True partnership occurs when collaborators create new value together – sharing vision, expertise, and resources to accomplish mutual goals. In this issue, you’ll find stories on just a few of the ways UNC Greensboro faculty, staff, and students are collaborating, both internally and externally, to create that value and a better world for us all.

You’ll learn about Guilford County’s and UNCG’s unique approach to battling the opioid epidemic. Lives are being saved by the translation of research into practice, with efforts informed by those in recovery, Guilford’s Emergency Medical Services and other local health care providers, and UNCG scholars and scholarship. (While social work students gain hands-on experience with this state-of-the-art intervention, ensuring we have a next generation of professionals trained in evidence-based practice.)

On campus, faculty and students are partnering across disciplines, and bringing in the public, to re-envision the humanities. The aim is to improve student success, strengthen our workforce, and seek answers to the big, transformative questions that shape our lives and communities.

And about 30 miles north of campus, faculty, teachers, students, and their families are co-creating the Moss Street Partnership School. From conducting novel research on enhancing literacy to developing innovative ways to tailor existing research to the specific needs of their students, the MSPS team is committed to improving educational outcomes for elementary school students.

It’s the collaboration of law enforcement, community leaders, and scholars that successfully deters violence in communities across the state. It’s the partnership between a patient and physician that leads to better health outcomes. It’s the ties of friendship that join Grateful Dead fans across the world and across time. At UNCG, we understand that we are truly better together.

TERRI L. SHELTON, PHD
Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement
Most of us don't appreciate the thousands of steps we take each day without stumbling or falling. Maybe we should.

“You’re within an inch of tripping every time you take a step,” says Associate Professor of Kinesiology Chris Rhea. “Yet, most of the time we don’t.”

Since his doctoral studies, which focused on how people use vision to navigate their environment, Rhea has looked for ways to help those whose walking is impaired due to injury or illness.

“We’ve been studying how we use vision to walk around in the world,” he says. “What if we can control someone’s vision and use that to control how they walk?”

Virtual reality technology – which has been getting more compact, cheaper, and more user friendly – is allowing Rhea to do just that.

When he joined UNCG in 2011, he started the Virtual Environment for Assessment and Rehabilitation Laboratory, or VEAR Lab. Since then, a string of projects, applications, and research by Rhea and his colleagues has begun to unlock the technology’s potential.

One application, which netted Rhea a patent in 2018, uses virtual reality – or VR – to retrain people who have trouble walking.

Studies of how people walk have revealed that each step we take is a little different from the one before. “Initially,” says Rhea, “they looked like random variations in our walking patterns.”

But, using pattern recognition algorithms, researchers have begun to identify hidden signatures – like fingerprints – within the seemingly random variations.

“We think these hidden patterns relate to a healthy person’s ability to adapt their walking behavior,” Rhea says. “If you see you are about to step off a curb, you’ve got to adapt your walking behavior, so you can do it without falling over.”

But for someone who’s suffered a stroke, a knee injury, or other medical condition that affects their walking ability, “they’re going to have a different signature.”

In the VEAR Lab, subjects – wearing goggle-like VR headsets or watching a video monitor – are told to match their steps to those of a virtual avatar as they walk on a treadmill.

“You’re just playing a game we all played in kindergarten – follow the leader,” Rhea says. But concealed within the avatar’s virtual steps are subtle cues designed to shift the patient’s movement.

“It’s the small hidden patterns that we embed in there,” he says “that we think can build up a person’s adaptive capacity, lost due to injury, aging, or disease.”

Rhea’s new patent is for the technology that embeds these adaptive patterns into the software driving the digital avatar.

There are many ways VR could improve rehabilitation.

Rhea’s doctoral student Chanel LoJacono is currently working on a VR headset program to bring a virtual obstacle course to life at a patient’s location, rather than having a patient travel to a special facility. This could make cutting-edge therapies less expensive and more accessible.

“We’re a ways from this, but imagine if you could check out a VR rehab headset. You’re with a human therapist every Monday, but you get to take one of these home,” Rhea says. “I get to play a game, and the game gets harder as I get better.”

By Mark Tosczak

Learn more at go.uncg.edu/rhea

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BACK IN ACTION

With $1 million in funding from the U.S. Department of Defense, Rhea’s team has developed a smartphone-based device that can be strapped to someone’s thigh to precisely measure their balance, providing objective data to physical therapists and helping them measure a patient’s improvement over time.

The military wants the technology to help assess head trauma in people who have been exposed to explosions. But Rhea is also using it to assess the impact of a 12-week rehab program to improve balance in older adults – part of a National Institutes of Health study led by Kinesiology’s Dr. Louise Raisbeck.

Just as Apple Watches can now alert their owners to some types of heart problems, Rhea foresees a day when personal technology could alert us to problems with our movement.
WHEN MANY OF US THINK ABOUT HUMAN TRAFFICKING, WE IMAGINE A KIDNAPPING AT THE BORDER. BUT OFTEN THAT’S NOT THE CASE—in fact, it’s just as prevalent in our own communities, says John Weil of UNCG’s N.C. Network for Safe Communities.

“People have this vision of somebody loaded into the trunk of a car and moved to another state,” he says. “In many cases in our communities, sex trafficking may be a process where a pimp builds a romantic relationship—maybe with a high-school kid they find on social media, someone who appears vulnerable.”

“Then it’s, ‘We need money for rent. Can you do this favor just one time?’” he adds. “Once you cross a threshold into victimization, you feel like you don’t have anywhere to go—you’re trapped and under the control of the trafficker.”

Weil and his colleague Dr. Stacy Sechrist have spent the last 10 years partnering with the three U.S. Attorneys’ Offices across North Carolina, using data-driven strategies to crack down on gun, drug, gang, and domestic violence. Now, they are focused on a newer trend: gangs entering into human trafficking, enticed by the difficulty law enforcement has in tracking that activity.

“A gang might use drugs and guns to make money, but these are finite resources that can be seized by police,” explains Weil. Pimps rely on the ability to control their victims, a different type of resource that’s not so easily confiscated and is, worse yet, reusable.

Thanks to Weil’s and Sechrist’s reputation for working with communities across the state to deter violence, in 2019 they were awarded a Governor’s Crime Commission grant to explore this issue in North Carolina. With the funding, they’re gathering and analyzing data from seven eastern counties to better understand what sex and labor trafficking looks like in rural communities.

Sechrist says they’ve found parallels between domestic violence cases and sex trafficking. “Offenders are difficult to prosecute. Often the victim sees herself as the trafficker’s girlfriend and may actually want to protect him. It’s not like she flags you down and asks for help.”

Victims of sex trafficking also experience repeated trauma, which can prevent them from verbalizing or recalling episodes of abuse in sequential order. “For that reason, it’s difficult for prosecutors to get information that makes a good case,” Sechrist says.

