



# The Tiger's Eye

A Closer Look at Excellence in Action at SSU



## Peering Behind the Work of Our Soft Skills Campaign

Our first grand milestone responds to the University System of Georgia (USG) research and initiative with the Momentum Approach on Soft Skills. Soft skills are the intangibles skills and character qualities, shaped by early childhood development, but still teachable and vital in adulthood.

These skills focus on professional life application and set a foundation for careers. A benefit of our Soft Skill Campaign is that our faculty and staff learn along with our students each week focusing on one person and one skill. Our 32 week campaign kicked off in Fall 2023, and will conclude in Spring 2024. As an Historically Black College and University (HBCU), we aimed to bring historic African Americans to the forefront, investigating and discovering what specific soft skill helped them become notable in history.

There is a QR code for those that want more information, and our images are recreated to be Savannah State University (SSU) intellectual property. We have both inside and outside constituents working along with The Center for Professional Excellence (CPE) for vetting and peer-reviewing. Our Soft Skills Peer-Reviewing team includes: Dr. Christina Davis, Associate Professor of Africana Studies; Dr. Carolyn Jordan, Director of the Honors Program; Dr. Sametria Mc-

Fall, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs; Dr. Dedra Andrews, Director of Title III; Dr. Rose Metts, retired Professor from SSU; and Mr. Jonathan Winbush, the General Manager of The Beach Institute African-American Cultural Center. In addition, we have recently added peer reviewers from across HBCUs nationwide. Please see our [CPE web page](#) for the complete list of participants and historic figures.

We also have a timeline with surveys along the way (about every 6-8 weeks) that illuminate what our students, staff and faculty are thinking and feeling about the campaign. The Director of the CPE presented the SSU Soft Skills Campaign at the *HBCU Faculty Development Networking Conference* in Houston, Texas on October 27, 2023, and will also present the campaign at the *SACSCOC Annual Meeting* in Orlando, Florida, on December 4, 2023. The CPE will begin to turn this into a short course for soft skills and offer the course to the USG for all institutions to benefit. The purposes and objectives of this Soft Skill Campaign are:

- To create awareness of African American professional contributions to society and to highlight the soft skills needed for those notable contributions
- To engage campuses in the writing process with an invitation to contribute to the content of this project

- To provide future in-class lessons or assignments on historic individuals within this campaign
- To impact the entire SSU campus (students, staff and faculty)
- To engage the city of Savannah with peer-reviewers and fact checkers from the local community with expert knowledge on historic Black figures
- To fulfill a challenge from the USG to provide soft skill awareness and training
- To deepen awareness and invoke conversations on social media about both the historic figure and the soft skill at hand
- To create a lasting artifact with a digital short course to be shared with other HBCUs within the state of Georgia and the nation as a whole
- To fulfill the mission and vision of SSU and the CPE in becoming more globally engaged (digital) citizens
- To inspire all with these amazing African American individuals that truly went above and beyond all expectation in their time and achieved great things for society

The CPE has conducted its first survey. 62% of our campus stated that they are aware of the Soft Skill weekly email; 45% stated that they read the emails weekly.



# Seeing the Difference: Mindset vs. Mindfulness

Working behind the scenes this entire year, the next milestone the CPE highlights is the inextricable relationship between the academic mindset of teaching and learning. This concept will be coupled with compassionate active mindfulness. Together the academic/growth mindset and the caring support of mindfulness creates a holistic approach for our SSU learning environment. With this paradigm shift of learning about our students we will be equipped to find new opportunities, inspire motivation, create intentions, give rise to purpose and forecast future professional goals throughout the SSU learning experience.

The CPE will start a Mindset/Mindfulness Campaign in Spring 2024. This will entail 22 large interactive posters spread around campus for all students to engage in writing words that are meaningful to them about the difference between “mindset” and “mindfulness.” A chart of help-


ful phrases will assist participants in reading and writing their own expressed ideas about these topics.

Ultimately, student success will manifest in the form of progression, retention, and graduation improved on by a strengthened posture for all: faculty, staff and student.

In preparation for this Mindset vs. Mindfulness Campaign for Year 2, we invited Dr. Richard La Fleur to speak on August 2 and 3, 2023 as well as September 28 and 29, 2023 to allow our faculty and staff to begin to

**Faculty & Staff LECTURE SERIES**

*Guest Speaker*



**Dr. Richard La Fleur**  
University of West Georgia

**Day 1**  
**Theory and Praxis of Meditation**

*When:* Thursday, September 28, 2023  
**1:00 pm - 3:00 pm (2 hours)**

*Location:* King Frazer Ballroom  
*Audience:* Faculty & Staff

*Description:* This workshop takes a closer look at theories associated to meditation and then translates it into praxis. It is designed to walk participants through the experience of using guided meditations in the classroom environment.

