

**YEARBOOK  
OF THE  
GEORGIA ROTARY STUDENT  
PROGRAM  
CLASS  
OF  
2018 - 2019**

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# PEACE

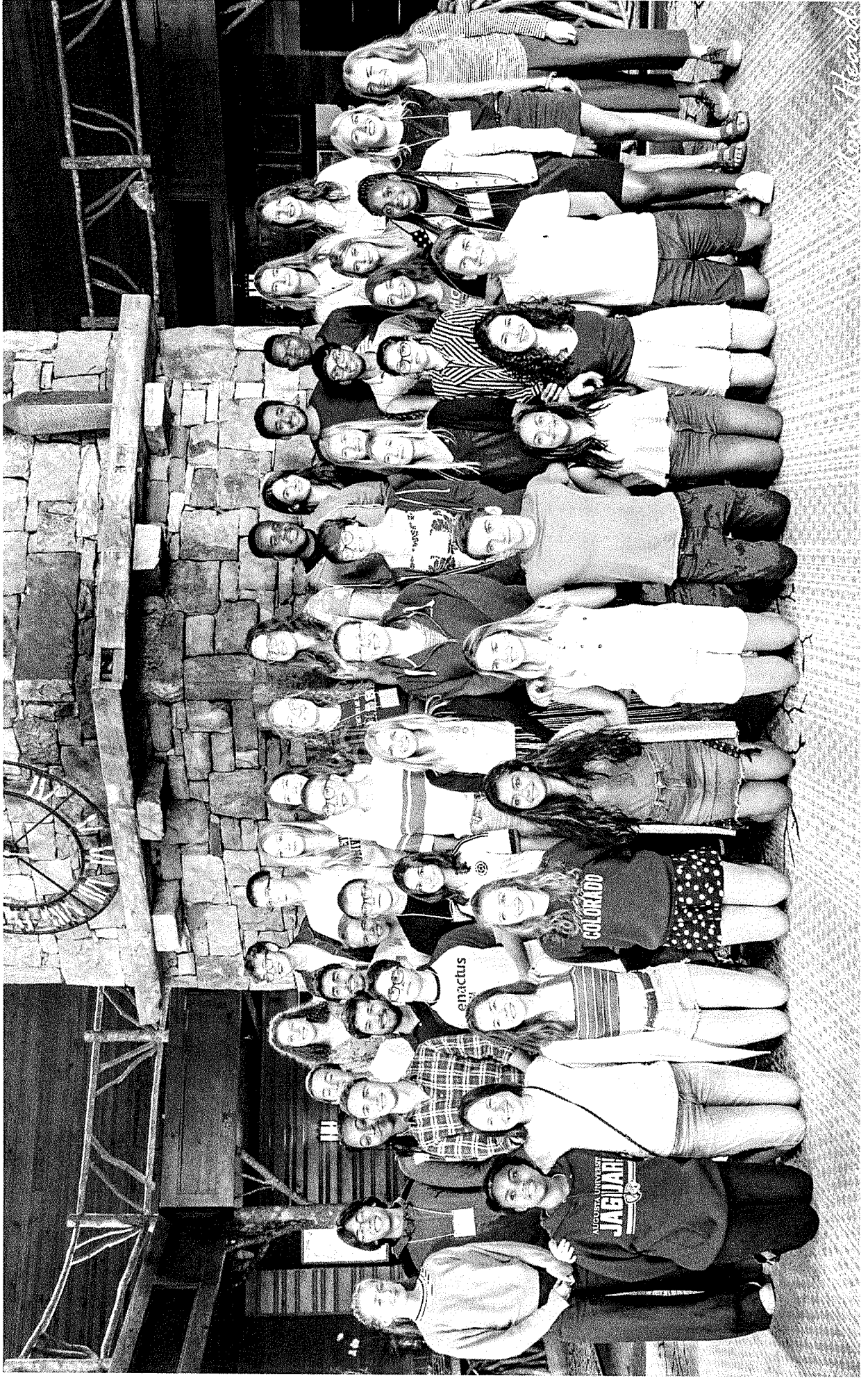
Peace - Oh, what a lovely thought!  
That angry wars no more be fought,  
Or death and violence be wrought.  
Peace - Oh, what a lovely thought!