Eventually, Weil and Sechrist plan to guide local law enforcement officials battling this problem through “focused deterrence” strategies, the crux of their expertise.

Developing strong police-community partnerships is vital. When it comes to the community, says Weil, “You need service and resource providers, as well as people who can make personal connections with victims and offenders.” Ideally, they provide a moral voice that hits close to home.

“The messenger is as important as the message. We bring in respected people from faith communities, former offenders, and even those touched by violent crime—like the mother of a murdered child—to share their stories.” The hope is they will help victims and offenders better hear the message of deterrence and connect.

Working with partners across North Carolina and nationally, Weil and Sechrist have seen focused deterrence strategies work wonders.

“Data analysis. Creating and sustaining partnerships between the community and law enforcement. Changing social norms around violence. The N.C. Network for Safe Communities collaborates with local leaders to improve community safety using evidence-based approaches.”

A WAY OUT

FOCUSED DETERRENCE

Analyze police data to zero in on major offenders.

Communicate with offenders face-to-face. Notify them that future violence will not be tolerated, and offer assistance that improves chances of success in a crime-free life.

Follow through. Aggressively prosecute future violence and deliver resources to those who choose to change.

Engage and educate the community.

“In the last 10 years, we’ve seen change in communities where kids couldn’t walk to church or play outside for fear of getting shot,” says Weil. “This work has a redemptive quality: if you can break a cycle of violence, you can create a new pathway. By giving people options, and building trust and legitimacy, you see entire communities change.”

By Robin Sutton Anders • Learn more at uncg.ucg.edu
**COLLISION COURSES**

Aidan Lytle, undergraduate researcher

Aidan Lytle has been interested in physics — “the purest science,” he says — since he was a kid.

But a less-than-stellar academic record meant, instead of pursuing science, he initially focused on another passion — music. That talent led him to playing in a battle of the bands at Carnegie Hall at 16, to the UNCG School of the Arts, and, finally, to a full scholarship at UNCG.

Circumstances derailed his musical education, though. He ended up working, doing stints as an EMT, bike mechanic, and U.S. Marine, among other things.

Becoming a Marine Corps avionics technician rekindled his interest in science and math. He was soon teaching himself calculus with the help of YouTube videos.

“I enjoyed it more doing it myself,” he says.

After the Marine Corps, the GI Bill funded a return to his first love — physics. Back at UNCG, he’s applied a laser-like focus to his goal of going to graduate school and becoming a physicist. That includes getting undergraduate research experience.

“I wanted to be contributing to the field.”

In year one, he worked with Professor Anatoly Miroshnichenko to analyze image data from certain types of stars, a project supported by a UNCG Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creativity award. Working with multiple faculty, he learned the coding necessary to process the astronomical data. A year later, he presented his findings at the University’s undergraduate research expo.

In 2019, Lytle also started working with UNCG’s Dr. Ron Belmont, an expert in high-energy nuclear physics. Lytle is helping write software that analyzes heavy-ion collisions to — ultimately — better understand the fundamental nature of matter.

“In heavy-ion collisions, gold atoms — stripped of their electrons and smashed together at nearly the speed of light — melt into a plasma of quarks and gluons, the fundamental particles that form the neutrons and protons in the atom’s nucleus.

“It’s like throwing two balls of springs at each other so hard that they explode outward,” Lytle says.

The quark-gluon plasma behaves like a liquid, and the software Lytle and Belmont are working on will help analyze its shape and flow.

The plasma is the same stuff researchers believe the early universe — less than a second after the Big Bang — was composed of.

“We know how atoms work, more or less,” Lytle says. “We don’t know how these work.”

Lytle, who’s also an officer in UNCG’s Society of Physics Students, is enthusiastic about the opportunities in the physics and astronomy department. “There are all these resources,” he says. “I have a couple of side projects, like working on a fuser — a basic nuclear engineering project.”

“It’s what you make of it,” he adds. “And I have a very broad range of interests.”

By Mark Tosczak

Learn more at arsc.uncg.edu | physics.uncg.edu

Kelly, who won a $20,000 National Board for Certified Counselors Foundation scholarship for her focus on marginalized populations, employs the purple orchid as a personal and professional motif. Purple, she notes, has a long history as a symbol for women seeking justice and for awareness of domestic violence.

“In therapy, we’re trying to change long-standing and even generational patterns. A lot of people haven’t experienced a healthy relationship in their families of origin, and they just repeat what they know,” she says. “What we know isn’t always healthy. Sometimes an intervention that teaches a couple how to communicate can be life changing.”

By Robin Sutton Anders

Learn more at gacounseling.org | ced.uncg.edu
STANDING ON Z

"The end of the jetty is like the end of our language. Nothing is ahead but the open sea."

UNCG's 2018 Senior Research Excellence Award winner is nationally recognized poet Stuart Dischell. The first book by the professor of creative writing, "Good Hope Road," garnered a National Poetry Series honor and was reissued, 25 years later, in Carnegie Mellon Press's Classic Contemporary Series. Subsequent books were published by Penguin and the University of Chicago, two of America's most prestigious literary presses.

Dischell's poems have appeared in The Atlantic, The New Republic, Slate, Ploughshares, and various anthologies, including The Pushcart Prize and collections edited by Garrison Keillor and Robert Pinsky. He has received two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships and a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, one of the top honors awarded to American artists. Baudelaire at Langtry, Wiliamson, and Saint-Malo and one of many readings at American University of Paris and Paris American Academy testify to his international reputation.

POETRY VS. PROSE

"My preference for poetry over prose has to do with personality and temperament, and also personal history. I came to poetry, like many in my generation, through songwriting. I wanted to be a folk singer, like Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, or Bob Dylan. But I was writing stories and journalism then too.

"Attention Deficit Disorder is probably another reason I wrote more poetry than prose. I was not physically capable, in my teens and twenties, to sit at a desk long enough. It's easy to write poetry. You don't even need a pencil to write it. You can say it in your head. Of course, it is not easy to write poetry well. Both priceless and worthless, it is the most democratic art form."

LA VIE EN ROSE

"Most of my work about Paris is nonfiction, essays on walking the original walls of Paris, although the city has filtered into my poetry over my last two books. I used to resist writing about Paris. I felt I didn't really have a claim on the landscape. But having been there some forty times, that's changed. Paris has always loomed large in my family's story. When my grandparents met in central Europe, my grandmother would only marry my grandfather on the condition that he would take her to live there. They left during the zeppelin attacks on Paris in 1915 to come to America. Growing up, I understood Paris didn't really have a claim on the landscape. But having been there some forty times, that's changed. Paris has always loomed large in my family's story."

"I grew up in a little town just outside of Atlantic City. I grew up on the beach. The ocean has always been an inspiration in my life, although I do love urban places. A good number of my poems are set on the seashore. Having that open space has always been important to me. Lately it's been the mountains. Just not feeling closed in. That's essential to me. That's why I need to travel. You know that quote from Paul Theroux where he says, 'I have seldom heard a train go by and not wished I was on it?'"

