

2026

INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETITION



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

PROGRAM OF EVENTS

APRIL 6 - 7, 2026

A Message from the Chancellor



**Chancellor
Sonny Perdue**

Greetings,

Welcome to the University System of Georgia's first Innovation & Entrepreneurship Competition. I'm grateful you're here to help us celebrate this inaugural event, and I want to offer a special thank-you to President Kathy Schwaig and Kennesaw State University for their partnership in being our hosts.

Across all 25 of our public colleges and universities, innovation isn't just a concept — it's a responsibility. As one of the nation's top public university systems, we prepare students not only for today's careers but for the opportunities that will shape their success tomorrow. That creativity, vision and commitment to exploring new ideas strengthen Georgia and benefit every community in the state.

This statewide initiative and competition highlight the remarkable talent that exists across our institutions, especially at a time when higher education is changing faster than ever. The ideas on display reflect bold thinking that will help shape Georgia's future and keep it at the forefront of innovation.

There's also a bigger story here. When our students graduate, they become the skilled talent that attracts new industries to Georgia. And many of those graduates don't just become great employees — we graduate great employers who build companies and drive growth right here in Georgia. Those companies, in turn, create even more jobs and fuel economic expansion. It's a virtuous cycle of prosperity — one that benefits our students, our campuses and the entire state.

Thank you for your commitment to this important work. Together, we're building an ecosystem where innovation thrives and where every student has the chance to make meaningful contributions to Georgia's continued success as the top state for talent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sonny Perdue".

Sonny Perdue

April 6: Day 1 (Preliminary Round)

- 12:30 p.m. Team check-in opens
- 1:30 p.m. Guest check-in opens
- 2:30 – 4:40 p.m. Preliminary pitches

Ballroom A

- 2:30 – 2:40 p.m. Atlanta Metropolitan State College
- 2:45 – 2:55 p.m. Georgia State University
- 3:00 – 3:10 p.m. Kennesaw State University
- 3:15 – 3:25 p.m. Georgia Highlands College

Ballroom B

- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Clayton State University
- Georgia Gwinnett College
- Middle Georgia State University