Peace - Oh, what a perfect way  
In which to live our lives each day  
In thought and deed; in work and play.  
Peace - Oh, what a perfect way!

Peace, Oh, what a glorious time  
When man on earth in perfect rhyme  
Will co exist with love sublime.  
Peace - Oh, what a glorious time!

Peace, Yes, it's a possibility  
To make this world what it should be  
Accomplished through GRSP.  
Peace - Yes, it's a possibility.

# GRSP Class of 2018 - 2019



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# GABRIEL DELLER AGULAR

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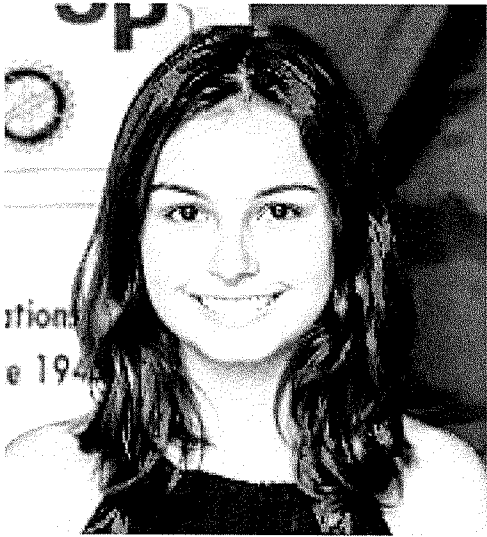
University of Georgia

My experience in the United States through GRSP has been incredible. I am attending the University of Georgia, a large and diverse university where I made friends from other countries and have the experience of living with an American student which increases my immersion in the culture. There I am also learning a lot from the courses I am taken, especially because I can do different things besides my major in Brazil (in architecture and urbanism), these courses are increasing my ability to understand things from different `optics` and adding to my curriculum. As a lover and student of buildings and cities, this year I am having the opportunity to visit several places I never imagined visiting as well as meaningful buildings that I studied in Brazil like the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles and the Kimbell Art Museum in Dallas, which has been an adventure and has taught me a lot.

What surprised me the most during this period was the receptiveness and affection of the Americans, especially those involved with Rotary and the GRSP program. My hosts, Skipper and Anna Burns from the Rotary Club of Griffin, made me feel part of their family, they are always interested in getting to know Brazil as well as introducing me to local customs. In December my parents came to see me and to know the Burns family, it was exciting to see how they received them so well and were so friendly. I'm sure I will remember these moments for all my life.

The program is very organized and the almost monthly meetings with the others GRSP are always interesting because of the fun and the personal improvement provided by the programs. For me the most valuable thing of this whole experience is to be able to meet and make friends from all regions of the world, my 'notion of the world' and its cultural diversity has increased significantly and that I will take with me back to Brazil.

Gabriel Deller de Aguiar



# KATHERINE ANCINEZ

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Georgia Southwestern State University

The day before my arrival to Georgia, I was very anxious about leaving everyone back home behind. Instead of feeling set free, I felt more like being left on my own. I was so nervous about meeting new people, especially when I had to speak a language that is not my native one. Nevertheless, I had a host family, and a trustee that received me with open arms. The way they understood my situation and the help they granted me made me feel at home.

In college, I got to experience and learn about things I'm passionate about. This helped me grow as a musician. It also made it clear to me what I wanted to do when I went back home. Something challenging about college was meeting new people. It is hard to have things in common with totally different cultures, and this was the challenge I had to overcome. I tried to hide from it and only made friends with those who came from South America. Nevertheless, I then realized that this program was mostly about experiencing the American lifestyle and that this comfort zone I put myself in was blocking me from the actual purpose of GRSP. Now I can say that it was worth the risk. Although people sometimes were not open, in the end I found a group that welcomed me with love. And with them I learned to accept differences, and to find those things that made our cultures very similar and beautiful.