BEAUTY IN ABSURDITY

"I'm not a very self-conscious writer, but I do come to understand what I've done afterwards. I teach a class called 'Now Look at What You Have Done,' in which poets look at the poems they have written and observe the congruous, unconsciously, subconscious choices we make in putting our poems together. I look at that as well when I'm revising and restructuring my work. Poets like Stanley Plumly once wrote that I'm hard to pin down, I'm part elegant, but part absurdist. And I think, being an absurdist, my stock-in-trade is a mixture of humor and devastating sorrow. Undercutting humor with sorrow and undercutting sorrow with humor. Trying to build something more human and more tense out of the mixtures. I don't believe people are always one way. Maybe it's just me. I've been at funerals where I heard bursting into laughter – even though I was brokenhearted. Throwing of some absurd thing the person had done."

POINTS OF PRIDE

"I've received national fellowships and international grants. I've been asked to read and lead workshops in hundreds of places. But I'm most proud of the students I have taught and the books they have published. I've worked with fine student poets, like Ansel Elkins, who won the Yale Younger Poets Prize, or Maria Hummel, who won the American Poetry Review's Honickman Prize, or Sarah Rose Nordgren, who won the Agnes Lynch Starret Poetry Prize. Jennifer Whitaker – now UNCG faculty – won the Brittingham Prize in Poetry for her book ‘The Blue Hour.’ I can't help but be pleased by the number of my former students who have won prestigious awards, but they all, to me, are outstanding."

WIDE OPEN SPACES

"My mother was a painter, an intellectual, a great reader, and she loved poetry. Her family was desperately poor; they were bohemians, kind of. My father was a hard-nosed, self-taught guy – an old-school tough guy. His son being a poet was not exactly in the long-term plan.

"I grew up in a little town just outside of Atlantic City. I grew up right on the beach. The ocean has always been an inspiration in my life, although I do love urban places. A good number of my poems are set on the seashore. Having that open space has always been important to me. Lately it's been the mountains. Just not feeling closed in. That's essential to me. That's why I need to travel. You know that quote from Paul Theroux where he says, 'I have seldom heard a train go by and not wished I was on it?'"

Interview by Mike Harris • Learn more at go.uncg.edu/dischell
UNCG and Rockingham County team up to transform K-5 education

MOSS STREET PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL – MSPS – isn’t your average “lab school.”

In fact, MSPS avoids that term, though it’s used in the 2016 legislation that created this and similar schools in low-performing districts across the state. UNC Greensboro faculty and MSPS staff want people to understand this isn’t a scenario in which a university goes into a community, overhauls a school, and then steps back to do its own research.

This is anything but that. What’s happening in Rockingham County is a partnership – among UNCG, the school district, and the community. Researchers, teachers, students, and their families are working together to create an environment of authentic teaching and learning that will ultimately change the trajectory of these students’ lives and transform the community.

With just one year under their belts, researchers and staff will tell you that there’s still a lot to learn. But if the success they saw in the first year – engaged reading, STEM integration, and gains in social and emotional learning – are any indication, there’s a lot to be excited about for the future.

UNPACKAGING THE CURRICULUM

It’s a place with a lot of pride.

MSPS – formerly Moss Street Elementary School – has a strong history and a deep connection to the rural community of Reidsville, North Carolina. But over the years, it has struggled with high teacher turnover, lack of resources, and a student population that faces distinct challenges. All students receive free or reduced lunch, and the majority of students come from underserved populations.

Then there’s UNCG, just 35 minutes down the road. It’s the region’s largest public institution with a renowned School of Education and a reputation for strong, community-engaged research and partnerships.

Bringing the two together to transform K-5 education in Rockingham County wasn’t a hard sell. It just made sense.

UNCG School of Education’s Dr. Carl Lashley and Dr. Christina O’Connor serve as co-directors of the school. Tina Chestnut, who attended Moss Street when she was a girl, was hired in the summer of 2018 as the MSPS principal and associate director. Dr. Allison Ormond, a doctoral alum of UNCG’s School of Education and N.C. Teacher of the Year, serves as associate director for curriculum.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Moss Street Partnership School is part of the UNC Lab School initiative, which aims to improve student performance in low-performing schools, as well as prepare future teachers and school administrators. UNCG was one of nine campuses selected by the state to participate in the initiative.

UNCG-POWERED

Three-fourths of the Moss Street Partnership School leadership team – Chestnut, Ormond, and O’Connor – are UNCG alumni, and many of the school’s teachers are currently enrolled in master’s programs at UNCG. The School of Education is supporting their efforts by holding graduate classes on site at MSPS.
“My students went from listening to me read to being fully engaged and requesting books to read. They went from writing one-sentence stories to writing complete stories. They developed a genuine love for books.”

– Nicky Pickard, MSPS kindergarten teacher

**READING FOR YOUR OWN REASONS**

Perhaps the best example of “tinkering” is the work done by Dr. Gay Ivey, William E. Moran Distinguished Professor in Literacy.

Ivey has spent decades conducting school-based research that seeks to understand children’s motivations to read. Her work has shown that the secret sauce for reading achievement is reading engagement–kids truly investing in reading for their own purposes.

In previous projects, she worked with eighth-grade teachers to abandon all assigned reading in favor of student-selected reading with no strings attached. Students could read whatever they wanted and do whatever they wanted with the reading. That was the language arts curriculum. The results?

“They read like crazy,” she says, noting that time spent reading is directly correlated to reading achievement.

“We do so many things to get kids to read. Principals are promising to color their hair green if students read a certain number of books, and it doesn’t take that. Kids find the process of reading the reward itself.”

Over the past year, Ivey has been working with MSPS teachers across grade levels to help them prioritize reading engagement. The school’s library and individual classroom libraries have been transformed—for example, there are significantly more books with characters of color, so that kids can see themselves in the stories they read.

“Our biggest problem is we’re running out of books because they’ve read so much already,” Ivey says.

It’s not just about “becoming a better reader.” Reading also helps with socioemotional growth.

**AVID READER** “Children read to understand other people and themselves better,” says Ivey, “to figure out the world, to laugh, to cry, and even to play, much like adults.”

For example, when kids read fiction, they start to live through the characters’ lives, and begin to learn empathy by seeing different perspectives. Reading can help children build relationships, regulate their own emotions and behaviors, and understand issues of morality, explains Ivey.

Additionally, people learn most of their vocabulary through contextual reading—not through studying weekly vocabulary lists.

Ivey is now gearing up to begin a formal study in which she and a team of teachers will design instruction to help students learn the important skills associated with reading, while experiencing reading as a personally and socially meaningful activity—with books of their own choosing, of course. The effectiveness of instruction will be measured, and modifications will be made based on the data.

The ultimate goal is for the findings to have an impact beyond MSPS.

