Mason SCIENCE

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In this Issue

- Message from the Dean
- Mason Science Community
- Research & Discovery
- In the News
- Happening at Mason
- Events



Dean's Blog: You Can Succeed

by Fernando Miralles-Wilhelm and Zander Leon

Last week, I referenced the importance of early career research and experiences shaping one's scientific success. To commemorate Black and African Heritage Month, as a part of our commitment to advancing access, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (AJEDI), I am delighted to share the story of our own Dr. Gerald Weatherspoon, Chair, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Humble beginnings

From the small town of Gloster, Mississippi, to the first African American Professor tenured in Chemistry at George Mason University, Dr. Gerald Weatherspoon has experienced an exciting journey, while paving the way for future scientists of all backgrounds.

Weatherspoon's initial upbringing occurred at a time and place where the Ku Klux Klan still passed out flyers and encircled school buses (in broad daylight) because they opposed desegregation in the south. After growing up and learning the ropes of farming, which left calluses on his hands, Gerald knew he was destined for something bigger. His ticket out of his small town was his enrollment to Jackson State

University, one of the largest Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the country. Weatherspoon's time at Jackson State instilled in him the importance of continuing his education.

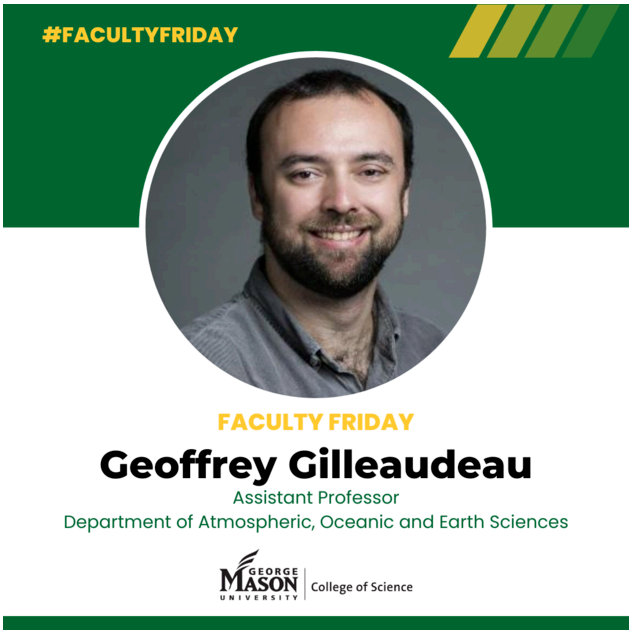
Weatherspoon traveled and participated in internships throughout his undergraduate years. He explained being outside of Mississippi was incredibly eye-opening, "Seeing what it was like to be a serious minority and understanding what the students were going through there (Cornell University and Washington State University)."

Weatherspoon went on to pursue his PhD at The University of California, Davis, but the quarter system pace was exhausting. After his first year, he decided to take a break. But the summer break turned into five formative years at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, where he was one of five African American chemists out of approximately 340 employees in the Chemistry Division. Bolstered by the encouragement of Nora Briant, a coworker and mentor at the lab, Gerald went back to UC Davis to finish his PhD, a turning point in his career. Nora encouraged him to return, in part because she knew he had the talent and ability to become the first black PhD chemist at Lawrence Livermore. Although he did achieve this goal, this would be only one of his big "firsts."

Read full message



#FacultyFriday highlights AOES assistant professor



Last week's #FacultyFriday featured Dr. Geoffrey Gilleaudeau, Assistant Professor, AOES. His research focuses on the ocean-atmosphere chemistry and its effect on biological development through Earth's history. His research group uniquely blends various geological areas of study and uses a range of geochemical tools applied to marine sedimentary rocks, spanning from the Proterozoic Eon to the current Holocene epoch. View the original Instagram post.

See recent faculty highlights

Mason colleges to host Spring Into STEM community outreach event

Mason's College of Science and College of Engineering and Computing are partnering to co-host the Spring Into STEM event on Saturday, April 29, 2023 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Hybla Valley Community Center in Alexandria.

The free event for K-12 students will offer team building and collaboration activities and an information fair encouraging attendees to learn more about STEM and resources, including Mason programs, camps, and activities, available in the DMV area. Contact Kerin Hilker-Balkissoon for details.

Contact Kerin for details

RESEARCH & DISCOVERY

Mason led system supports USDA goal to increase crop production and decrease environmental footprint

by Laura Powers



George Mason University Geography and Geoinformation Science Professor and Center for Spatial Information Science and Systems (CSISS) Director, Dr. Liping Di, will lead a multidisciplinary research team building scientific data modeling tools to take the guesswork out of crop management decisions.

