KSU junior wins prestigious Goldwater Scholarship

Biology major Trae Dunn is KSU’s third Goldwater winner
CSMConnect is the College of Science and Mathematics (CSM) biannual newsletter designed to keep you informed of the latest activities and developments going on in the college. CSM values the networks developed with partners on and off campus. You are important in our network of partners. CSM provides students a high quality and innovative academic experience through our seven minor programs, seven undergraduate degrees, and three masters programs. Students can create their own learning experience through provided tracks, research, and specialized courses. CSM is soaring into the next level of national prominence through cutting-edge research at Kennesaw State University, a student-centered, research-driven R2 institution.

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Trae Dunn, Biology major
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Dr. Kojo Mensa-Wilmot has been named dean of the College of Science and Mathematics (CSM) at Kennesaw State University (KSU) starting August 1, 2020.

Mensa-Wilmot comes to KSU from University of Georgia’s Department of Cellular Biology in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, where he served as department head and professor.

Mensa-Wilmot earned his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Ghana and his Ph.D. in biochemistry and molecular biology from Johns Hopkins University’s School of Public Health. A prolific and well-published researcher, he is a reviewer at six different scientific journals and was named a fellow at the African Academy of Sciences in 2017.

“This is an exciting time for KSU and the College of Science and Mathematics” said Mensa-Wilmot. “As dean, one of my goals will be to expand opportunities for faculty, staff and students, focusing on interdisciplinary approaches that enable us to find new solutions to the challenges facing our global communities.”
KSU professor receives grants to combat white-nose syndrome in bats

Kennesaw State assistant professor of microbiology Chris Cornelison has earned two research grants totaling more than $300,000 over the next two years—one from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and another from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)—to address how to mitigate the spread of white-nose syndrome, a fungal disease causing the rapid decline of tri-colored bats.

LSAMP Scholars engage in meaningful and prestigious internships

One of the key elements that makes Kennesaw State University (KSU) an attractive option for potential students is the opportunity to learn through engagement. Every summer, students can take advantage of the many new learning opportunities that happen outside of the classroom. This summer is no exception, with several students in the Peach State Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) - Kennesaw program taking part in internship or research opportunities. All but one of the opportunities are being conducted virtually.

KSU alumna presents research at Posters on the Hill virtually

Computational mathematics graduate Kara Heller hopes to make the world a greener place as she presents her research on electric vehicles and energy conservation to U.S. legislators at the Posters on the Hill on April 21. This is the third consecutive year a Kennesaw State University student has been chosen to participate in the national event that will take place virtually amid the current public health concerns.
Dr. Andy Wilson joined the Department of Mathematics in Fall 2020. He works in algebraic combinatorics, where he exploits symmetries to better understand mathematical objects coming from representation theory and geometry. Past projects have involved parking functions, knot theory, and supersymmetry. Dr. Wilson is also interested in using mathematics to evaluate the fairness of voting districts and other intersections between mathematics and social science.

Dr. Xinyan (Abby) Zhang joined the Department of Statistics and Analytical Sciences in Fall 2020. Her research interests include developing Bayesian statistical methods and bioinformatics tools with application in genomics and metagenomics. She has also collaborated with several teams in the fields of public health on various topics, including cancer, infectious diseases, and data analytics in social media. She has published 28 peer-reviewed journal articles in the past five years and presented several times at national conferences.

Dr. Martin Rolek joined the Department of Mathematics in Fall 2020. He is a discrete mathematician whose research lies in the field of graph theory. His focus is primarily on graph coloring and graph minor problems. He has recently worked with an undergraduate student to investigate fractional coloring of planar graphs with certain structural restrictions. He has also previously designed computer algorithms to help search for specific graph minors in graphs satisfying a specified range of parameters.

Dr. Julianne Vega joined the Department of Mathematics in Fall 2020. Her research interests lie in topological and geometric combinatorics. Her work involves analyzing the structure of combinatorial objects, such as graphs and posets, through topological and geometric spaces. Recent projects include classifying the homotopy type of matching complexes and studying the triangulations of order polytopes.

