Clarke Schools partnership allows kids to ‘Experience UGA’

The partnership’s vision is that children who start kindergarten in a Clarke County school will have at least 13 opportunities to visit the UGA campus by the time they graduate from high school and ultimately will view a post-secondary degree as an attainable option for their future.
The University of Georgia and the Clarke County School District have launched Experience UGA, a new partnership that aims to bring every Clarke County student to UGA’s campus for an annual field trip and opportunity to experience learning on a college campus, explore college options and interact with UGA students.

The partnership’s vision is that children who start kindergarten in a Clarke County school will have at least 13 opportunities to visit the UGA campus by the time they graduate from high school and ultimately will come to view a post-secondary degree as an attainable option for their future. While students in Clarke County schools typically have an opportunity to participate in at least one field trip to UGA during their K-12 years, there has not been funding available or a structured plan to reach all 13,000 students every year. The field trips started earlier this month.

“We are very pleased to continue to find innovative ways for the Clarke County School District and the University of Georgia to offer unique learning opportunities for our students,” said Superintendent Philip D. Lanoue. “By the time a student graduates from our district, our goal is that they will have seen each college or school at UGA, which will undoubtedly help students prepare and plan for post-secondary success.”

In its inaugural year, Experience UGA will offer seven field trips, all hosted by a variety of academic departments and public service units across campus that are providing teacher resources, faculty expertise, student volunteers and critical funding for bus transportation—one of the biggest financial barriers to getting students to campus. The President’s Venture Fund is providing substantial support to launch this partnership.

“No factor is more important to an individual’s success in life than education, particularly higher education,” said UGA President Jere W. Morehead. “I am pleased that the University of Georgia, through the College of Education and the Office of Service-Learning, is creating a partnership with the Clarke County School District to introduce every student to the UGA campus. I believe that Experience UGA will change the lives of many of the Clarke County students who come to this campus.”

Planning meetings between CCSD and the UGA Office of Service-Learning and College of Education’s Office of School Engagement began over the last year. Nearly 5,000 Clarke County students are expected to participate in trips led by hundreds of UGA students from service-learning courses connected to the academic content of the field trip. Some well-established trips such as the fifth grade tour hosted by the Georgia Museum of Art, will serve as models for new Experience UGA trips. Trips this year range in grade level from Pre-K to high school and cover a range of curricular topics, from art and music to biological sciences:

- The State Botanical Garden, a unit of Public Service and Outreach, will offer a trip for Pre-K students to learn about forest ecosystems.
- The Georgia Museum of Art will continue to host a gallery trip for fifth graders, while expanding to include music performances by the School of Music.
- The J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, a unit of Public Service and Outreach will work with sixth grade students to develop leadership skills in their Outdoor Leadership Lab.
- Seventh grade students will explore ecosystems, nutrition and food production at the State Botanical Garden and UGArden, UGA’s student-led community garden.
- The Richard B. Russell Building Special Collections Libraries will host eighth grade students studying Georgia history.
- The Franklin College of Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Vice President for Research will host ninth grade students on a tour of more than 20 biological sciences research facilities across UGA’s campus. The students will explore careers in science with UGA science students and participate in hands-on science activities.
• The Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources will host 10th-12th grade students studying environmental science, Advanced Placement environmental science and AP biology for hands-on experiences with white-tailed deer and various aquatic life.

The Experience UGA partnership plans to add additional grade-level trips each year as more curricular connections are made to UGA units and as funds to support trips are secured through private donations and grants. For more information or to find out how to support this partnership, contact Claire Coenen, Experience UGA Coordinator with the Office of Service-Learning at coenen21@uga.edu.

About the Clarke County School District
With 21 schools and over 12,000 students, the Clarke County School District offers students both diversity and a culture of academic excellence. The district was recognized as Georgia’s top school district for closing the achievement gap as a Title I Distinguished District. Learn more at www.clarke.k12.ga.us.

About the UGA Office of Service-Learning
In service-learning courses, students participate in service activities that address community issues in order to enhance academic learning and teach civic responsibility. The UGA Office of Service-Learning supports the development of academic service-learning and community engagement initiatives designed to enhance students’ civic and academic learning, promote engaged research that is responsive to community needs, and contribute to the public good through mutually beneficial community-university partnerships. The OSL is jointly supported by the Offices of the Vice President for Instruction and the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach. For more information, see www.servicelearning.uga.edu.

About the UGA College of Education’s Office of School Engagement
The Office of School Engagement at the University of Georgia serves as a bridge between the worlds of theory and practice in P-16 public education to improve the educational experiences of students and the professional lives of educators. For more information, see archive.coe.uga.edu/ose.

Shannon O. Wilder has served as the founding director of the Office of Service-Learning (OSL) at the University of Georgia since 2005