“We’re trying to innovate locally, knowing that what we learn will be shared with the larger research and practice communities,” she says. “I hope to be publishing and having teachers as co-authors with me. I envision us out on the trail together, sharing our work.”

“Research suggests that children are most likely to become engaged in reading when the characters and social worlds of books are familiar to them,” says Ivey, “particularly when characters look and talk like them, their friends, and their families.”

What sets MSPS apart? Teacher autonomy, a focus on STEAM—science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics—and experiential learning.

Traditional school settings typically utilize pre-packaged curricula, prescriptive lesson plans, and pacing guides. Often, the result is that teachers—and their expertise and experience—get left out of the equation.

That’s why if you ask UNCG researchers how to best facilitate teaching and learning, they’ll tell you it’s anything but pre-packaged curriculums. It’s letting teachers do what they do best—teach kids—in experiential, collaborative, and interdisciplinary environments that move the needle for student learning.

This kind of environment is what enticed Chestnut to return to the school she attended as a child, and led as a principal a few years ago, during its Moss Street Elementary School days.

“These kids deserve to have access to education that is relevant to them and that engages them,” Chestnut says. “Traditional ways of teaching and learning have not proven effective in Title I schools like Moss Street. Rather than adopting specific programs, we look at the North Carolina standards and then figure out how we can facilitate learning using our guiding principles.”

And this is where UNCG researchers come in. Over the past year, UNCG faculty have worked alongside teachers to help bridge theory and practice.

They haven’t conducted formal studies yet. Right now, they’re talking to teachers about their needs, sharing their research expertise, and working in classrooms to see what kinds of small interventions may prove successful.

They’ve been “tinkering,” as one faculty member describes it—researchers alongside teachers.

“We really believe in the idea of doing things together,” says O’Connor. “The teachers’ work informs the faculty’s work, and vice versa.”

Just how innovative is MSPS? When it comes to experiential learning or STEAM education, the school isn’t reinventing the wheel. But the way it’s piecing these different components together, in a low-performing, high-needs school in rural North Carolina? That’s exciting for O’Connor, even after 25 years working in public education.

“To do it this way, in this context—I haven’t seen this before.”
**GROWING STEM** Above, Carlton’s doctoral student Dauring Blankmann (left) helps a kindergarten class explore the relationship between bees and flowers. Carlton’s work at MSPS is part of her larger STEM TLC project – the STEM Teacher Leader Collaborative. Co-founded in 2013 by Carlton and Dr. Jennifer Mangrum, TLC is a network of teachers enacting disciplinary practices: collaboration, analyzing data, designing and implementing solutions, iterating on design, etc., ” she explains. “It’s rigorous and responsive STEM, versus the traditional ‘read the textbook and answer the questions.’”

**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING** The work done in elementary schools goes beyond teaching literacy and STEM, as important as those are. Teachers, counselors, and social workers also work together to help young children build positive relationships, regulate their emotions, and learn to communicate.

“Kids need to learn how to talk to each other and with their teachers appropriately.” Children come out of the experience empowered, with new skill sets.

“Kids need to learn how to talk to each other and with their teachers appropriately.” Children come out of the experience empowered, with new skill sets.

“This partnership provides a valuable training opportunity for our graduate student clinicians,” says Herndon, “while expanding available services in a resource-limited rural community.”

**RESOURCE RICH** Dr. Jason Herndon, director of UNCG’s Psychology Clinic, and MSPS’s speech language pathologist Melissa May are part of a multidisciplinary team – made up of licensed faculty, graduate students, and MSPS staff – that provides testing for children at MSPS to help determine if they have the chance to engage in interesting, robust STEM upper-middle-class white students. If students don’t have access to STEM outside of school through summer camps, enrichment programs, or afterschool programs – which are often more readily available to upper-middle-class white students. If students don’t have the chance to engage in interesting, robust STEM in elementary school, Carlton says, studies show it is much less likely that they will consider those pathways as they move to middle and high school. That’s why excellent school STEM is so high stakes.

**LIFE SKILLS** Above, the restorative practice team meets in the MSPS library. Left to right: Lashley, physical education teacher Justin Somes (also pictured right, working with Dyson), fourth-grade teacher Kristen Peterson, fifth-grade teacher Shelbie Cridge, school social worker Johnette Walters, and third-grade teacher Balsaun Carter. This fall, Walters and fourth-grade teacher Taylor Englehardt led the first school-wide restorative practices teacher training.

**ROOT, STEM, FLOWER** The pressure for elementary schools to focus on literacy and mathematics can mean that science gets lost in the shuffle.

But for Dr. Heidi Carlton, those disciplines don’t have to be viewed as separate areas of study. They can be combined in productive ways that are mutually beneficial. Along with her doctoral students Alison Mercier and Dauring Blankmann, the Hooks Distinguished Professor of STEM Education is working with MSPS teachers to help integrate science and engineering into their curriculum.

The work started in the summer of 2018, when Carlton’s team held a workshop for all MSPS teachers with an interest in STEM.

Carlton was floored by the level of interest in the first workshop – nearly all MSPS teachers across grade levels voluntarily attended. Ultimately, the entire school decided to implement an interdisciplinary “design a windmill” unit in inter-grade groups. Why is early exposure to STEM so important? Carlton explains that many MSPS students may not have access to STEM outside of school through summer camps, enrichment programs, or afterschool programs – which are often more readily available to upper-middle-class white students. If students don’t have the chance to engage in interesting, robust STEM in elementary school, Carlton says, studies show it is much less likely that they will consider those pathways as they move to middle and high school. That’s why excellent school STEM is so high stakes.

Her plan for year two is to integrate STEM into the regular curriculum. And she means good STEM.

“I’m talking about STEM that really engages in disciplinary practices: collaboration, analyzing data, modeling scientific ideas, coming up with alternative solutions, iterating on design, etc., ” she explains. “It’s rigorous and responsive STEM, versus the traditional ‘read the textbook and answer the questions.’”

Carlton was motivated elementary teacher leaders,” Carlton says. The project is currently funded by the Cemala Foundation, Duke University, and Summit Rotary of Greensboro.
CHASE HOLLEMAN HAD BEEN PURSUING THE MAN FOR WEEKS WITH PHONE CALLS AND TEXTS.

“We’re just here to talk and help however we can,” he said.

“Dave” (a pseudonym) needed help. Just a few weeks earlier, in the spring of 2018, he had overdosed on opioids. Paramedics had saved Dave’s life with an emergency injection of the drug naloxone and referred him to Holleman, a case manager for GCSTOP—the Guilford County Solution To The Opioid Problem.

Holleman finally convinced Dave to meet, so he could give him naloxone. Some people who use opioids are destined to overdose multiple times; having naloxone at hand could save Dave’s or someone else’s life.

“He got into the passenger seat of my truck and couldn’t talk — was just covered with shame,” Holleman says. “He looked on the verge of tears and panic the whole time.”