Spending time with the other GRSP students for me was the most fulfilling part of the program. I find it so incredible that people from all over the world ended up at the same place. We were all so different, but at the same time, we were all put in the same situation. This is what made us so close. And the best part is that we are all willing to share our cultural shocks. It's funny that, for example, the cold weather was very strange for me, but for another person, seeing palm trees was strange. Spending time together made us learn so much. And the best part is that I can't say anything bad about any of them. They are all lovely souls.

So much traveling, meeting new people, trying new things, and adapting helped me grow so much. I don't have the words to describe how thankful I am for everything I discovered. We don't know how wrong we are about someone or something until we actually get in their shoes. This is something I will keep with me forever. GRSP made me realize that world peace is possible if we are willing to understand circumstances from different points of view. I want to say thank you to all the GRSP family for giving me the best year of my life.

Katherine Ancinez



# JAMES THOMAS JOHN ANTELL

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University of Georgia

Looking back at the photographs taken at our first conclave, we're not quite the same people we were in September 2018. For one thing, there are some much-improved haircuts. This year has been amongst the best of my life and I have made memories that I will keep forever.

I was warmly welcomed by hosts and trustees at Atlanta Airport back in late July. After a trip to the best steakhouse I've ever been to, my wonderful host Mr. Nathan rushed me up to the beautiful Lake Burton, nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. After three days of sun, boating, and the warmest Southern hospitality, I was just about ready to apply for my American citizenship.

As Fall semester began at UGA (Go Dawgs!), time was filled with tailgates, football games, date nights, and the vibrant Downtown scene (not to forget classes of course).

The Rotary Clubs of Monroe, Social Circle, Conyers and Loganville all warmly welcomed me to their meetings, just as my wonderful hosts Mr. Nathan, Mrs. Amy, Mr. Frank, Mrs. Sandra, and Mr. Daniel welcomed me into their homes. I spend a memorable Thanksgiving with Mr. Nathan's family down on Tybee Island and a festive Christmas skiing with Mrs. Amy's family in Utah. I experienced flying a plane thanks to Mrs. Sandra and Mr. Rodney, whilst Mr. Daniel took me fishing for the first time.

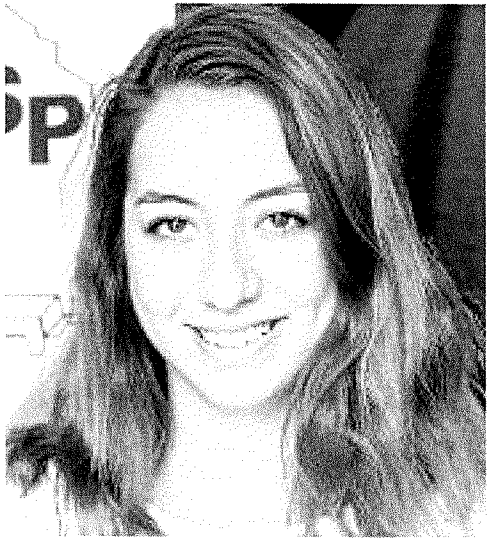
Spring semester had me missing the Georgia summer. For me, this semester was filled with involvement in UGA's Startup Accelerator and training with the UGA Sailing Club.

I've learned a lot about American culture this year, and have done my best to acclimate by driving a truck, wearing a cowboy hat, eating grits and having a go at shooting guns. I'm yet to understand the rules of American football, but I'm working on it.

It was a privilege to spend this year on the Georgia Rotary Student Program and I couldn't have asked for a more fun and welcoming group of people to spend it with.

