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Georgia Southern University This Week — Oct. 22

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***This Week* readership survey**

In order to evaluate the content and look of *This Week*, the Office of Marketing and Communications is asking all faculty and staff members to participate in a readership survey. The online survey can be accessed at <http://news.georgiasouthern.edu/Survey/thisweek.htm>. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Human Resources

Open enrollment through Nov. 2

Open enrollment for insurance will be held through Friday, Nov. 2. During this period, employees may make changes in their benefits coverage that are not allowed at any other time during the year. Changes made in benefits coverage during the open enrollment period will become effective Jan. 1, 2008.

Human Resources will hold four information sessions to discuss the cancer policy as well as changes and improvements in the health care plans for the coming year, and employees are encouraged to attend. The sessions are Monday, Oct. 15, at 2 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 18, at 10 a.m., Tuesday, Oct. 23, at 2 p.m. and Wednesday, Oct. 24, at 9 a.m. All sessions will be held in Russell Union Room 2080.

There will also be an opportunity to add dental insurance during the open enrollment period. The dental program is an "employee-pay-all" program with monthly premiums.

Participation in the pre-tax health and/or dependent care spending accounts is available during open enrollment. Participants must re-enroll for flexible spending accounts every year. These accounts do not renew automatically. For more information, contact Human Resources at ext. 5468.



Professor receives National Science Foundation grant

Georgia Southern faculty member Sarah Higdon has been awarded a \$179,376 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF).

The five-year collaborative grant is designed to help develop research opportunities for undergraduate students who will have an opportunity to work with scientists from around the world on a major astronomy project.

The grant provides students and faculty at Georgia Southern University and 13 other institutions access to the Arecibo Legacy

Fast ALFA (ALFALFA) survey, an ongoing project that is expected to detect 20,000 galaxies out to a distance of 750 million light years.

"This grant makes it possible for undergraduates to contribute to the scientific output of the ALFALFA extragalactic survey and follow-up studies," said Higdon, a professor of astronomy in the Department of Physics. "At the same time, the students will learn valuable lessons about the way that science collaboration functions through their interactions with their faculty mentors, their peers and the leaders of the project."

Led by Cornell University astronomers Riccardo Giovanelli and Martha Haynes, the ALFALFA survey is based at the Arecibo Observatory in Puerto Rico. Using the world's largest radio telescope, the survey is mapping a large part of the sky by using radio wavelengths that are appropriate for the detection of neutral hydrogen gas in other galaxies.

Higdon has been contributing to the ALFALFA survey by providing data on star formation, gas properties of merging galaxies, and the formation of tidal dwarf galaxies.

The ALFALFA survey is expected to take six or seven years to complete, and Higdon's contributions to the project will grow through the NSF grant, which is titled "The Undergraduate ALFALFA Team."

Higdon is working with Colgate University professor Tom Balonek and Union College professor Rebecca Koopman. Together, they are developing an undergraduate student program that includes four core components:

- An annual group workshop at Arecibo that features observing sessions, lectures and group activities
- Observing time at Arecibo for several groups of students per year
- An annual summer research stipend program that will support seven students who will make a presentation at a national meeting
- Funding to provide computers to each of the 14 consortium schools

As part of the grant, Higdon will also collaborate on curriculum and public outreach endeavors with Jose Alonso, the director of the Angel Ramos Foundation Visitors Center at Arecibo.

Two Georgia Southern students are already involved in the ALFALFA survey. Physics majors Josh Davidson and Daniel Richey accompanied Higdon to Arecibo and gained experience with the radio telescope in January.

BASS

Georgia Southern conference brings FDA, pharmaceutical companies, and academics to Savannah

University, pharmaceutical industry and government representatives will gather in Savannah Monday through Friday, Nov. 5-9, for the 14th Annual Biopharmaceutical Applied Statistics Symposium (BASS XIV). The symposium will take place at the Mulberry Inn. The Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH) co-sponsors the conference.

"BASS brings biostatisticians and scientists from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, from pharmaceutical companies, and from colleges and universities across the country to Savannah," said co-chair Laura Gunn, assistant professor of biostatistics in JPHCOPH. "While they're here they share their research formally through tutorials, industry sessions and short courses, and informally through personal discussion. Because these three groups have so much to do with the development and effective use of new medicines, BASS gives them an important opportunity to connect."

Karl Peace, founding director of the Karl E. Peace Center for Biostatistics in Georgia Southern's JPHCOPH, founded the first BASS in 1994 to bring together individuals who used biostatistics in their work. In addition to providing an educational forum, BASS provides revenue to support graduate fellowships in biostatistics. More than 30 students have earned master's and doctoral degrees in biostatistics as a result of symposium revenues.

This year's keynote speaker will be Mitchell Gail, Ph.D., chief of the biostatistics branch, Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute. A graduate of Harvard Medical School with a Ph.D. in biostatistics from George Washington University, Gail is well known in the field of biostatistics for his studies in modeling absolute risk of disease, including breast cancer risk projection. Gail will speak at 6 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 5.

Another interesting speaker will be Louise Ryan, chair in the department of biostatistics at the Harvard School of Public Health. Along with two Harvard colleagues, Scott Evans and Tianxi Cai, Ryan will present a short course titled "Hot Topics in Clinical Trials."

In addition, Mark van der Laan, who holds the JP Hsu/ KE Peace Endowed Chair in Biostatistics in the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley, and his colleague, Cathy Tuglus, will present a short course titled "Statistical Methods for Biomarker Discovery."

Biostatistics is a growing field of public health used in epidemiology, health services research, and design and analysis of clinical trials in medicine. By using biostatistics in clinical trials, scientists can find drug thresholds that offer the most effective results, increase survival rates, and reduce the adverse effects of medication.

The weeklong event is sponsored by the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health at Georgia Southern and the Department of Biostatistics of the Medical College of Virginia Campus of Virginia Commonwealth University. For more information about the