3:30 – 3:40 p.m. Preliminary Round Break

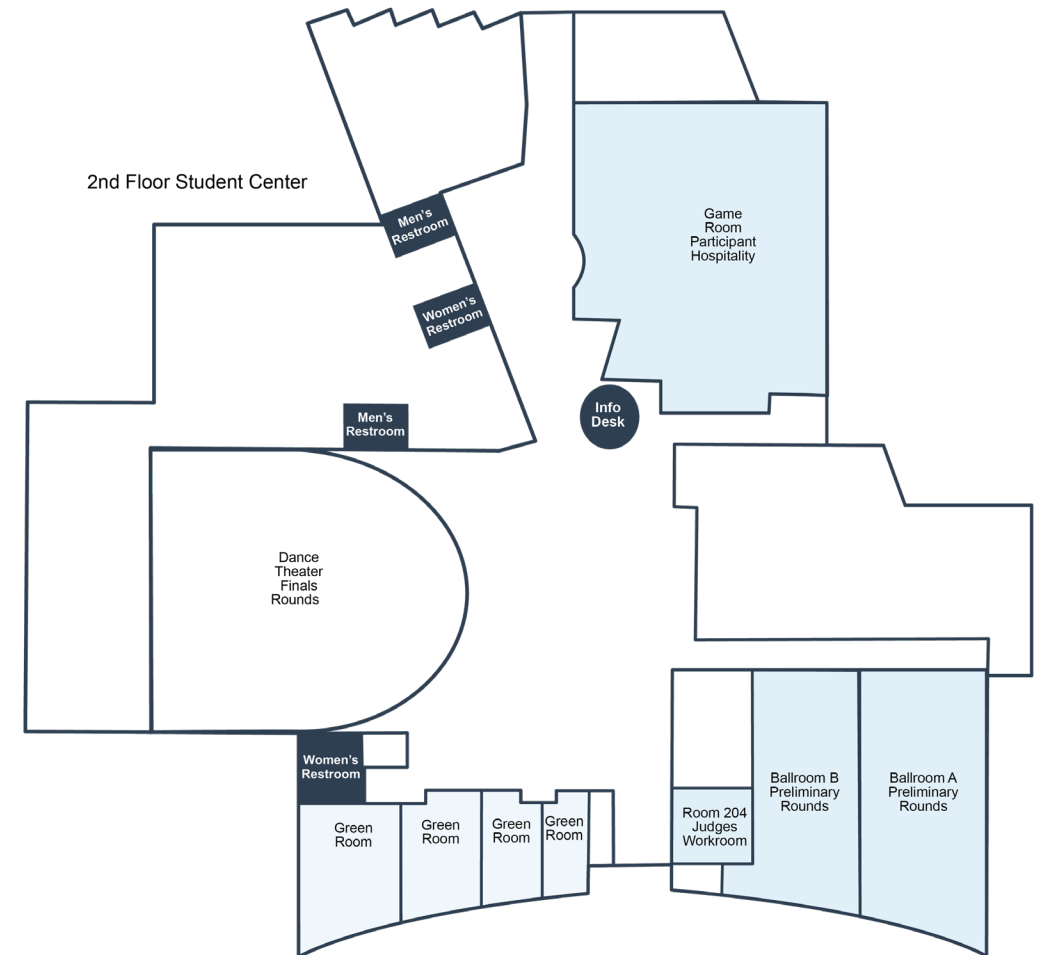
Ballroom A

- 3:45 – 3:55 p.m. Augusta University
- 4:00 – 4:10 p.m. Columbus State University
- 4:15 – 4:25 p.m. Dalton State College
- 4:30 – 4:40 p.m. Georgia College & State University

Ballroom B

- Gordon State College
- University of Georgia
- University of North Georgia
- University of West Georgia

5:00 p.m. Day 1 concludes



April 7: Day 2 (Preliminary Round)

- 7:30 a.m. Team check-in opens
- 8:00 a.m. Guest check-in opens
- 9 - 10:10 a.m. Preliminary pitches

Ballroom A

- 9:00 – 9:10 a.m. Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College
- 9:15 – 9:25 a.m. Albany State University
- 9:30 – 9:40 a.m. South Georgia State College
- 9:45 – 9:55 a.m. Savannah State University
- 10:00 – 10:10 a.m. -----

Ballroom B

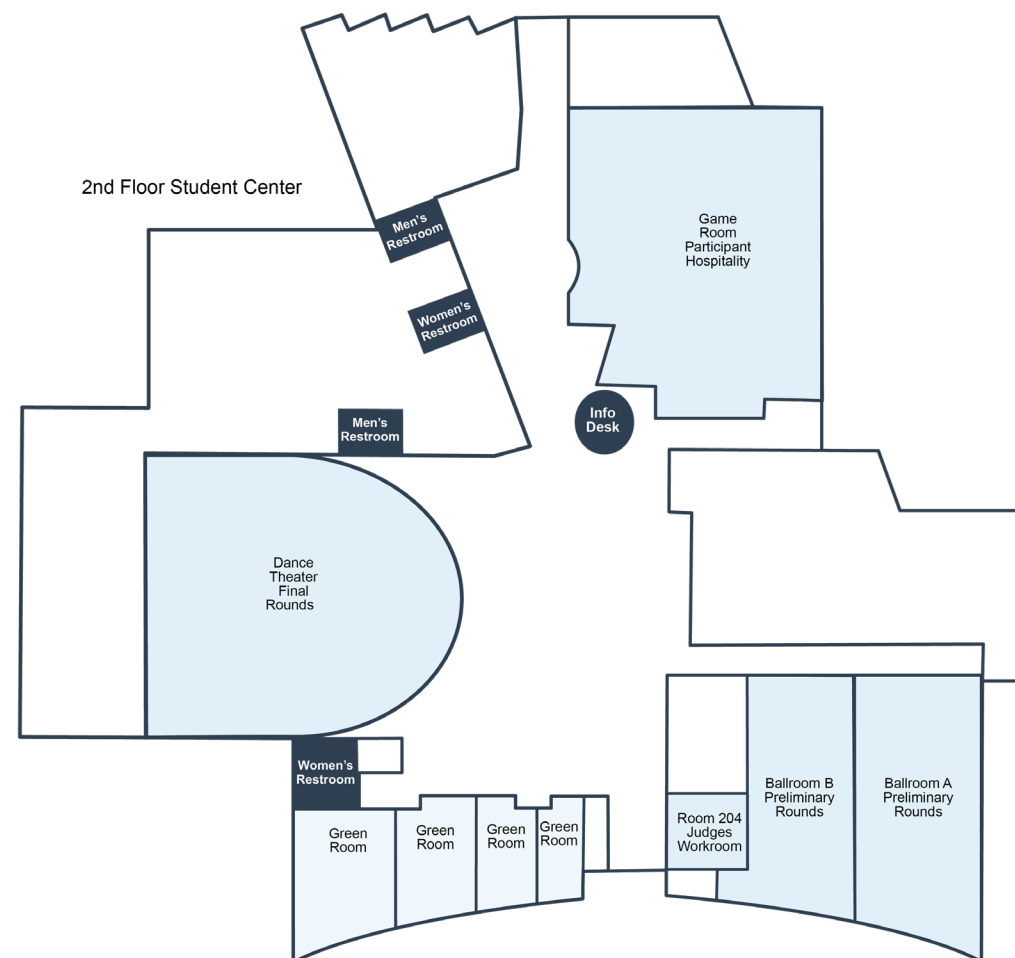
- Georgia Southern University
- College of Coastal Georgia
- Fort Valley State University
- Georgia Southwestern State University
- Valdosta State University