Dr. Carl J. Saint-Louis joined the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Kennesaw State University in the Fall 2020 Semester. His research group specializes in the discovery and characterization of new Fluorescent Organic Compounds (FOC). The challenges in building FOCs are the ability to tune their luminescence wavelength to near-infrared (NIR) wavelengths with high fluorescent quantum yields and the capability to control the quenching of fluorescence in aggregate state also known as “Aggregation-Cause Quenching” (ACQ). Dr. Saint-Louis studies the effect of introducing different electronic moieties to FOCs to tune their fluorescence NIR wavelengths with high fluorescent quantum yield and the effect of inserting large rotating units in FOCs that suffer from ACQ to overcome the fluorescence quenching problem by creating a phenomenon known as “Aggregation-Induced Emission” (AIE).
Dr. Nick Green joined the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology in Fall 2020. As a quantitative ecologist with prior experience in government and private industry, he applies state-of-the-art mathematical and statistical tools to investigate how organisms respond to natural and human-caused challenges. Scientifically sound conservation requires understanding not only how stressors affect populations and communities, but how uncertainties in our knowledge of organisms’ life history translate to uncertainties in modeled outcomes. To address this need, Dr. Green’s research focuses on statistical methods to maximize the information that can be gained from ecological datasets, and on integrating that information into predictive models for ecological processes. Dr. Green’s research encompasses a wide variety of fish and wildlife species.

Dr. Todd Pierson joined the Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Organismal Biology in Fall 2020. Research in his lab focuses on the ecology, evolution, and conservation of Appalachian organisms—with a special focus on salamanders. Appalachia is a global hotspot of salamander diversity, and these amphibians are compelling models for understanding topics of broad relevance in ecology and evolution. Using a combination of local fieldwork, behavioral experiments, and insights gained from genomic data, research in the Pierson Lab focuses specifically on topics such as the evolution of variation in reproductive behavior, hybridization and the nature of species boundaries, and the application of new methods for studying basic natural history.

Dr. Tsz Chan joined the Department of Mathematics in Fall 2020. He focuses on research in number theory. Dr. Chan is interested in using elementary, analytic, combinatorial and algebraic methods to study numbers and fractions such as their spacings and distributions. Dr. Chan enjoys transforming problems and relating them to different areas and themes.

Dr. Mikhail Lavrov joined the Department of Mathematics in Fall 2020. His research interests are primarily in graph theory and combinatorics. Much of his recent research has been in Ramsey theory, which explores finding highly ordered substructures in sufficiently large structures. This often naturally leads to analyzing the structure of random graphs, and some of his research has applications to the game theory of network creation.
All it took for Kennesaw State University assistant professor of biology Sarah Guindre-Parker was holding a bird.

She arrived at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia as a biology major with a premed concentration, but all that changed once she joined a research project as an undergraduate. “I’d never seen a bird close-up, they look like these weird little dinosaurs,” said Guindre-Parker, who is about to start her second year with KSU in the College of Science and Math. “I got really hooked on the birds and the field work, which sent me down the path of pursuing graduate school, doing some of the same work that I do today.”

Her research work focuses on how European starlings cope with changing environments on both surface and cellular levels through their breeding, their behavior or their physiology. “That’s really what I’m interested in—how animals navigate the world, especially under changing conditions,” she said. “Every organism faces some kind of change in their environment over their lifetime, so it’s not a unique problem exclusive to some animals in certain environments. It happens everywhere.”

As a professor, she tries to help her students find their paths. A product of undergraduate research herself, Guindre-Parker recognizes the importance of exploration and diversity of experiences during college. She said she has a place in her program for anyone who shows an interest in research no matter their major. “I very much wanted a lab and a study system that allows undergrads to be involved in research because I am a product of that opportunity. It was very transformative for me,” she said. “Sometimes if enthusiastic students come to me and say, ‘I just want to see if I like research,’ I try to find a spot for them. I try not to rule them out if they’re not 100 percent serious about being a field biologist forever. You can’t know that before you’ve tried it.”

In addition to KSU’s emphasis on undergraduate research, Guindre-Parking said that the KSU Field Station also drew her to the University. Shortly after arriving in Georgia,
she put up several bird nest boxes in hopes that starlings would lay eggs there this spring, during their prime nesting season.

“It’s a cool outdoor space that’s close to campus and a great opportunity for me and for students to get involved with field research as well,” she said. “I visited the Field Station and immediately thought birds will like this spot. We put out nest boxes and then right before the breeding season was about to start, starlings showed up and started using the boxes.”

She has studied different species of starlings for many years, including starlings in Kenya during her doctoral program at Columbia University. Georgia’s local European starling, a common bird throughout North America, thrives in all kinds of environments, so Guindre-Parker sought to understand their adaptability at the physiological level. Among other factors influencing the birds’ adaptive abilities, she studies their endocrine flexibility—their ability to use their hormones to adapt to changing environments—a trait birds share with humans.