It was a first step, at least. But Holleman hoped his intervention might eventually provide more benefit than naloxone.

A local partnership takes on a national epidemic

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LIFE SAVER

A local partnership takes on a national epidemic

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FIRST, REDUCE HARM

Arming people who use opioids with the overdose-reversal drug naloxone, which they can use to help others or have a companion use on them, is part of a nontraditional approach to treating drug misuse called harm reduction.

Rather than requesting someone immediately abstain from all drug use, as many treatment programs do, the idea is to chip away at dangers that go along with illegal drug use: deaths from overdoses, infections from dirty needles, risky sex, and more.

Though still outside the mainstream in the United States, harm reduction meets people who use drugs where they are. It helps them take positive steps, even if they’re small steps and even if they don’t immediately stop using or enter treatment.

“You’re trying to get them to make a positive change, any positive change,” says Melissa Floyd-Pickard, chair of UNC Greensboro’s Department of Social Work. She and Professor Jay Poole oversee the University’s work on GCSTOP.
Some people, Dr. Floyd-Pickard notes, won’t change. But some will, and sometimes even a small positive change, such as taking clean syringes, can lead to further changes and even entering treatment.

The approach is rooted in a core principle of social work – meeting people where they are.

“Meeting a person where they are involves understanding their situation and respecting their perspective on their situation,” says Guillermo Tremols, GCSTOP’s Syringe Exchange Program coordinator. “It involves active listening, and authentic engagement. It is not about trying to execute changes that we think they need. It’s about finding out what changes they want to make, and assisting them in achieving those goals.”

In this “judgment-free” zone, GCSTOP supplies people who use drugs with naloxone, clean needles, and safe injection supplies and educates them about handling opioids more safely. GCSTOP recognizes that some aren’t ready to enter treatment. But putting brakes on fatal opioid overdoses, which have skyrocketed in recent years, is a first step.

A DEADLY WEEKEND

Jim Albright, director of Guilford County Emergency Services, remembers when it hit him that something different and alarming was going on with opioids: the last weekend of April 2014.

“One of my supervisors called and said, ‘We need access to the warehouse because we’re running low on naloxone,’” Albright recalls. “I was like, ‘Did they not get enough out in the weekly shipment? What is going on?’”

It wasn’t a logistical error. “We had 24 overdoses, of which five were deaths, in a 24-hour period,” Albright says. Paramedics were using up their naloxone supplies because of the number of patients needing it.

Misuse has been rising since the late 1990s, when doctors began prescribing powerful opioid-based painkillers more often. Many people start opioids for legitimate reasons, such as treating pain from an injury or surgery.

But some people are more vulnerable to the addictive quality of opioids, with a subset becoming dependent after just a few days. After their prescriptions run out, some turn to heroin.

In the last six or seven years, synthetic opioids, including the powerful prescription drug fentanyl and dozens of chemical variants, have hit the streets. Opioid overdoses are now the leading cause of accidental death in the U.S.

In 2017, according to state statistics, an average of five people died from opioid overdoses every day in North Carolina.

STATE RESPONSE

A little over two years ago, Albright got a call from then-state Senator Trudy Wade. The General Assembly was preparing to allocate funds to communities to battle the opioid crisis, and Wade wanted to know if Guilford County had a need for such funding, and if so, how it would be used.

She needed an answer in 10 minutes.

Albright had been learning about harm reduction for a while, and he had a pretty good idea of how he might use state funds:

- Provide overdose survivors with harm reduction services and – if they are ready – connect them to addiction treatment and other services.
- “Meeting a person where they are involves understanding their life circumstances, regardless of decisions they have made or behaviors they are engaging in, they are worthy of compassion and respect.”

He could have used the state funding to launch a county program, but he had a bigger idea.

UNCG Chancellor Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. had given a speech about how important it was for the University to engage with the community. Plus, Guilford County and UNCG were seeking partner projects as new members of MetroLab, a network of 37 university and city or county partnerships working to bring data, analytics, and innovation to local government.

“This to me seemed like the absolutely perfect fit,” Albright says. “There is capability within the university community that we felt like we could leverage.”

Albright had been going to meetings of CURE Triad, a county group that was taking on drug misuse by bringing together law enforcement, health care providers, emergency services, addiction treatment providers, and others. UNCG’s Dr. Stephen Sills, director of the University’s Center for Housing and Community Studies, had been attending those meetings, too, and had experience conducting data analysis projects focused on substance use.

With Sills’ center as a home for the program, Albright launched GCSTOP. Chase Holleman – a social worker and co-founder of CURE Triad – joined as GCSTOP’s Rapid Response Team coordinator.

EXPANDING IMPACT

As GCSTOP grew, it moved from the Center for Housing and Community Studies to the UNCG Department of Social Work, where it could expand its reach by tapping into the department’s expertise and plugging student interns into the program.

“It just became more and more apparent that social work was such an integral part of what was happening there,” explains Dr. Poole.

“As we began to see folks, we recognized that they all dealt with so many complex social determinants of health issues.”

Social workers, Poole says, are trained to assess people using a model that evaluates physical needs, psychological state, and social connections. Together those form a web of forces that can push people toward – or away from – drug use. “In many cases, people use substances to try to manage other bigger issues in their lives,” he says. “On the other hand, if you have the brain disease of addiction, you struggle to stop using even if you’ve dealt with those issues.”

Methods changed too. Holleman had originally focused on mobile outreach, often working out of his truck. But as the effort grew, they set up easier – and safer – “pop-up” clinics at businesses or other sites that would agree to host them.

THE RIGHT TOOLS

UNCG offered Albright (below) the technical know-how to create a system that takes relevant patient data from Guilford County Emergency Services and makes it securely available to GCSTOP social workers. They handle outreach – by phone, by text, or in person – to people who’ve been treated for overdoses.
A High Point gas station and a thrift store parking lot have become regular sites. “We go set up in their parking lot, with their permission, and give out supplies,” Poole says.

Thanks to a grant from Cone Health, GCSTOP also has a clinic hosted at College Park Baptist Church. That site — staffed by a behavioral health nurse, GCSTOP staff, and social work students — provides health screenings and referrals as well as opioid-use focused services.

Floyd-Pickard hopes to expand this side of the program, to connect more clients with healthcare services and get more people into medication-assisted treatment, an addiction approach that uses drugs, under medical supervision, to help people off opioid use.

“This year we launched another clinic with Alcohol and Drug Services, A Triad nonprofit. And we’re bringing mobile Hepatitis C testing into our work, thanks to a $100,000 contract with the Guilford County Department of Public Health,” she says.

“We’ve also received a $1.3 million Health Resources and Services Administration grant for workforce expansion. It’s a great opportunity for our community — and our students.”

FORCE MULTIPLIER
One of the most powerful resources that UNCG provides to the effort, Albright says, is students.