10:30 – 12:30 p.m. I&E Panel & Lunch Break

Dance Theater

- 12:30 p.m. Doors Open for Finals Round
- 1:30 p.m. Finals Round Begins
 - General Welcome and Remarks
 - Final Teams 1 to 6

- Judges Deliberation
- Award Ceremony
- Competition Concludes



Participants



Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College Bounce Back Together

Bounce Back Together is a social enterprise that turns inflatable fun into healing by using rental revenue to fund interactive play therapy for children coping with loss.

Albany State University The Vanguard Project

Many college students experience mental health challenges but lack consistent education and support due to stigma and limited, one-time awareness efforts, highlighting the need for structured, ongoing semester-based mental health programming in higher education.



Atlanta Metropolitan State College Herndon's Choice Youth Barber Project

Revolutionizing Education Through Apprenticeship. The Herndon's Choice Youth Barber Program will offer extended support in academic enrichment, pre-apprenticeship training in select trades, and athletic skill development for Atlanta students aged 12 to 14 years old.

Augusta University Titra Health

Titra Health is building a patient engagement platform for GLP-1s, connecting fragmented patients back to their primary care providers through daily monitoring, personalized plans, and direct EHR integration, creating a persistent data layer across providers, payers, and manufacturers.



Participants



Clayton State University ErgoDental Innovations

PerioDock™ is a headrest-mounted periodontal charting dock that eliminates the body-twisting dental hygienists perform dozens of times per day, reducing injury risk while improving clinical documentation accuracy and efficiency.

College of Coastal Georgia Mariner Ventures

Through inspired innovation, Cool Charge Covers protects your car battery from the heat of the southern summer, giving you peace of mind every time you start your car.



Columbus State University NextRep

A mobile app that uses AI to give tennis players real-time conversational coaching and audio feedback during practice.

Dalton State College Sataria

Sataria is a women's golf apparel brand founded by student-athletes to create stylish, high-performance clothing that blends modern fashion with on-course functionality.



Participants



Fort Valley State University

Roots of Change

Roots of Change is a food intelligence platform that uses NFC tags and lifecycle data tracking to monitor food freshness from farm to consumer while reducing waste and enabling research on how food quality affects health.

Georgia College & State University

TraySync

TraySync is a digital workflow platform that standardizes dental procedure tray setups, helping dental practices train assistants faster, reduce errors during procedures, and improve clinical efficiency.