Because starlings are creatures of habit, Guindre-Parker said she expects the same birds to come back to nest next spring. That’s a good baseline for a multiyear research project she has in mind, involving the influence of stress hormones on coping with environmental change, in the starlings that do return to the KSU Field Station.

“Right now, I’m just getting started with this specific system, but I envision having a long-term study lasting at least a decade where I’ve monitored the same individuals from multiple populations around Georgia over their whole lives” she said. “The goal would be to understand how starlings that live in an urban environment versus in a more rural environment have evolved their current coping strategy. Can you see differences in flexibility of behavior or physiology that persist across generations?”

With a field study system set up and a team of undergraduate researchers at the ready, Guindre-Parker said she will welcome two masters students to her group this fall as part of the Master of Science in Integrative Biology program, and in the future seek out more expansive field research opportunities for her team. For now, she marvels at how far she has come since her premed days, and how quickly her work has found a home at KSU.

“Looking back on it, I’m very proud of how much I’ve gotten done and how incredible the students that have joined my team in my first year have been,” she said. “I didn’t know anything about the people who I took on to work as part of the lab, but they’ve been great and motivated so far. I’m really excited to keep it going.”
Kennesaw State junior Trae Dunn, a biology major who is researching nervous system development in worms to better understand human disorders, has been awarded a Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship.

The Goldwater Scholarship recognizes the nation’s top undergraduate scholars in the sciences, mathematics and engineering. One of 396 recipients selected this year, Dunn is the third KSU student to win a Goldwater, joining Jiexi Liao in 2013 and Biya Haile in 2019.

“This is a tremendous accomplishment for a young scholar, and we are so very proud of Trae for being selected for this honor,” said Kennesaw State President Pamela Whitten. “Trae is among the best of the best at KSU, and he has distinguished himself through his many accomplishments. We look forward to supporting him as he continues on his journey and are excited for what we expect will be a bright future.”

The Goldwater Scholarship is the latest addition to Dunn’s academic resume. In 2019, he presented his work on understanding how genes mutate to produce abnormalities that cause
disorders such as epilepsy at the National Conference for Undergraduate Research. That same year, Dunn was one of four student researchers selected to represent KSU at the inaugural Posters at the Georgia State Capitol. He also served as a summer fellow working in the lab of Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor and Nobel laureate Robert Horvitz.

An Honors student, Dunn became interested in research during the first semester of his freshman year when he began working with Martin Hudson, a neuroscientist and associate professor of biology in the College of Science and Mathematics. Later in his freshman year, Dunn became one of the College’s 10 Birla Carbon Scholar recipients.

According to Amy Buddie, director of undergraduate research at Kennesaw State, Dunn’s experience as a first-year student researcher is exactly what the University’s First-Year Scholars Program is all about. Launched last year, the program pairs first-year students with highly productive scholars on campus and immerses them into a culture of research with relevance. Buddie said Dunn’s success can inspire others to get engaged in research as early as possible.

“Trae is a perfect example of how taking on opportunities in research and scholarship at KSU from the moment you arrive on campus can propel you to success beyond your expectations,” Buddie said. “When Trae joined the laboratory of Dr. Hudson his freshman year, he was immersed into a culture of research excellence. The mentorship of Dr. Hudson and his graduate students as well as from more seasoned undergraduates in the lab provide benefits beyond compare for a burgeoning scholar like Trae.”

Dunn, of Alpharetta, says that what keeps him motivated is that he sees how research can impact a person’s quality of life, which is something he learned firsthand when his grandfather was recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

“Now, I am not only looking at it through the eyes of a researcher, I’m looking at it as a person who has been directly impacted and it makes me focus that much more on my goal of becoming a neurologist,” he said. “I want to be at the forefront of changing Alzheimer’s into a curable disease and helping others like my grandfather.”

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Talon’ted Undergraduate Researcher

The Office of Undergraduate Research provides Kennesaw State undergraduate students with faculty-mentored opportunities to interact in all phases of the research process. Undergraduates develop their inquiry and analytical skills as they investigate topics in disciplines across campus which match their interests and career aspirations. Trae Dunn of Alpharetta is one of KSU’s Talon’ted Undergraduate Researchers making the transformation from a consumer to a producer of knowledge. [Read his interview online.](#)
Working long days and sometimes overnight shifts, three Kennesaw State alums—all of whom received their inspiration and training in the lab of associate professor of biology Scott J. Nowak — have a critical task during the coronavirus pandemic.