Students in UNCG’s undergraduate and graduate social work programs are required to do internships to gain practical experience before they graduate. These internships allow GCSTOP to help more people.

Mike Thull, assistant professor of social work and GCSTOP’s clinical director, oversees selection and training of students who work with GCSTOP. The program has six to eight interns — half undergraduate, half master’s — at any given time.

“For GCSTOP to function, we need a steady supply of motivated, underprepared students,” Thull says. “They always go out in teams with someone who has some more senior experience,” he says. “And then we set very specific parameters for them.”

Thull, who directs the entire field program for social work undergraduates, notes that GCSTOP is “definitely more selective” than many other opportunities. It also requires a considerable time commitment. Undergraduates and first-year master’s students work 16 hours a week, while second-year master’s students put in 24 hours per week.

“To me, it feels like it’s been a force multiplier,” Albright says. “We’re paying for some positions, and we’re able to leverage those against students. The students — the ability they have to contribute to the program is unbelievable.”

COLLECTING EVIDENCE
When Albright helped launch GCSTOP, he wanted to be sure that it was truly effective. That requires data collection and rigorous evaluations.

“Why Opioids Kill
People rarely know exactly how potent street drugs are or what’s in them. Someone who thinks they’re taking heroin but are actually taking fentanyl, for example, can accidentally overdose.

Tolerance to opioids builds up with use, but can be lost when a person spends time away from drugs, say in jail or a treatment center. Going back to using the same amounts they did previously can leave someone more vulnerable to overdose.

“Students learn motivational interviewing, an evidence-based counseling approach that uses questions to identify a person’s aspirations. “Rather than trying to influence them to create the change we want, we draw out their own desire for change, so the motivation comes from within,” explains Tremos. “It puts the client in the driver’s seat, encouraging autonomy and self-reliance.”

“We provided the students another opportunity to learn from the field,” Floyd-Pickard says. “We’ve received more than $2 million in federal funding for extra training and information.”

As they come in, they go through a pretty intensive training,” Thull says. New interns also spend time — after initial training — shadowing outgoing interns and are equipped with a “decision tree” to clarify when they need to call in someone more senior.

“They are taught, Thull says, to be particularly sensitive to those who might be a risk to themselves or others.

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“This year, UNCG and NC A&T’s Joint Master of Social Work program received $13 million in funding to increase the number of graduates trained to handle substance use disorders, with an emphasis on opioids. The universities also launched a Joint Doctorate in Social Work.

“The people who are helped by Guilford County EMS and then the GCSTOP program, many of them are not repeating overdoses and are getting naloxone. They are avoiding the death sentence, if you will, of overdose.”

There are many other questions that Gruber would like to dig into: Is the program successful in getting people who use opioids to adopt safer use patterns, such as using clean needles and testing their drugs for the highly potent fentanyl before injecting it? Are they adopting safer sex practices that could prevent HIV transmission? And is the community benefiting from lower healthcare costs because of fewer EMS calls and emergency room visits?

Albright says that while the total number of overdoses in Guilford County continues to increase, the percentage of overdoses resulting in death has declined since GCSTOP started its work.

Measures that restrict how many pills doctors can prescribe and close legal loopholes related to lab-brewed fentanyl analogues, the quantity of suspected overdoses ending in death dropped from 18 percent in 2016 to 11 percent in 2018 — with this year’s percentages on track to be even lower.

“GCSTOP helps Albright fulfill a commitment he made in 2015 to neighbors whose son died of a heroin overdose.

“My dream is to meet someone after they’ve overdosed,” Holleman says. “See them find some sort of recovery — go back to school, learn how to be a helper — and work for GCSTOP.”

That hasn’t happened yet, but it could. After Holleman finally got the High Point man, Dave, naloxone, the two started talking more often.

Eventually he’s like, “I’m ready to do something different,” Holleman says.

He met the man into a methadone clinic to start weaning himself off opioids. And then Dave told Holleman he wanted to help others struggling with addiction.

He asked for clean needles and safe injection supplies and offered to distribute them at certain motels where he knew people sometimes used drugs. And then Dave went further.

“He said, ‘I want to go back to school and be a drug counselor,’” Holleman says. “And then he started back at school.”

By Mark Tovacul • Photography by Martin W. Kane • Learn more at gcstop.uncg.edu
DISCUSSIONS IN THE HUMANITIES – from philosophy and religion, to history and politics – guide our most crucial decisions, on a global scale and in very personal ways. They shape our worlds.

But over recent decades, false narratives have accumulated around the humanities. Many, for example, perceive the study of humanities as a side item, an afterthought, or a luxury in undergraduate education.

Students hear that career readiness comes from pursuing a major of the moment – whatever is most in demand at the time. Universities serving first-generation and minority students receive particular pressure to funnel students toward professional or STEM fields, regardless of interest, in order to launch careers.

However, studies of career readiness tell a different story. The National Association of Colleges and Employers has found that critical reasoning, collaboration, and communication are the skills that are the most sought after by employers, with 75 percent of employers rating them in their top three desired skills. They are also the skills that frequently help senior professionals carve pathways to leadership positions. UNC Greensboro’s researchers call them “the three Cs.” These skills, they say, are best developed through humanities courses.

With that knowledge, UNCG is on the road to changing how the humanities are perceived, in a big way. The University is re-envisioning the role of humanities in undergraduate education and, in the process, doubling down on its commitment to student outcomes.

“We are thrilled to launch an innovative program that will allow us to rethink the humanities across our campus,” says UNCG Chancellor Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr. “By transforming undergraduate research and career preparation for students, enhancing curricula, and offering faculty new tools, UNC Greensboro is positioning itself to emerge as a leader in the humanities, across the state and beyond.”

Currently at UNCG, undergraduate research experiences are being integrated into a multitude of humanities courses and projects, along with career preparation and professional development components. Last year, the University received a $200,000 grant from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support those activities.

The program is designed to offer new funded research opportunities for faculty, while improving outcomes for underserved students. The impact will reach beyond the confines of campus – not only through community-engaged research, but through the development of the next generation of active, concerned citizens dedicated to serving and improving their respective communities.
Senior classical archaeology major Michael Bell can easily point to how opportunities for undergraduate research have changed the trajectory of his life.

He met Dr. Murphy on his second day of classes as a transfer student at UNCG. During an introductory course, Bell recounted an instance of Greek mercenaries swinging their identities and deeds into the stone of Abu Simbel, while fighting on behalf of sixth century BCE Egyptian pharaoh Psamtik II. Murphy challenged Bell, asking for a short presentation on behalf of sixth century BCE Egyptian pharaoh Psamtik II. He plans to apply for graduate programs in classical archaeology – the earliest known site for metal production in the Aegean. He’s exploring prestige goods production and how they relate to social organization and economic priorities. Bell has presented his work at the Southern Conference Undergraduate Research Forum, as well as at UNCG’s Thomas Undergraduate Research and Creativity Expo.