Georgia Gwinnett College

CodeFolio



CodeFolio

CodeFolio is a portfolio platform that complements LinkedIn by allowing students, developers, and creatives to quickly create and share project-based portfolios that showcase real work instead of just listing skills.

Georgia Highlands College

ByeByeBugs

ByeByeBugs is a home pest control subscription service that delivers customized treatment kits and simple guidance to help homeowners safely and effectively manage pest problems themselves.

BYE BYE BUGS



Participants



Georgia Institute of Technology

AdaptaPlay

AdaptaPlay is a modular gaming controller add-on for those with disabilities and mission is to develop, test, and distribute an easily customizable adaptive gaming controller add-on so individuals with disabilities can play online games, connect with peers, and reduce isolation.

Georgia Southern University

Echo Oracle

Echo Oracle is a physics-informed AI software that converts complex ultrasonic inspection data into automated 3D defect visualization, classification, and sizing, comparing against structural code compliance-based pass/fail decisions for critical infrastructure.



Georgia Southwestern State University

FitFlow



FitFlow introduces a lightweight, rechargeable seat cover that easily clips onto any wheelchair to provide continuous airflow and reduce heat discomfort for wheelchair users.

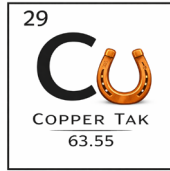
Georgia State University

Arthroba

Arthroba is building the first scalable, personalized knee rehab platform that combines a validated wearable device with AI-driven recovery insights to make joint health smarter and more accessible.



Participants



Gordon State College Copper Tek

Copper Tek's accessible kits allows farriers to electroplate horseshoes with copper. This product serves to protect from bacterial invasion and prevent degradation of the hoof capsule.

Kennesaw State University PaintCo Labs Inc.

PaintCo is a patented commercial body art printer that allows fans to print custom sport designs on the skin in seconds not minutes.



Middle Georgia State University ProMatch Labs

FindAPro is a platform that connects consumers with service professionals while using its AI feature, B³ (Build, Brand, Bank), to help new and small businesses launch, grow, and gain visibility.

Savannah State University Empower Migrate

Empower Migrate is an AI-powered mobile platform that helps shelters with individuals transitioning out of homelessness provide support resources to allow them to achieve long-term stability.



Participants



South Georgia State College Sky Harvest Precision

SkyHarvest precision provides autonomous drone fertilizer spraying, aerial mapping and other agricultural and industrial solutions.

University of Georgia Skyfall

Skyfall uses a novel net deployment mechanism on an inexpensive satellite platform to deorbit medium sized space debris.



University of North Georgia Zapp

Zapp's is a platform that reduces job application time from minutes to seconds using AI-powered personalization.

University of West Georgia Lanke

Lanke is a brand merging 3D technology with African craftsmanship to deliver personalized handbags.



Valdosta State University BATReX

BATReX is a U.S. based EV battery reprocessing company that certifies and uses end-of-life battery cells as backup power sources, and recovers manganese, cobalt and lithium from substandard cells for battery manufacturing.



Judges Panel



Jeb Stewart – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Jeb Stewart is an entrepreneur and investor, having directly invested in more than a hundred startups or early-stage businesses and multiple venture capital funds, serving as an active advisor to many of them. He has been part of building businesses in several industries and has (pseudonymously) authored a Wall Street Journal bestseller on entrepreneurship.



Teresa MacCartney – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Teresa MacCartney serves as the Chief Operating Officer for the University System of Georgia, overseeing operations for 25 public colleges and universities. She has held senior leadership roles including Executive Vice Chancellor, Acting Chancellor, Interim President of Georgia Southwestern State University, and Director of the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget as the Chief Financial Officer for the State of Georgia. A graduate of Georgia Southern University, MacCartney chairs the Georgia Higher Education Facilities Authority Board and has served on numerous state boards and authorities throughout her distinguished career.



Mark McKenna – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Dr. Mark McKenna is a physician-entrepreneur with two healthcare exits, recognized for building and scaling patient-centric platforms at the intersection of aesthetics, wellness, and longevity medicine. He designs modern healthcare brands that integrate experience, technology, and disciplined execution to redefine private care.