**Day 2**  
**Psychology of the Mind and Body**

*When:* Friday, September 29, 2023  
**10:00 am - NOON (2 hours)**

*Location:* King Frazer Ballroom  
*Audience:* Faculty & Staff

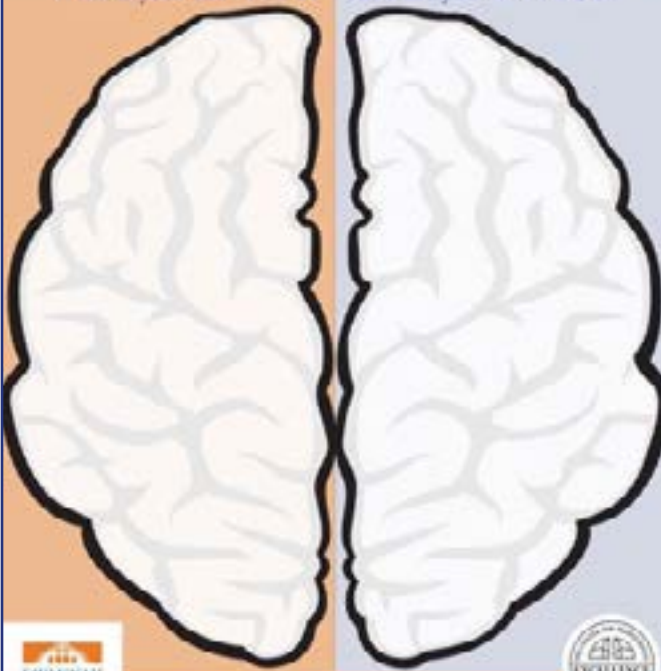
*Description:* The unique connection between the mind and body will be highlighted in this workshop. Mindfulness is the full engagement of our minds and bodies and this workshop explores those connections.

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**It's Time to Use Your Noodle**

The image in front of you is a reminder of the themes we think about at the Center for Professional Excellence. We are asking you to participate by adding a sound or a phrase in the board for what centers in your mind. Think about the term "Academic Growth Mindset." What does it mean to you? Also, what do you think about "Professional Active Mindfulness?"

**What is your MINDSET? How are you MINDFUL?**



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learn more about mindfulness. Dr. La Fleur is a researcher on “Moral Injury” and works for Military clients’ mental health. Dr. La Fleur is a certified facilitator of Therapeutic Enactment, a group-based therapy that engages client in a dynamic interpersonal and action-based process. Dr. La Fleur helps clients physically, emotionally, cognitively and spiritually to address trauma on multiple levels.

Dr. La Fleur has also done important work on “mattering” and helps individuals and institutions discover new frameworks to better

understand roles and relationships for social discourse. Dr. La Fleur lectures on a holistic approach for healing and mental well-being. He is a Professor of Psychology from *West Georgia University* within the USG.

## Examining Knowledge Question Surveys

Dr. Lauren Scharff from the *United States Airforce Academy* presented to our Faculty on August 2, 2023, on how to discover student academic mindset through *Knowledge Question Surveys*. In preparation for Year 2 with the rollout of the mindset vs. mindfulness concept campaign, Dr. Scharff helped faculty see their biases within their own academic mindset as individuals and how they view their students learning mindset as instructors.

Mindset is a proposed way of thinking about one's abilities and skills such as intelligence, communication, and leadership. A growth mindset refers to a belief that, with effort, one can improve an ability or skill. While many efforts have focused on supporting a growth mindset in students, new research suggests that instructors' mindsets about student abilities can impact

student performance, motivation, engagement, and sense of belonging. Instructors also display mindsets about teaching and their ability to improve, which may influence their likelihood to engage in faculty development and try new pedagogies.

Dr. Scharff provided a background on mindset, shared practical and adaptable strategies to promote growth mindset in students, and led the SSU faculty in evaluating their own mindset using a faculty mindset survey.

A foundation was laid with both these experts on mindfulness and mindset for the next Title III Year 2 to build upon the awareness of these ideas. Understanding and application for this campaign will occur in Year 2 and 3.



## Pouncing on Fully Funded Conferences

The Center for Professional Excellence was able to fully support the SSU faculty who submitted proposals to present at the *USG Teaching & Learning Conference* that was held from March 27-29, 2023, at The Classic Center in downtown Athens, Georgia.