Rebekah Henneborn and Mary Katherine Grimes graduated in May with degrees in biology. Kristina Palermino-Rowland earned a bachelor’s in biology in 2016 and a master’s in integrative biology two years later. The three recently started working at Ipsum Diagnostics in Sandy Springs, an anatomical and clinical pathology laboratory that has an emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration to produce tests for the novel coronavirus.

The emergency use authorization expanded Ipsum’s testing capacity from 1,000 to 4,000 tests a day, with a turnaround of 24 hours. That meant the lab’s staff expanded as well.

Enter the KSU trio. Grimes and Henneborn hired in early April while Palermino-Rowland worked in academia and at another lab before joining the team at Ipsum.

Ipsum Diagnostics co-founder Lauren Bricks said the three have brought strong work ethics and deep knowledge to the lab, and touted their efforts as critical to Ipsum’s success in coronavirus testing.

“Kristina, our molecular supervisor, has worked on important projects to improve efficiency and capacity by implementing automation and technologies to centralize the COVID-19 workflow. Mary Katherine and Rebekah have consistently demonstrated the ability to adapt, which is paramount to overcoming the challenges of COVID-19 testing,” Bricks said.

“Currently, there are roughly 160 laboratories performing COVID-19 testing and only 12 have been granted FDA authorization. Ipsum is proud to be in this distinct group. We have remarkable employees, and are so grateful to have Kristina, Mary Katherine and Rebekah on our team.”

Grimes said she was excited to get a job so soon after finishing her studies, especially one that engaged her best-learned skills.

“I feel especially fortunate for the opportunity to work in my field during a time when work for many people is unpredictable,” she said. “However, I never would have imagined that my graduation day would be spent in a COVID-19 diagnostic lab. Despite the unfortunate circumstances, I am grateful for the opportunity Ipsum Diagnostics has given me.”
Henneborn credited her Scholars in STEM (S-STEM) advisor, associate professor of biology Jennifer Louten, for directing her to Nowak’s lab, where she gained not only the work experience that makes her a valuable member of the Ipsum team but the confidence to pursue a career in science. Henneborn also said Louten inspired a critical change in academic direction.

“She helped me realize that if I put in the work that my future in science could be fulfilling,” said Henneborn, who benefited from a National Science Foundation Scholarships in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics grant for technical school transfer students. “She pushed me to think bigger and broaden my goals. I started out majoring in biochemistry but found cellular and molecular biology was a better fit, so I changed majors.”

Palermo-Rowland also came through the S-STEM program after having earned an associate degree. She continued in KSU’s Master of Science in Integrated Biology program, all the while working in Nowak’s lab. She credited her experiences with helping her to become a top-notch scientist and leader; Bricks credited Palermo-Rowland with scaling up testing by working with laboratory leadership and other technologists to validate new equipment, automate and centralize the workflow, and help develop solutions for the numerous obstacles caused by the pandemic.

“First and foremost, the projects that I took on during my master’s degree helped me become a well-rounded scientist,” she said. “Science isn’t always perfect. It takes strong critical thinking skills to determine where something went wrong in the testing process and how to overcome the problem. The structure of the MSIB program also provided me with the skills necessary to effectively communicate with all members within an organization to reach a common goal.”

All three say they plan to stay in science in one form or another. Grimes has set a path to medical school, while Henneborn sees a master’s and a doctorate in her future. Palermo-Rowland hopes to move into management at a lab.

For his part, Nowak is not surprised by their success.

“Kristina, Mary Katherine and Rebekah have all been absolute rock stars in my laboratory, and I couldn’t be prouder of their current work,” he said. “They’re really excelling in a critical field.”

“The structure of the MSIB program also provided me with the skills necessary to effectively communicate with all members within an organization to reach a common goal.”

-Kristina Palermo-Rowland
KSU physics professor earns NSF grant

Kennesaw State University professor Nicolas Douguet has been awarded a $138,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to study molecules subject to intense and ultra-fast laser fields.

“I’m excited about this funding on multiple levels,” said Douguet, assistant professor of physics who has previously served as a collaborator and co-principal investigator on other grant awards. “First, the theoretical and computational techniques we are developing will be used to expand knowledge in a very promising area of physics, and it will provide opportunities for undergraduate research at KSU. Second, it is personally gratifying because this marks the first time that I have received a grant as the primary investigator.”