Leroy Hite – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Leroy Hite is an entrepreneur, industry creator and keynote speaker who created the world's first luxury firewood company from scratch, a category that didn't exist, scaling it to the White House Oval Office, the Today Show, and Netflix before selling and exiting in 2024. A keynote speaker who has shared the stage with Ritz-Carlton co-founder Horst Schulze, he brings a hard-won playbook on category creation, resilience, and building something the world has never seen.

Judges Panel



Tracey Cook – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Tracey Cook serves as the Chief Fiscal Officer for the University System of Georgia and Treasurer to the Board of Regents, providing oversight and guidance in the areas of fiscal affairs and shared services. She has over 35 years of experience in the higher education sector. Tracey earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Accounting from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany and a Master of Business Administration Degree, with a concentration in Finance, from Georgia State University. Tracey has also earned the distinction of Certified Public Accountant (CPA).



Allen Fox – Day 1 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Allen Fox leads entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem development for the Georgia Department of Economic Development, building the infrastructure that connects research, capital, and customers to help startups scale. He specializes in frontier tech industries including defense, advanced manufacturing, agtech, logistics and energy, working to position Georgia as a leader in innovation.



Dave Payne – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Dave Payne is the managing partner of Neighborhood Studios. Dave has been a founder and investor in his entire career. He currently runs a venture studio.



Kaitlin Hagan – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Kaitlin Hagan is the Founder and CEO of NewCrew, an Atlanta-based recruiting firm helping construction, architecture, and engineering firms hire exceptional people. Inspired by watching her parents' construction company struggle to find reliable workers, she launched NewCrew to bridge the talent gap across the industry — from skilled trades to leadership roles.

Judges Panel



Daniela Burleyson – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 1

Daniela Burleyson is the Sr. Manager of Brand Marketing for Atlanta United FC, where she leads marketing campaigns and drives the club's brand and fan experience. Throughout her career, she has worked for four professional sports teams, including the Atlanta Falcons, Atlanta Braves and Kansas City Royals, with a focus on storytelling, fan engagement and brand growth.



Christopher Klaus – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Christopher Klaus is the Founder and CEO of Fusen, a technology entrepreneur and investor dedicated to building and scaling transformative companies. He founded Internet Security Systems (ISS), helped establish Georgia Tech's CREATE-X program, and now supports founders through Fusen.



Jessica Johnson – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Jessica Johnson is the Education Director at the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget and a proud graduate of the University System of Georgia. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and a master's degree from Georgia State University. Jessica has worked in public finance and administration for over 15 years and currently leads a team at OPB that conducts budget analysis and policy planning for the Governor on education issues ranging from Pre-K programs to higher education across the state.



Cade Joiner – Day 2 (Preliminary Round) Ballroom 2

Cade Joiner founded Shred-X Secure Document Destruction, one of the largest independent shredding companies in the Southeast one year after earning a BBA in Marketing from the University of Georgia in 2001. Joiner is the former Chairman of the National Federation of Independent Business of Georgia and currently serves as Chairman of the Board of the USG Foundation, and a board member of the UGA Entrepreneurship Program, the UGA Athletic Association, the Georgia Research Alliance, and the University System of Georgia Board of Regents. As a serial entrepreneur, he also advises the boards of multiple healthcare and tech start-ups across the United States.

Judges Panel



Selby Hill – Day 2 (Finals Round) Dance Theater

Selby Hill is the Founder and Director of Operations, Yonder Yoga where she manages the operations and growth strategy for Yonder Yoga and their seven locations spanning Atlanta, Athens, Georgia, and Charlotte, North Carolina.



Jim Syfan – Day 2 (Finals Round) Dance Theater

Jim Syfan is the CEO of Syfan Logistics. In 1984, he and his sons founded Turbo Logistics, which they later sold. They went on to create and co-own Syfan Logistics, Inc., Syfan Transport, Inc., and Trilogy, a factoring company. Jim also helped establish the Syfan Logistics Christian Charitable Fund to support local community needs and assist Syfan team members.