James Antell





## ALARA SU BILGEZ

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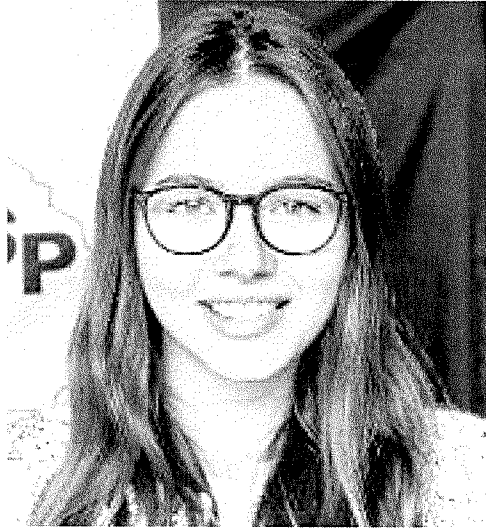
My year as a GRSP student was more than what I expected even though I didn't know what to expect. I loved my school, the classes I took, my host family, other GRSP students, and everyone I met from Rotary. Every week, at the Roswell Rotary meetings, I got the chance to listen to some inspiring speakers and talk to other Rotarians. Everyone was very nice and helpful. My school schedule was not as busy as it was back in my country but I took the courses that I was interested in. Even though I knew that those credits won't count in my country, I tried to maintain a good GPA and had an academic year as I wanted.

When I was not at my dorm, I was at my host family's house. I'm not exaggerating when I say they are the most amazing people I have ever known. I love them with all my heart and I know that they do too. They never made me feel like I was a temporary student that they have to take care of. From day one, we were like a family. We went on a cross-country road trip together and we still like each other after that. I can't thank them enough. But they know that they have a family in Turkey now.

I had the chance to make some presentations about me and my country. I also talk to people and answer their questions about Turkey. The great thing about this scholarship program is that not only you have the chance to learn about the American culture but they get the chance to learn about your culture too. I've been watching American movies and TV shows since I was 12 and I thought I knew a lot about the American culture. It's amazing how there are a lot more than what we see on TV about the American culture. You have to come here and experience it yourself!

If it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't be able to go to the United States, see that many places, learn about the American culture, the south, and I wouldn't meet my host family and their dogs. You can't forget about the dogs. I am so grateful for everything that Rotary has done for me and I will always be. Thank you for everything.

Alara Su Bilgez



## **ANNEMARIE BOKER**

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Oglethorpe University

When I came to Georgia, I was very nervous. Many questions and thoughts went through my head: How would it be to live in the U.S.? Would I find friends? Are my English skills good enough to express myself and to meet the college requirements? How will my host family be?

However, I believe we all felt like this, and all these concerns were unnecessary.

The conclave, where we all met for the first time, felt like meeting old friends. Everyone was new, but no one felt left out. It was like a big family reunion with a small but significant difference - we did not know each other before. But we got to know one another, helped, and supported each other, and became a big group of friends from all over the world.

I think it is incredible what GRSP did to us. We all grew as a person, developed new personality traits and skills, and experienced things which we would not have experienced without this excellent opportunity to be part of the GRSP family.

In particular, a big thank you should go to our host families. Chris and Kathleen, I am so happy that I got to know you and that I was allowed to be part of your family. I could not have asked for a better place to stay. You are amazing people with a big heart, and if I would not miss my own family in Germany so much, I would not mind staying forever! I will never forget the fantastic trip to Arizona and the breathtaking views that we saw on our hikes. Thank you for your support, your hospitality, the great trips, and that I always had a place that I could call home.

Also, a big thank you to Henry and Chris, my two new brothers. It was a refreshing experience to have brothers for a year that do not for example wrangle about little things like favorite T-shirts, as it sometimes happens when you grow up in a family with sisters only. I had so much fun with y'all and never laughed as much in my life as when we were together.

I cannot forget the dogs in this article: Puzzle, Scout and Biscuit, you three were amazing cuddle buddies. You are the sweetest little dogs that I know, and I will miss you so much.

