call for faculty award nominations

The Division of Online Learning facilitates an annual award to honor a faculty or staff member who has demonstrated excellence in developing, supporting, and/or teaching of online courses and programs at UNCG. The goal is to showcase outstanding teaching and to recognize development and support efforts that create engaging online learning experiences. This recognition will promote innovation and improve the quality of UNCG online courses and programs.

This year’s award recipient will be notified in January 2021. Nominations should be submitted no later than November 13, 2020. The award winner will receive an honorarium of $3,000.
Criteria:
Faculty and staff members can be nominated for online teaching, development, and support activities conducted in the 2020 calendar year. Self-nominations are accepted. Faculty and staff can be nominated for exemplary work related to online learning, including but not limited to:

- Teaching online courses
- Development of online courses or programs
- Effort to enhance online student success
- Any combination of the above

Nomination Process:
Students, staff, faculty, or administrators can submit a nomination. The UNCG Online Academy of Online Professors will constitute the Screening and Selection Committee. The nomination packet should include:

- A letter of nomination detailing the qualifications of the nominee and a description of the online course and/or support service (300 words)
- A brief statement on the impact or innovation of the nominee’s work (100 words)
- A letter of support from the nominee’s department chair, dean, or direct supervisor
- Student testimonials (maximum of 3); must be from the last 3 years
- Peer evaluations (maximum of 3)
- Course and instructor evaluations (maximum of 3)

Please send nominations and supporting documents via email submission by November 13, 2020, to Nichole McGill, ntmcgill@uncg.edu

For questions on the UNCG Award for Excellence in Online Education please contact Dr. Karen Bull, Dean, The Division of Online Learning, kzbull@uncg.edu.

National Transfer Student Week

Spartan faculty and staff are encouraged to help celebrate National Transfer Student Week by letting our UNCG transfer students that you, too, were a transfer student. If you weren’t a transfer student, you can still let them know you support them. Feel free to use the following transfer support buttons on your social media profile for the week of October 19 – 23, and we encourage you to post about your transfer experience using the tags @UNCG and #transferstudentweek.
As faculty and staff transfer champions, it is vitally important that we build awareness of
common transfer barriers and the diverse student needs and identities within our transfer populations. Although the transition between institutions is inherently complex, we believe that transfer is a good and valuable pathway to bachelor's degree completion.

See UNCG’s Transfer Week 2020 page: https://admissions.uncg.edu/transfer-week-2020/

For more information on National Transfer Student Week: https://www.nists.org/national-transfer-student-week

Campus Culture Survey - Inclusive Environments

Note: The following is based on a pre-COVID-19 survey, and although the University has since established fully-online teaching, learning, and administrative support, the survey’s findings are still very relevant and important to understanding our students’ perception of UNCG campus culture and support.

What do our students say about the inclusive environment created on campus?

In order to address that question, the iBelong Project was launched in Spring 2019 to better understand student experiences at UNCG. The project utilized the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) survey developed by the National Institute for Transformation and Equity.

This is the final part of a three-part series that highlights the results of the survey, and how that information can be useful for faculty and staff in their interaction with students.

There were three distinct findings from the CECE survey. First, students agreed that they perceived diversity to be a priority at UNCG. 81% agreed that diversity is a major priority and 79% agreed that UNCG is committed to fostering an inclusive community. The data supports that the work to create an inclusive environment has been received by the students on campus.

The second and related finding was that students are not as clear about the appropriate mode to report issues related to bias on campus. 63% agreed that there were sufficient mechanisms for reporting. The Dean of Students Office, Chancellors Fellow for Diversity and Inclusion, and the Title IX office are all working on clarifying the structure and exploring ways to make it more student friendly.

The final theme as it related to diversity and inclusion was that students reported they had varied experiences with teachers successfully engaging students in classroom conversations about diversity and inclusion. 58% of students felt their teachers had skills to facilitate
conversations about inequity and 60% felt teachers had skills to address diversity issues that arise in the classroom. The UTLC is expanding programming that addresses sustained dialogue/civil discourse in the classroom in order to support faculty in this area.

How was this Culturally Engaging Campus Environments survey conducted? 7,000 undergraduate students were randomly sampled from the UNCG roster to provide a representative sample of our student population. Selected students were then invited by email to complete the survey, and students needed to complete at least the first major section – 53 questions (21%) – of the survey in order to be included in the final sample. The final sample used to compile the results included 1,127 undergraduates, including online and transfer students, and their demographic data mirrored the general demographics of the UNCG student body.