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“Opportunities for undergraduate research have afforded me the opportunity to study abroad, but he applied for and received an award through UNCG’s URSCO.

As a high-impact practice that not only enriches the path of individual students, but also enriches communities, both non-academic and academic.

“When a student feels they contribute to a discipline, they have a greater affinity for it and tend to stick with it longer. Expanding access to undergraduate scholarship in a field will expand the demographics of that field.”

“The engagement of traditionally underrepresented students in research not only improves their academic and professional path but also ensures those fields of study – and the ways we understand our world – are driven by a diverse set of scholars.”

“Diversity,” says Murphy, “keeps disciplines relevant.”

Survey, Bell is analyzing the use of agricultural goods, like honey and beeswax, and metallurgical material on the Cycladic island of Kea – the earliest known site for metal production in the Aegean. He’s exploring prestige goods production and how they relate to social organization and economic priorities. Bell has presented his work at the Southern Conference Undergraduate Research Forum, as well as at UNCG’s Thomas Undergraduate Research and Creativity Expo.

“The experience I gained in field work, research methods, experimental design, data collection and analysis, and presenting results has been instrumental in preparing me for my future academic endeavors – and in helping me to build confidence in my personal life,” says Bell.

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One of the newly funded faculty-student research collaborations will take place through a new course offering this fall: “Africans in the Greco-Roman World,” says UNCG Lloyd International Honors College Dean and historian James Ali, who will co-teach the course with assistant dean and classicist Rebecca Muich.

The course combines classical studies with history and African diaspora studies. The material counters the common impression that people who lived in and interacted with the Greco-Roman world were only Greeks and Romans. “They’ll get a real opportunity to deal with primary sources,” says Dr. Ali. “And in working with the classical world, you have to expand your ideas of what primary sources are. You have to read for the gaps, as well as what is there. You have to understand your sources as containing biases and preconceived notions and read for that.”

The course’s primary sources will be curated by undergraduate research assistants Janelle Crubaugh and Denisha Wortham – and made available online for wider use. Crubaugh is a history and international and global studies double major, while Wortham is double majoring in African American and African diaspora studies and sociology. Some activities will spin off into community events. For a photography exhibition, the researchers will enlist the help of UNCG’s costume studio to construct their own Minerva helmet, which they will invite students and members of the community to try on.

“We want to bring the community into conversations that academics are having, and we want to generate the idea that we’re all Minervas,” says Dr. Ali (photo, front). “When people think about classical studies, they think about people who are white, and they separate it from Africa. But it’s a disservice to see the Greeks and Romans as separate from the rest of the Mediterranean world.”

Dr. Cerise Glenn, director of UNCG’s African American and African Diaspora Studies Program, is one of several notable guest speakers for the project. “We train for how to open up and begin a new conversation,” she says (photo, rear). “When we examine the African identity in the Greco-Roman world, we learn things from the myths and the narratives – who gets framed in and out? It opens up a conversation about race and identity. The way we co-tell stories, particularly in popular culture and media, shows us how we are still grappling with what we were in the past.”

Muich and Ali will guide students in learning about African figures from that world, such as Candace Amanirenas, a female Nubian warrior-queen who fought the Roman empire, and Septimius Severus, who worked his way up through the army to become emperor of Rome, and St. Augustine of Hippo, who had a profound impact on Christianity.

“The Greco-Roman world was an incredibly diverse place. It’s very expansive geographically, extending from Iberia sometimes as far as India and very far south into northern Africa. Our work opens the conversation from Romans and Greeks to people around them,” says Muich (photo, middle). “Now did they participate in or challenge those institutions and how were they represented – there’s so much about representation and it begins in antiquity.”

Public resource allocation, infrastructure – these are humanities questions, says Associate Professor of English Jan Feather.

“The humanities offer us the tools to think critically about where we put resources and how we make decisions about the communities we live in,” adds Women’s and Gender Studies Program Director and Associate Professor of History Lisa Levenstein. “Those are questions that determine what happens in our universities, in all disciplines, and in our world.”

Together, Dr. Ali and Dr. Levenstein are the co-founders of UNCG’s Humanities Network and Consortium, or HNAC, which they launched to connect humanities students, scholars, and the public. It’s about starting conversations that bridge gaps, they say, between individual fields of scholarship and between scholarship and public life.

Last year, HNAC worked with the New York-based Humanities Action Lab, to bring the “States of Incarceration” exhibition to Greensboro. UNCG scholars from multiple departments contributed to the exhibition, which focused on the United States prison system and its flaws and even included letters from 1920s chain-gang inmates in North Carolina.

UNCG students not only generated material for the exhibition – which took place at the International Civil Rights Center and Museum – but also organized public programs for the community about mass incarceration.

In the fall of 2020, HNAC will focus on issues of civic engagement, democracy, and voting rights, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment.

The consortium’s slogan is “humanities for everyone.” “We are countering the idea that the humanities are the province of the elite,” Levenstein explains. “We believe that everyone deserves and benefits from a strong engagement with the humanities. Those conversations are vital to our students, the public, and a flourishing democracy.”

HNAC sponsors and takes part in many events on campus and in the community, such as the Greensboro Bound literary festival and FrameWorks, which provides scholarly programming around UNCG theater productions. (Below, Muich and Feather, left to right, discuss a Greensboro Bound panel on writing from a feminist perspective.) For each event, HNAC facilitators engage the conversation with the public, scholars, and providing a forum where students can participate – and lead.

“Our students are thought leaders and change-makers, and as the next generation, they need to know how to have those conversations, how to participate in those conversations,” says Feather. “We want to nurture the change-making skills of a broad range of students. And we’ll see them changing the world.”

By Susan Kirby-Smith • Photography by Jiyoung Park, Kai photos courtesy Joanne Murphy • Learn more at cnt.uncg.edu / hnac.uncg.edu / honorscollege.uncg.edu / transformingthehumanities.uncg.edu / arco.uncg.edu
the word's out

OFF THE CHART

Imagine you’re sitting alone in an exam room, struggling to catch what your doctor is saying.

Because you are hearing impaired, you ask the doctor to repeat himself, but he seems irritated. Eventually, you stop asking. You agree to a medical test without understanding what it’s about. And you leave, unsure of your diagnosis.

All of this happened to Alexis Johnson, one of several patients who shares her health care journey in 2019’s “Narrating Patienthood: Engaging Diverse Voices on Health, Communication, and the Patient Experience,” edited by Professor of Communication Studies Peter M. Kellett.

Kellett’s work grew out of his own experience with a rare diagnosis. Here, he and his wife attend a checkup with his ophthalmologist Dr. Rajiv Shah.

A FACE TO THE NUMBERS “Narrative medicine utilizes patient narratives to improve understanding and empathy,” says Kellett. “It promotes more personally sensitive and culturally responsive care, and thus better health outcomes.”