Steve, Anna, and Agnes: I always had a great time when we met. You were like my second host family! You invited me to many activities such as the concert of Phillip Phillips and the soccer game of Atlanta United. I still laugh at the fact that I saw my first soccer game in America together with you. Also, Agnes, I found a really good friend in you. We did so many things together, like our New York trip, our shopping tours, concerts and the coming trip to San Francisco and Los Angeles, which I look forward to. You are like my Danish sister, and I am so sad that we will not live together anymore. I will miss the Taco Tuesdays in the cafeteria and the gym days where we motivated each other.

Last but not least, I want to thank the Rotary Club of Atlanta for choosing me as your scholar. You are the reason that I got to know all these amazing people, went to these fantastic places, and experienced the American college lifestyle. It was so cool to be a cheerleader!

If someone would ask me if I would do it again, I definitely say yes! I am sad to leave, but I will take all these memories with me and hope that I will see everyone again. This year taught me the importance of international understanding, and that Rotary is a great organization to bring people together. In Germany, we have the saying: "Man sieht sich immer zweimal im Leben" (You always get to see each other twice in a lifetime) and I hope that that will happen.



## **FLAVIA GAROFALLO BORTOLOZZO**

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Young Harris College

GRSP is a unique opportunity only Rotary is able to offer, in fact Georgia is the only place where the scholarship is offered. I never thought that I would be the lucky, worldwide selectee, who would get the chance to study in an American University, live in a dorm, have a roommate, be supported by a host family, sponsored by 4 Rotary Clubs and to become friends with another 47 GRSP students from different places of the world.

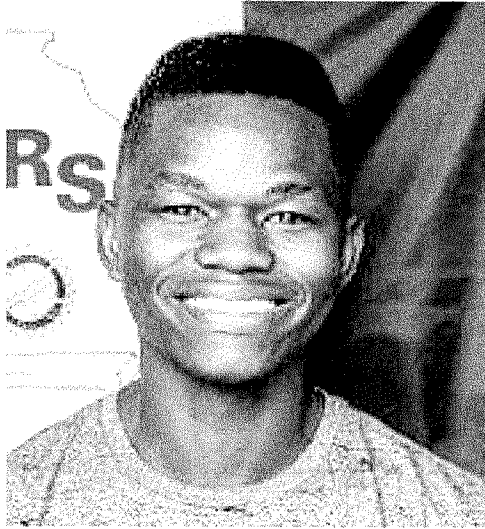
This scholarship is definitely about growing, discovering the world and more about yourself, going out of the comfort zone, having fun, studying a lot, making new friends, going on adventures, facing challenges, learning about different cultures...the list goes on.

I have had an incredible year at Young Harris, a small Liberal Arts College with a beautiful campus in the middle of the Blue Ridge Mountains. It offered me several options of classes and excellent professors to expand my knowledge in different academic areas. Between classes, studying long hours in the comfy library, eating in the dining hall, hiking and rock climbing, I made the best friends I could ask for - an essential part of making my year very special.

I am very thankful to my Hosts Deborah and Walter, who welcomed me in their home, opened their families and shared their holidays with me; Also, the Rotarians who helped hosting and driving me around so I could participate in all the GRSP weekends; The GRSP office with Barbara Lariscy and Holly Baker; It is a lot of work to make this Program happen. Finally, I am grateful to the Sponsors Rotary Clubs, for the scholarship and for the interest in listening about my country and experiences.

I cannot stop thinking that I do not deserve so much hospitality and generosity; nonetheless I will cherish this year forever and make my best to spread Rotary and GRSP values to more people!

Flávia Bortolozzo



## **PAUL CHIDUWA**

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University of Georgia

My trip to Georgia is probably going to go down my memory lane as one of the boldest things I have ever done. All too often people are told to go out of their comfort zone but even this anecdote presents some sort of barriers and expectation. Thinking differently can be assessed as going out of a comfort zone, but moving to a foreign country with no family and a different lifestyle certainly goes beyond the limits.