Sarah-Elizabeth Langford – Day 2 (Finals Round) Dance Theater

Sarah-Elizabeth Langford is the Executive Director of the Development Authority of Fulton County. She is a former member of the USG Board of Regents and currently serves of the Board of Economic Development, the USG Foundation Board, the Board of Trustees of the Atlanta International School and GEEARS. She is the former First Lady of the City of Atlanta and a graduate of the University of Michigan and Howard University School of Law. She has one daughter, Maria.

Competition Panelists

The Competition panel is reserved for student participants and advisors only and is not open for guest attendance.

The Innovation Journey: Challenges, Rewards, and the Entrepreneurial Mindset

The Innovation Journey: Challenges, Rewards, and the Entrepreneurial Mindset features successful entrepreneurs Doug Shore, Jesslyn Rollins, and Malory Atkinson, alongside David Nuckolls, Executive Director of the Georgia Center of Innovation, who brings a statewide lens on building and supporting innovation ecosystems. Together, the panel will examine the realities of launching and scaling ventures—from individual founder challenges to the broader networks, resources, and policies that enable entrepreneurial growth—highlighting the entrepreneurial mindset required to sustain innovation over time.

Moderator



Dr. Lou Marino

Lou Marino is a Professor of Entrepreneurship and the Director of the Michael A. Leven School of Management, Entrepreneurship and Hospitality in the Coles College at Kennesaw State University.

Panelist



Doug Shore

Doug Shore is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Kennesaw State University Foundation, Kennesaw, GA, of the advisory board of the Michael J. Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State University, and of the Robin & Doug Shore Entrepreneurship Center at Kennesaw State's Coles College. He also serves on the Advisory Council of Entrepreneurship at Cornell, Ithaca, NY. Doug retired from the B2B media business after launching, growing and selling Shore-Varrone, Inc., to VNU (now Nielsen) in 1998.

Competition Panelists



Malory Atkinson

Malory Atkinson is the Co-Founder and Managing Partner of Georgia's only women-owned structural engineering firm, Shear Structural. She co-owns The Zero Co (Georgia's first zero proof bottle shop), Elemental Spirits Co, Sidetracked Wine Co & 3411 Pierce Coworking alongside her husband.



David Nuckolls

David Nuckolls is the Executive Director of the Georgia Center of Innovation at the Georgia Department of Economic Development, where he has led the center since 2020. He oversees six statewide teams that help businesses pursue innovation and growth, expanding focus areas such as AgTech and Creative Technology while strengthening support for entrepreneurs through initiatives like the Innovation Support Network. With a background in economic development, marketing, and communications, he also serves on multiple boards and has been recognized by *Georgia Trend* as one of Georgia's notable leaders.



Jesslyn Rollins

Jesslyn Rollins is the CEO of Atlanta-based BIOLYTE. Since BIOLYTE's inception, she has held every position in the company from director of sales, chief sales and marketing officer to CEO (at age 30), managing the sales, marketing, operations, finance and production teams. Jesslyn has led BIOLYTE to become a multi-million-dollar business; it was named a 2022 Inc. 5000 company, earning the 605th spot on the list of America's fastest-growing private companies. She was named a 2022 Atlanta Business Chronicle "40 Under 40" awardee and is passionate about making an impact on her community.



KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY



SAVANNAH STATE UNIVERSITY



Albany State University
UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



CLAYTON STATE UNIVERSITY



Middle Georgia State University



FORT VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY
EMPOWERING FUTURE



AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY



GEORGIA COLLEGE & STATE UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



SOUTH GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE



Georgia Tech.



Georgia State University



UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA



Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College



COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY



Georgia Gwinnett COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA



GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY



ATLANTA METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE



COLLEGE of COASTAL GEORGIA



DALTON STATE



VALDOSTA STATE UNIVERSITY



GORDON STATE COLLEGE



GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY of NORTH GEORGIA
THE MILITARY COLLEGE OF GEORGIA



GEORGIA HIGHLANDS COLLEGE
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