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In 1989, Dr. Adams created one of the first sociology courses in the country dedicated to the subject. Adams, 21 students, a film crew, and two graduate assistants traveled with the Grateful Dead and their fans across the northeastern U.S. to study Deadheads within concert venues, a pedagogical approach that had to be defended by then UNCG Chancellor Moran to UNC System president Spangler. The course was even ridiculed in a local newspaper.

But Adams’ research—on how Deadheads form and maintain identities and communities—eventually gained her national and international recognition.

In the spring, three decades of work came home for Adams at the “UNCG Dead Scholars Unite!” symposium, which she co-organized with Assistant Professor Justin Hammon and alumna Kristen Iliff as part of the University’s “The 60s: Exploring the Limits” post-long series of events. The symposium brought together Dead scholars and Deadheads, and reunited Adams with her summer of ‘89 students, marking the 30th anniversary of what they now fondly refer to as “The Class” (photos from 1989 and 2019 on left).

“Another Year of the Dead” events included showings of “Long Strange Trip: The Untold Story of the Grateful Dead,” art and photo exhibits, a semester-long online course, and performances by UNCG cover band Spartans Play Dead.

Over the years, Adams has seen Deadheads age, as well as newer generations of fans enter the scene. In the process, her work on Deadheads has increasingly aligned with her other primary research area—aging and friendship.

“I was studying Deadheads long enough for the things to come together,” the gerontology professor says.

From the beginning of her academic career, Adams was interested in how aging adults form and maintain friendships across geographic distance. The topic of friendship was not popular in her field at the time, but Adams followed her instinct and forged her own path. Since then, she says, studies have found that friendships in old age are as critical to wellbeing as family connections.

“I was willing to study things that were difficult to fund,” she says. “Things which were not necessarily the topics everybody thought I should be studying, but in the long run turned out to be important.”

At UNCG, she has helped develop GROWTH, a hub of faculty and community partners who support transdisciplinary aging-related research, education, and outreach across the campus and community. “I want to help develop the aging network infrastructure in Greensboro,” she says.

Lately, the mission has become more personal. “This is in some ways about planning for my own retirement and making Greensboro the kind of place I want to be old in. I’m kind of planning my own exit,” Adams says.

Adams says a key Deadhead community belief is “what goes around comes around,” meaning that good karma will come back to you. For Adams, the fruits of her life’s work and community-building are finally coming around.

“Another Year of the Dead” logo by Lena Rodriguez-Gillette • Learn more at gerontology.wp.uncg.edu • www.facebook.com/UNCGDead

By Matthew Bryant • Primary photography by Martin W. Kave • Summer 1989 photo of Adams and students courtesy Lloyd Wolf | www.lloydwolf.com | All rights reserved • ‘Another Year of the Dead’ logo by Lena Rodriguez-Gillette • Learn more at gerontology.wp.uncg.edu • www.facebook.com/UNCGDead
3rd Floor Groove

A grand piano. Shelves of CDs, hockey art, and children’s drawings. And the deep, “thunk” of a big double bass.

Welcome to Steve Haines’ office. He’s just finished mentoring a bass player and is about to start a practice session for himself. “The bass is a jealous instrument. You can’t turn your back, or there’s a problem.”

The music professor leans the big bass carefully against the wall and pulls out his new album — “Steve Haines and the Third Floor Orchestra.” It’s a departure from his earlier works. It’s not quite jazz, not quite folk, not quite singer-songwriter, he notes. He had certain songs in mind — and wanted to complement Brooklyn-based singer Becca Stevens’ voice and UNCG faculty Chad Eby’s saxophone with a full symphony orchestra.

The album sold 5,000 copies in its first month. Reviews were glowing. Japan’s jazz pianist Ariel Pocock. “My main identity is as a performer.” Now he’s a composer and a teacher.

In the quiet days after the December 2017 exams, 41 performers gathered in UNCG Auditorium to record Haines’ new album. Many were faculty, whose offices are on the third floor of the Music Building.

In the quiet days after the December 2017 exams, 41 performers gathered in UNCG Auditorium to record Haines’ new album. Many were faculty, whose offices are on the third floor of the Music Building.

He knows how inspiring moments can take students to another level. A jazz track on a friend’s mixtape is what first hooked him, in high school. Oscar Peterson’s “The Honeydripper.” “I just played along. I could not stop dancing.” A year later, he sat in with the Duke Ellington rhythm section. Another inspiration.

In 2012, that nearly ended. Haines had a tumor in his right shoulder. After the mass was removed, he could barely move his arm. He thought he’d have to change careers, but a specialist believed he could transplant a nerve in Haines’ arm. Several months after that surgery, he started playing again. A thousand hours of practice brought him back. The bass felt beautiful. “I fell in love with it again.”

Artistically, he was transformed. “I learned less is more. The sound of one long note is more beautiful than I had known before.”

Another project is the development of nanomaterials to detect bacteria – we’re bypassing their usual resistance methods,” she says. Another project is the development of nanomaterials to detect organophosphorus pesticides.

Recent studies have shown that pesticides can linger on farms for extended periods of time after they are sprayed. As a result, pesticides have been found in the meat of farm animals and in milk. Why is this a problem? Pesticide-laden food can affect our neurological systems.

Over the last decade, Obare has secured more than $5 million in federal grants to advance the emerging field of nanotechnology. "Nanotech has the ability to change the way we address different types of problems because it brings an integrated approach,” Obare explains. "When you’re making a nanomaterial, you start with the fundamentals of chemistry. When you’re trying to understand how a nanomaterial behaves, physics comes into play. We use these materials to address health and environmental challenges.”

In one project, Obare is applying this integration of the sciences to search for innovative solutions to antibiotic resistance. A common approach to combating antibiotic resistance is to create new drugs. However, it takes approximately 10 years for a drug to go through the development and FDA approval process. When it’s a matter of life or death, that’s too long to wait. "We’re using the same old drugs, but in ways that trick the bacteria – we’re bypassing their usual resistance methods,” she says.

Obare’s team has spent years perfecting sensors to detect pesticides and is now developing a device farmers could use to test their products. Ultimately, consumers could use it to test their own food at home.

It’s this kind of work — research that bridges disciplines to impact human lives — that excites Obare.

"One of the things I love about UNCG’s strategic plan is the focus on community," she says. "We have an opportunity to really think about the big problems that communities are facing right now. How can we, as scientists and engineers, use our knowledge and the integration of the sciences through nanotechnology to address these issues?"

By Alyssa Bedosky • Learn more at go.uncg.edu/obare
The newly renovated Three College Observatory features one of the largest reflecting telescopes in the southeastern United States. Situated in a dark-sky location in central North Carolina, the observatory is operated jointly by UNC Greensboro, NC A&T, and Guilford College to help researchers, students, and the public reach for the stars.