Laser physics is an emerging field, in that the Nobel Prize in Physics was recently awarded for a project that involved generating high-intensity, ultra-short optical pulses. Douguet’s research focuses on strong-field and attosecond physics, where very short laser bursts can serve as a high-speed camera to study the internal dynamics of fast-moving electrons in molecules on its natural (attosecond) time scale. To give a sense of how fast these processes occur, one attosecond is to one second as one second is to the age of the universe. With such fast lasers, electron movies measure the time an electron takes to tunnel through a quantum barrier, or trigger charge migration and bond formation in biomolecules. Ultimately, the goal of this field is to control specific chemical reactions with potential applications in biophysics and medicine.

“I would say attosecond physics is still in the infant stage”, he said. “We’re now focused on the fundamental aspects and what we can learn with this new generation of lasers. There are already some nice applications and demonstrations of the principles of control of some physical process in atoms and molecules. It’s very exciting to be involved with this field at this stage.”

Douguet will use KSU’s High-Performance Computing Cluster supercomputer along with the resources of the Extreme Science and Engineering Discovery Environment (XSEDE) for which he shares another grant to use supercomputers at various U.S. universities.

“You can imagine that analyzing the motion of many electrons in complex molecules interacting with a strong electromagnetic field is very difficult and requires the use of very powerful computers,” Douguet said.

Douguet also said he plans to use part of the funding for student researchers. He said he’d like to involve students each semester, including summers. He would also like to take students to at least one conference a year through the grant. The three-year grant began on August 1.
Kennesaw State associate professor of molecular biology Martin Hudson has earned a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for a study that seeks to identify genes involved in neurological disorders such as schizophrenia and autism.

The three-year, $406,500 grant will enable Hudson to continue his research on neurogenins, which involves understanding how gene regulatory networks function. Ultimately, this research can offer clues as to why certain mutations interact with each other and create a diseased state. This is Hudson’s second major NIH grant since 2016.

“We are looking at how naturally occurring mutations, which individually might have little to no effect in the body, interact with each other such that two mutations in combination might lead to these types of diseases,” Hudson explained. “Specifically, this study will focus on how changes in gene control might create a phenotype or disease and how those networks of gene control interactions function, hopefully bringing us closer to isolating a cause and finding a cure for these diseases.”

In conducting the study, Hudson and his team will use the nematode Caenorhabditis elegans, a tiny worm with a nervous system that shares some similarities to that of humans. This will allow the researchers to gain deep insights into how neural circuits form.

“Figuring these developments and mutations out in a worm is relatively easy and since worms regenerate quickly, we are able to study several generations over a brief period of time,” Hudson said. “The great thing is that at least 50 percent of worm genes have an ortholog in humans, making the information we glean from the worm applicable to understanding human genes.”

Hudson has been studying neurological disorders such as schizophrenia and autism since he arrived at KSU in 2010. He credits his team of student researchers who work with him in his lab, particularly Elyse Christensen, who graduated in 2019 and earned her master’s degree in integrative biology.

“This is a tribute to the hard work done by our team of student researchers who work with me in the lab,” Hudson said. “Elyse, in particular, did a study which was funded internally through KSU’s Office of Research. I believe that it was her published paper that attracted the attention of the NIH. When I texted to tell her we got funded on this project and it wouldn’t have happened without her work, she was thrilled.”

Dedicated to student-driven research, Hudson said he’ll use the grant to fund a master’s student and his team of undergraduates, who have served as co-authors of Hudson’s studies in recent years.

“I think experiential learning is so important that I want to be able to give that back as well,” he said. “They’re the backbone of my research team and critical to the work we do. I want to give students a chance to work in the lab and perhaps find something they’re passionate about.”
The KSU Field Station is a 25-acre property located two miles from the Kennesaw campus. The KSU Field Station, managed by the Office of Research, offers an outdoor space for interdisciplinary research opportunities and a living learning laboratory for researchers, educators, and students.

Explore the research and volunteer services faculty and staff from the College of Science and Mathematics haven taken part in recently.

**European starling research**

Like many local birds, the KSU Field Station's European starlings wrapped up the breeding season after a busy spring of laying eggs (a) and raising young (b). Dr. Sarah Guindre-Parker monitored over 40 nesting attempts at the KSU Field Station and other sites, where she checked nest boxes weekly (c), measured and weighed the eggs (d) and chicks (e), took small blood samples to assess the health of birds, and collected hours of video recordings at the nest to document parents delivering food to their chicks (f).