I came on the GRSP program driven by a myriad of feelings and expectations. My 20 year old self was relatively well according to societal standards- in college, focused, decent grades but my inner man was lacking. Growing up in a homogeneous environment has its own perks but I had enough of these. I wanted to experience a different lifestyle, a paradigm shift and an eye-opener which would successfully equip me for the future. GRSP has proved to be all this and even more!

I have had the amazing opportunity to meet amazing people from different parts of the world. I have managed to form everlasting bonds and friendships with students, GRSPers, Trustees and club members. I have had the wonderful opportunity of a holistic American college experience at undoubtedly the best public school in Georgia- UGA, immersing myself fully in all campus activities, sports and education.

The best part of being a GRSPer to me has been developing a sense of empathy instead of sympathy. All too often the global community watches catastrophic events happen in foreign countries and are sympathetic to the cause, but coming into contact with somebody who has been affected by it changes the story altogether. You feel their pain, anxiety, disappointment and fear and get a better understanding of their life as you communicate and exchange ideas. This is the only way to fight racism and integrate the world beyond the scope of social media global communities. My interactions with Americans affected by events like 9/11, the Islam community and other minorities, African Americans and other groups have moulded me into becoming more of a global citizen rather than a Zimbabwean. The experience has carved my intuition for the better in all facets relating to life and international relations

Conclusively, my experience has been great and this year has undoubtedly been the best year of my life. I can only hope and dream that more people get a similar experience!

PAUL CHIDUWA



# TAKUNDA CLAUDIO CHIKUNDURA

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Georgia Gwinnett College

It has truly been a long journey we all went from being strangers on a GRSP page and now 8 months later it feels like I have known all these people my entire life. I have had a wonderful opportunity to live a life in a year in Georgia. I have been attending Georgia Gwinnett College since the fall of 2018. My host family, Shawna and Patrick Anderson helped me to get settled in and always invited me to their lovely home and showed me southern hospitality it was home away from home and they always took me around showed me the different cities around Georgia but most importantly took me to different expensive restaurants. They let me call my friends over to their house on some weekends. There were also two other GRSP students at GGC Signe and Fahmida they became my best friends and all other GRSP students from north of Atlanta we are close and always meet occasionally especially with my homies from Athens Paul and Daniyal are like my brothers. Even my roommates at GGC we all live so well together, and we have done various activities together like going camping. It was a year of learning more about Rotary by getting more involved, and the US by taking classes like American history and American government to understand how it all works and how things are the way they are today. I also managed to travel around to other cities such as New York, Washington D.C and my latest trip to San Juan, Puerto Rico over spring break for a week and it was a refreshing break. It truly has been a wonderful year and I appreciate this opportunity and to be able to experience this with 45 other students was the best feeling in the world. Finally, I would like to give a special shoutout to the best trustee Mike Alexander he contacted me before I even came and started to prepare me on things to expect and always is good company and gives good advice.

Thank you, Rotary.

Takunda TK Chikundura



## TARIRO ANNE CHIMHANDAMBA

Zimbabwe

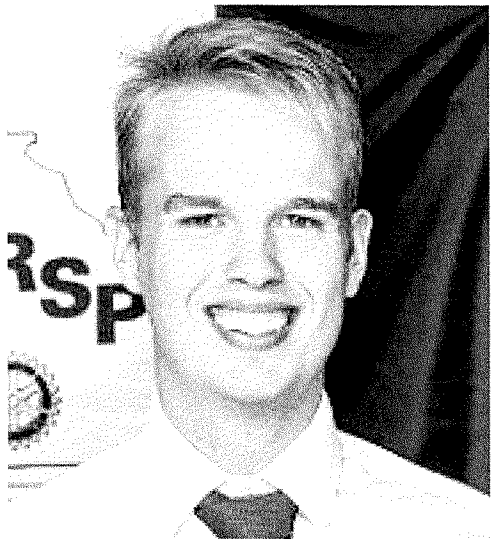
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Augusta College