The survey is based on a conceptual framework that identifies external and internal factors that impact student success, some of which include family, finances, employment, demographics, initial academic dispositions, and academic preparation. It seeks to showcase student voices and create conversations about inclusive excellence, learning, and sense of belonging.

The specific goal of the iBelong Project is to understand how students experience our campus now, and how to help the University better meet the learning, professional, and personal needs of all of our current and future students.

A full report can be found at UNCG’s iBelong website sa.uncg.edu/ibelong. A feedback form on the website allows you to share your reaction and input.

See Part 1 in this series on the Campus Culture Survey.

See Part 2.

**In Memoriam: Rochelle Brock**

Dr. Rochelle Brock passed away this past Wednesday following a multi-year battle with cancer.

Rochelle joined UNCG in 2015 as Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC), a position she would hold until 2018 when she returned to the ELC faculty. Prior to joining UNCG, Rochelle served on the faculty of Indian University Northwest where she was the Executive Director of the Urban Teacher Education Program, as well as serving on the faculty of Purdue University.
Rochelle was an internationally recognized scholar in Black feminist theory, urban education, and multicultural education. Rochelle’s work impacted not only the fields of education and social justice, but also her students and colleagues. Her students were deeply impacted by her writings, teachings, and mentoring.

Those who were fortunate enough to work with Rochelle know of her warmth, wisdom, and absolutely fantastic wit and sense of humor. She had a special energy that is hard to put into words – dualities come to mind of caring but direct, wise but curious, steadfast but droll. Rochelle worked tirelessly towards the transformative power of education in the lives of students, especially students who are Black, Indigeous, and/or Persons of Color (BIPOC). She worked to create a greater sense of community, and her time in the SOE and ELC will have a lasting impact on our organization.

She will be deeply missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with Rochelle’s family and her community of colleagues, students, and friends.

A celebration of life in honor of Rochelle will take place in the spring. More information will be disseminated as it becomes available.

**In Memoriam: Sultan Albogami**

One of our international students, Sultan Albogami, passed away last week.

Sultan was a senior in the Computer Science program on a scholarship from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission. He passed away while visiting his brother in Washington, D.C. Sultan is remembered for his uncanny ability to establish trust and rapport with people of all ages and cultures, his passion for all things tech, and his commitment to doing his very best, whether in the classroom, at work, or in clubs through which he was involved.

Our hearts go out to Sultan’s family and friends, those who knew and loved him, and other Spartans who are touched by this loss, especially our tight-knit community of international students and scholars, those in the Computer Science Department and the College of Arts and Sciences.

**Dr. Sherine Obare**
Dr. Sherine Obare (Joint School of Nanoscience and Nanoengineering) received new funding from the Georgia Institute of Technology/Primary: National Science Foundation for the project “NNCI: Southeastern Nanotechnology Infrastructure Corridor (SENIC).”

The Southeastern Nanotechnology Infrastructure Corridor (SENIC) is a partnership between two southeastern nanotechnology centers along the I-85 corridor with complementary tool sets and ex-pertise: the Institute for Electronics and Nanotechnology (IEN) at the Georgia Institute of Technology (GT) in Atlanta, GA and the Joint School for Nanoscience and Nanoengineering (JSNN), an academ-ic collaboration between North Carolina A&T State University (NCA&T) and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) in Greensboro, NC. SENIC has operated as a National Nanotechnology Coordinated Infrastructure (NNCI) site since September 2015 and has developed its vision and goals with input from its advisory board as part of a strategic plan that was initially developed in 2016 and refined in 2017. This strategic plan forms the basis for this renewal proposal, with programs and initiatives in support of the strategic goals being modified based on the lessons learned during the first 5 years of the NNCI program.

The SENIC vision is to be a premier nano-fabrication and nano-characterization resource to southeastern US user communities from academia, small and large companies, and government organizations, providing tools, staff expertise, educational and outreach activities, as well as societal implications of nanotechnology programs.

This vision is supported by the following five strategic goals and the programs and initiatives in sup-port of these goals are discussed in the later sections of the project description.

1. Develop and Serve Diverse User Base: The goal is for SENIC to develop and serve a user base primarily from the southeastern US that is diverse in terms of its (1) technical and scientific background (serving both traditional and non-traditional users), (2) demographics (gender, ethnic-ity and level of education), and (3) affiliations (4-year and 2-year colleges, small & large compa-nies, government). Our quantitative goal for the second 5-year period is to increase the number of external users by 10%
per year, with an even distribution between external academic and industry users.