Now, undergraduate student researchers are diving into video analysis and planning their upcoming lab work to see what this season's data reveal about the behavior and health of urban versus rural starlings. For example, KSU senior Kaitlyn Brown is hard at work analyzing videos to understand how much time parent starlings spend incubating their eggs. She is interested in testing the hypothesis that being a bird parent closer to the city is harder than parenting in rural environments. She presented her findings at the Animal Behavior Society's virtual conference in July 2020.
Biology program volunteers at the KSU Field Station

Coordinated by Kennesaw State University’s Field Station Operations Manager Mike Blackwell, biology program volunteers weeded, fed, and mulched American chestnut tree hybrid seedlings, the result of a decades-long breeding program. These seedlings will be evaluated for resistance to the chestnut blight that wiped out American chestnuts. About 100 years ago, before the chestnut blight, the American chestnut tree was a dominant tree species of the eastern US. Eventually blight resistant plants will be used to restore these magnificent trees to their habitat.
A year after earning her master’s degree in applied statistics and analytics, Kelly Linz is back on campus, this time as an industry expert sharing her knowledge of data literacy with a new group of students.

Linz, who works as an advanced analytics data scientist at Coke One North America (CONA), was hired shortly after completing a course in applied analytics offered by the Analytics and Data Science Institute. The Applied Analytics Projects course, which is open to all graduate students regardless of major, tasks student teams with solving real-world problems under the guidance of a corporate sponsor. Over the years, sponsors of the course have included Georgia Pacific, SPANX, Cox Communications, Shaw Industries, Equifax, and CONA Services.

Now equipped with industry experience, Linz has returned this semester as a sponsor working with and mentoring students on a research project for CONA Services and Coca-Cola Southwest Beverages. The project focuses on how the CONA Services system is paid and the factors that improve or delay the payment process.

According to Linz, this project will provide students with the same type of experience that she received when she was in the class and that she credits with her ability to land her current position.

“No doubt, I 100 percent earned my job because of my work in this course. However, even if I hadn't gotten the job at CONA Services, the class would have been worth it because without it I wouldn't have had that industry experience otherwise.”

Linz enrolled in the applied analytics course on a whim, seeking to fulfill her graduation requirements. Having earned a bachelor’s degree in biology from Kennesaw State, Linz originally planned to work in a research-related field in biology. However, once she enrolled in the applied analytics course, Linz noticed the field of data science is ever-changing instead of repetitive. She later transitioned from pursuing biology research to a career in data science.
“I saw that I would never be doing the same thing two days in a row,” Linz said. “I decided it was really important to keep learning and not get stuck doing the same thing day in and day out.”

At the conclusion of her applied analytics course, Linz’s presentation caught the eye of CONA Services’ leadership board, who offered her a position at the company.

Stories like Linz’s highlight the breadth of the field, said Jennifer Priestley, professor of statistics who teaches the applied analytics course. The course is designed to help students develop data literacy skills, something she believes can be useful in any occupation.

“I think every student on campus should have some experience with data literacy,” she said. “To be honest, I think everyone should have some basic knowledge of how to work with data, how to translate data to information to solve problems.”

Having a graduate of the program return to help mentor students was Priestley’s hope when she first developed the course in 2017.

“Students get so much more out of using data that relates to a real-world challenge that a company has rather than taking it out of textbook; it’s just a much stronger more high-impact experience,” she said. “Then you add having someone who has actually walked in their path, an alum who is now working in industry and it is irreplaceable, you almost can’t put a value on it.”

Linz hopes that students can learn from her experience in the course and become confident in their abilities to make a difference in the workplace.

“My hope is that they can see where I started,” she said. “I’m very straightforward with them; I was not a computer science wiz, I was not a math genius, I had a degree in biology,” said Linz. “But I took the skills I had, made it work and ultimately found the career I was meant to have. Hopefully, my story will inspire others.”

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**Growing Education**

Student learning experiences are enhanced by contributions provided to the college to support our student scholarships; improve the margin of excellence; and support research endeavors and professorships to help Kennesaw State University provide a strong environment for recruitment and retention of promising faculty.

For philanthropic opportunities, contact Jada Marcum, CSM Senior Director of Development, at jmarcum@kennesaw.edu or call 470-578-6877. For more information, visit giving.kennesaw.edu.

To donate to the college, visit bit.ly/GivetoCSM.