The team received $749,972 from the National Science Foundation's Convergence Accelerator to design the user-inspired CropSmart Digital Twin (CSDT)—a public facing decision support system that provides the crop farming industry real-time data on the conditions of area crops, soil, weather and markets, decision trade-off, and optimal decision advice. The team's work supports the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) goal to increase U.S. agricultural production by forty percent while also cutting the country's environmental footprint in half by the year 2050. *Photo courtesy of Liping Di.*

More on this work

IN THE NEWS

Mason scientist part of Aussie/US partnership to mitigate bias in AI-powered modeling

by CSIRO, Australia's National Science Agency



Dr. Taylor Anderson, Assistant Professor, Geography and Geoinformation Science will collaborate with research teams from Emory University, Arizona State University and Australian teams from UNSW Sydney and RMIT University. The teams were selected to receive the responsible and ethical AI project grants totaling US$1.8 million from NSF and AUD$2.3 million from CSIRO, with the projects aligned to CSIRO's Missions. Anderson's team will seek to understand bias in AI models designed to predict infectious disease spread.

Fully story

Happening at Mason

2023 Patriot Pitch Competition



The Patriot Pitch Competition supports idea and early-stage business ventures, and serves as a pipeline of ideas and experiences that is certain to inspire tomorrow's entrepreneurs. Please encourage your students to register.

Patriot Pitch Competition is open to all Mason students and recent alumni with an idea and a desire to launch a new business. **The deadline to sign up to participate is March 1, 2023**. The event will take place in April.

The competition includes four tracks that encompass the breadth and diversity of Mason's academic programs. Entries are due by March 1. Volunteers can support the event in many ways, share your time and expertise to evaluate applications, mentor a team, coach a practice pitch, or judge pitches during the competition.

More on the competition



Guidance on Upcoming Performance Evaluations

The new employee performance evaluation cycle is fast approaching. The A/P faculty self-evaluation launched February 20 and the classified staff self-evaluation will follow on March 1.

Human Resources will host four virtual sessions of Performance Management Updates for 2023 to share an overview, new forms, and revised rating scale. Check the Performance Management website for guidance, due dates, resources, training opportunities, and frequently asked questions. Photo by Evan Cantwell/Creative Services.

Find out more

Events

Faculty Matters Workshop Series: Writing Workshop for Teaching and Mentoring Statements
February 23, 2023 | 1:30 to 3 p.m. | Virtual
The yearlong Faculty Matters Workshop Series, a collaboration between Faculty Affairs and Research Development Service, is designed to address key issues central to faculty development and success. The next workshop, Writing Workshop for Teaching and Mentoring Statements, will focuses on how to convey the impact and effectiveness of your teaching and mentoring for renewal, tenure, and/or promotion. Registration required.

Spring 2023 UndocuAlly Trainings
February 24, 2023 | 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. | Johnson Center Bistro
Learn the history of our undocumented communities, past and present legislation, and the lived realities and barriers our undocumented communities are fighting through with strength and resilience. Registration required.

College of Science Faculty Meeting
February 24, 2023 | noon to 1 p.m. | Exploratory Hall 3301 or Virtual
Check your email for the link to remotely access this meeting.

Compassionate Conversations Workshop
February 24, 2023 | 1 to 2:30 p.m. | Virtual
Join Dr. Erikca Brown, Office of DEI Inclusive Education Manager and Dr. Paula Danquah-Brobby, Director of AJEDI in a faculty and staff workshop on compassionate conversation. Compassionate conversation refers to the skillful ways people can talk together to feel understood and better able to understand one another. Registration required for event access.

Mason Science Women Leaders in STEM Mentoring Program kickoff
February 24, 2023 | 3 to 4:30 p.m. | Exploratory Hall 3301
Participate in a conversation around the importance of mentoring, especially for women in STEM, mentoring best practices, and tips to identify a mentor. All students, staff, and faculty are welcome.

Serve as Teacher-Mentor for UNIV 100 Courses
Application Deadline: February 24, 2023 | 11:59 p.m.
University Studies is now accepting applications from Mason staff to teach and serve as a role-model to first-year students in 'UNIV 100 Introduction to Mason' courses for Fall 2023.

4-VA@Mason Collaborative Research Grants Application Deadline
Deadline: February 28, 2023 | 11:59 p.m.
Faculty interested in piloting a novel research project in conjunction with colleagues at one of the seven other 4-VA schools in Virginia are encouraged to apply.

See Full Calendar

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