I would like to begin by Thanking all the Rotarians who support the GRSP program for giving me the opportunity to come here and experience your way of life and culture. This year has been to me a year for self-reflection and rediscovery while learning from various Rotarians, Students and all the beautiful people I have got to connect with. I've had amazing experiences and have done things I did not imagine I would do ( Co-piloting a plane), all who have made me set out of my comfort zone and for that, I am truly grateful. I came to the USA with a bias and knowledge i had received through movies and social media, my views have definitely changed and grown from what they once were. Georgians to me are the most welcoming people as you taught me things about southern culture and the history of your country, you have always been willing to answer the questions I asked. To the Rotarians, I have had the chance to encounter; thank you for welcoming into your communities and for being willing to learn about my country and teach me a new perspective on America. To my fellow GRSP students, although our time was short thank you for the memories we have shared together, I pray the Lord will be with you as you continue your journey through life.

From my country to yours,  
Asante Sana

Tariro Chimhandamba



# GUSTAV DALSGAARD-HANSEN

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Dalton State College

## My GRSP Year

Getting to experience America, and especially an area of America that is often forgotten in the mainstream depiction of America, has been a truly amazing experience. This part of the world and the people living in it continues to positively surprise me. Seeing parts of the U.S. that I would probably never have seen if not for the GRSP has been wonderful, and it has given me memories that I will be able to hold on to and cherish for the next many years. Among those highlights are places like Nashville, Chattanooga, Miami, New Orleans, and Atlanta. However, some of the most interesting experiences that I have encountered over here have probably occurred when I experienced some of the cultural differences between Denmark and America. Having to come to grips with converting everything from the metric system to the imperial system comes to mind, as well as getting used to the fact that tea over here is served cold, rather than hot. I have found that the people I have encountered down here in the South have been incredibly friendly and hospitable to me, and that the phrase "Southern hospitality" is definitely a real thing down here. I have discovered that a lot of cultural similarities exist too. For example, I have found that the Danish people and the people of America can bond over their shared enjoyment of pork and gravy, and that cultural values like freedom and democracy are equally important in the hearts of people from both countries. In the time that I have been over here I have been fortunate enough to go on several student weekends to places all over Georgia. This provided me with a great opportunity to see places all over Georgia, as well as meeting and talking to the other students from the program. One of my favorite weekends this year has to be the Savannah weekend in October. Me and the other students were really lucky to have amazing weather while we experienced the city, and just getting to admire the architecture and history of the city was a wonderful experience. That being said, this year would not have been as amazing as it has been without the help and support of my amazing host parents, Bruce and Kayanne Satterfield. I cannot thank you guys enough for welcoming me into your home and giving me so many great experiences over the past year. You guys embody Southern hospitality and kindness, and I could not have wished for a better host family. I would also like to thank my trustee, John Richmond, for helping me out this year. You and your family also played a big part in making this year one of the best ones of my life. In conclusion, these past 9 months have probably the best and most exciting months of my life. They have taught me a lot, not just about cultures of people from all over the world, but it has also taught me a lot about myself. However, the most important thing I have learned through the GRSP is that even though we all might be born different places in the world, we are all connected by shared values and ideas.

Gustav Dalsgaard-Hansen



## **ANNA HELEN MARGUERITE DUNCAN**

**Scotland**

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Columbus State University

My year as a GRSP student has been the best year of my life. I had friends in high school whose siblings had been on the program in previous years, and after hearing how amazing it was for them, it was something that immediately took my interest.

The experience has taught me so much. I have grown so much as a person, learning where my talents are and what I am passionate about, and it has pushed me far out of my comfort zone allowing me to gain independence. I have also met so many wonderful people, and explored the vast variety of different American cultures.