The CPE and Title III supported six (6) faculty members presenting at the conference: Dr. Peter Munday from Sociology presented "Strategies for Creating and Providing Online Tenure Content;" Dr. Hope Attipoe from Social Work



(Above) From left: Dr. Abhinandan Chowdhury, from the College of Science and Technology in Mathematics, Dr. Patrice White, from the College of Education, Instructor Sharee Seal, from International Study Abroad and College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Dr. Paramasivam Sivapathan, from Environmental Science, Dr. Nancy Linden, from The Center for Professional Excellence, Dr. Sherry Serdikoff, from Behavior Analysis, Dr. Christopher Torrance from the College of Business Administration, and Dr. Stephanie Alexander from Sociology.



presented "Critical-Radical Pedagogy: An Instrumental Approach to Technology and Learning;" Dr. Guan Jun Wang from Business Finance and Dr. Shinemin Lin from Mathematics presented "Paths to become a millionaire,

A Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experience;" Band Director, Dr. Gabriel Arnold presented "Using Google Tools to Super Charge Your Classroom;" and Dr. Paramasivam Sivapatham from Learning Science presented "Infusion of Advanced (cont.)



(cont.) Pouncing on Fully Funded Conferences

Technologies into the ISCI Classroom to Excite and Engage Gen-Z College Students.”

Also, on February 15-17, 2023, the CPE was able to support seven (7) staff members who presented and attended the local *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Commons Conference*. This conference is an international conference with an intimate feel/listen environment for high-quality presentations from nationally and internationally recognized speakers. Since 2007, the *SoTL Commons Conference* has been hosted by the *Georgia Southern University*, and the Faculty Center and SSU has been able to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity for professional growth. *Savannah State University* had both presenters and attenders at this conference.

On February 20-22, 2023, the SSU staff was invited to engage in the sixtieth-annual meeting to explore one of the most important issues of our era - how to live and learn with technology in ways



From left: Mr. Vantrel Mainor, Coordinator from the Center for Student Success and Retention; Ms. Shalia McGirt, Tutor/Coach for Student Support Services; Dr. Nancy Linden, from the Center for Professional Excellence; Ms. Holly Sparks, Administrative Assistant for the College of Science and Technology; Ms. Ginger Donahue, Program Support Specialist for the CPE and Ms. Sheila McGirt, Coordinator of tutorial Computer Services

that add authentic value to our lives and to the world. The conference embraced ideas of the conveniences offered by emerging technologies in the classroom and beyond.

This conference explored ways to employ people-centered approaches that in-

cludes balance, compassion, healthy living, mindfulness and relationships. The special conference is sponsored by *The Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, USG eCampus and the *University of West Georgia*.

## Propelling Savannah State University Pride

**D**r. Nancy E. Linden was invited to join the Propel HBCU Faculty Fellows Academy inaugural cohort for 2023-2024.

*The Southern Company* and *Apple* joined educators and community stakeholders on January 13, 2021 in announcing a partnership to launch the *Propel Center*, a new digital learning hub, business incubator and global innovation headquarters in Atlanta for students of HBCUs.

The \$25 million investment from *The Southern Company Foundation* will help grow African American entrepreneurship and provide much-needed technology resources to the workforce of the future. This new enterprise will provide scholarships, internships, leadership development, and access to technology and innovation to support career readiness for students attending select HBCUs within the *Southern Company* system's service footprint in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Dr. Nancy E. Linden, representing *Savannah State University*, has been clustered



in a Community of Practice (CoP) with Dr. Andrew Hutchens, *Benedict College*, Dr. Keesha James, *Lawson State Community College*, Dr. Meigan Fields, *Fort Valley*

*State University* and Dr. Sosanya Jones, *Howard University*.



## Roaring SSU Initiative: Regular Substantive Interaction (RSI)

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Education made public updated regulatory definitions of distance education that higher education institutions receiving Title IV funds must comply with in the Distance Education and Innovation Ruling.

The U.S. Department of Education requires that all online courses for which students may use Title IV funds (federal financial aid) “ensure that there is regular

and substantive interaction between students and instructors.”

The CPE has brought an online short course developed by the USG to SSU. It is the hope that all faculty, who teach online, will take this RSI Certification course in order to be SACSCOC compliant. Presentations began in Year 1 and implementation will occur in Year 2.



## New Quality Matters (QM) Master & Peer-Reviewers

Going beyond an initial focus on course design, QM has created a series of program certifications. These certifications draw upon the knowledge gained from reviewing several thousand courses from hundreds of institutions over more than a decade.

As such, they follow the pattern of established QM course design Rubrics.

Dr. Chevanese Samms Brown earned her Quality Matters Peer-Reviewer Certification on January 17, 2023 and Dr. Shetia Butler Lamar earned her Quality Matters Master Reviewer Certification on May 16, 2023. Dr. Serajul Bhuiyan earned his Peer-Reviewer Certification on June 7, 2022.



Dr. Serajul Bhuiyan



Dr. Shetia Butler Lamar



Dr. Chevanese Samms Brown

# Title III and The Center for Professional Excellence

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**T**he offices for The Center for Professional Excellence are located in suite 203 of Whiting Hall on the beautiful Savannah State University campus.

\* Free Image used for the The Tiger's Eye masthead  
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