2. Develop Strong Synergies between Partners: The goal is for SENIC to appear as a single user facility with two locations to outside users while developing strong partnership initiatives that strengthen staff expertise, fabrication and characterization capabilities, as well the education & outreach and SEI programs offered by the two partners.

3. Expanding Capabilities based on Future Research Trends: The goal is for SENIC to develop a plan for expanding the SENIC nano-fabrication and nano-characterization capabilities based on future research needs of current and future users. In particular, we plan to add and/or upgrade at least 10 tools (or unique capabilities) per year.

4. Develop Educational & Outreach and SEI Programs Targeting the Southeast: The goal is for SENIC to focus on the most effective education & outreach (particularly workforce development at the undergraduate, graduate and community college level) and SEI programs for the south-eastern US target clientele and develop measurable metrics for these programs.

5. Assist NNCI Network in Becoming More Than the Sum of its Parts: The goal is for SENIC to assist the NNCI and its Coordinating Office in strategic initiatives that strengthen the network.

**Dr. Brian Robinson**

Dr. Brian Robinson (University Libraries) received new funding from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History for the project “‘No Longer Yours’: Contextualizing and Emphasizing Freedom Seekers of North Carolina.”

Funding will support the development of a digital textbook that highlights the lives and conditions of people enslaved. By providing a history of the social dynamics and networks, geography, local laws, and conditions of daily work and life, this text will provide the reader with insights into the local circumstances of those who sought freedom. This resource will help new learners, who may think of the Underground Railroad in vague and general terms, connect to the lived realities of people who were enslaved in North Carolina and the
strategies they used to seek freedom.

Information will be derived from both primary and secondary sources and from digital and analog materials. Observations and examples from scholarly works (Freddie Parker’s Running For Freedom: Slave Runaways in North Carolina 1775-1840, Robert S. Starobin’s Letters of American Slaves, William Still’s The Underground Railroad and John W. Blassingame Slave Testimony: Two centuries of letters, speeches, interviews, and autobiographies) will be carefully selected and presented in formats accessible to learners of all ages. Primary sources drawn from the North Carolina Works Progress Administration (WPA) narratives, NC Runaway Slave Advertisements, People Not Property, and the Race and Slavery Petitions Project will play a central role in helping learners conceptualize slavery and freedom-seeking through concrete examples.

Dr. Edna Tan

Dr. Edna Tan (Teacher Education and Higher Education) received new funding from the Trustees of Boston University for the project “Developing a Network to Coordinate Research on Equity Practices and Cultures in STEM Maker Education.”

The RCN: Developing a Network to Coordinate Research on Equity Practices and Cultures in STEM Maker Education is a four year Advancing Informal Science Learning (AISL) project that will bring together scholars and practitioners working at the intersection of equity and interdisciplinary making education in STEM. The researchers’ driving purpose is to collectively broaden STEM participation in the United States through pursuing common research questions, sharing resources, and incubating emergent inquiry and knowledge across multiple working sites of practice.

The network aims to build capacity for research and knowledge building in consequential and far-reaching ways by leveraging combined efforts of a core group of scholars, practitioners, and an extended network of formal and informal education partners in urban and rural sites serving groups underrepresented in STEM. Making learning spaces can be particularly fruitful spaces for STEM learning toward equity because they foster what we
call critical creative inquiry: interest-driven, collective, and community-oriented learning in making for social and community change. Equitable processes are rooted in a commitment to understand and build on the skills, practices, values, and brilliance of communities marginalized in STEM; providing opportunities for high quality life-long learning across multiple spaces; and actively working to position learners as knowledgeable and creative individuals already situated in intellectually and culturally rich communities.

The Network will be led by a multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary PI team of researchers from different geographic regions of the United States.

**Newsmakers: Gilliam, Little, Osborne, Kiss**

Whether researchers with timely insights or students with outstanding stories, members of the UNCG community appear in print, web and broadcast media every day. Here is a sampling of UNCG-related stories in the news and media over the week:

- Jacque Gilliam was featured with an article in MOD Society. [The feature.](#)
- Dr. Thomas Little spoke to WFMY News2 about the importance of the vice presidential debate. [The piece.](#)
- Counseling graduate student Nicole Osborne spoke to the New Pittsburgh Courier about health and wellness during quarantine. [The article.](#)
- Dean John Kiss spoke on Weekly Space Hangout about growing plants in space. [Watch here.](#)