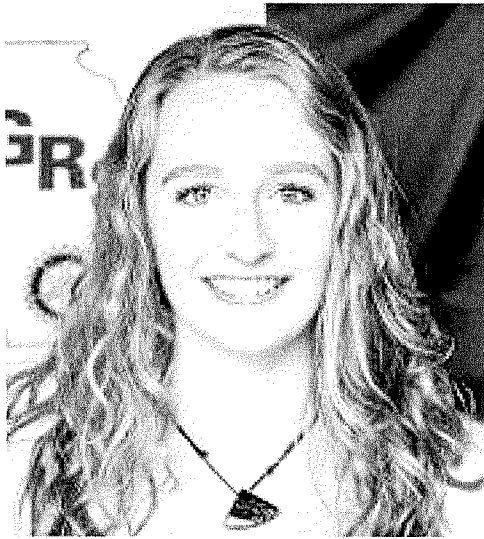
I couldn't have asked for better host parents than Stephanie and Jordan. They have grown to be my family, and I am so grateful for the support and care they have given me throughout this year. I felt immediately at home with them the first night I got here, most of which was spent in bed with serious jet lag. I have never hesitated to come to them for help with anything and everything that comes to mind. They have helped me realize what I truly value in life and have taught me so much about how to survive in college, as well as general life. Jordan has definitely done a great job of filling in for my dad, with his "witty" humor and wonderful dad jokes, which are usually aimed at messing with me. I have so much love for you both and thank you so much for taking me into your home for this year, and I can't wait for you to come and visit me in Scotland!

I would like to thank my trustee Ken Townsend so much for taking the time to help me with various things throughout this busy year. You have done a wonderful job of making me feel like I have the support I need, as well as going to extra efforts to get to know me and my family. I would like to thank you and Janice for your wonderful generosity and the outings you have taken me on this year. I would also like to thank the Rotarians at my rotary club for their generosity and their hospitality, as well as the various Rotarians who took the time to get to know me and go on outings with them, I really appreciate it.

I have met so many lifelong friends on the program from all over the world, and we have grown to be extremely close. We have travelled all over Georgia, as well as other parts of the USA together, and I have so many wonderful and treasured memories. I remember Music Midtown at the beginning of the year, which was so much fun and was when we first really got to know each other. Since then, we have been to New York, Miami, and various parts of Georgia together, which have all been awesome. I have also met so many amazing friends at my college in Columbus, Georgia, who have supported me throughout this year, and who I know I will keep in touch with forever. There is no doubt in my mind that I will be back to visit them in the USA far into the future. Thank you to Rotary for this once in a lifetime experience, I will treasure it forever. I could not be more grateful to have been chosen as a GRSP student for 2018/19.

Anna Duncan





# RACHEL MORVEN DUNNETT

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University of North Georgia

Initially I was doubtful about accepting my offer to study in the US as part of the GRSP programme - my sister, having been on the programme two years before, yelled at me until I accepted. I can honestly say I've never been so thankful for having someone scream in my ears. I was placed at the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega, a beautiful little hallmark town up near the mountains. Coming from a touristy capital city, I was shocked at how much I love it here! Everything about the campus and the town makes me feel welcome and at home, especially the temperamental weather. I can't imagine being at another school and it's going to be weird to have to adjust to a different university back home.

My host parents Mark and Charise and host sister Grace have been instrumental in my time here as they have supported me so much. They accepted me into their family straight away and treated me like their own daughter, along with helping me get through so many issues (lol losing my passport and visa) and I don't think I would've been able to hold myself together if it weren't for them. They are so kind and also hosted my family when they came to visit - I cannot thank them enough. My trustee Martha has also been very supportive and I would like to thank her for taking time out of her busy schedule to meet up with me. Hopefully I can return the favour and host should they find themselves in Scotland!

What has made this year the most special though has to be the friendships and memories I have made. I was so lucky to be placed with Sofia, who is like an older sister to me, and Sofie, who has been my best friend throughout the year. Who knew that three girls of different ages from Scotland, Sweden and Denmark would have so much in common? Despite getting along so well, I am glad that Rotary did not place us in the same suite as it meant that I got to know some Americans well too, especially my roommate Taylor.

When I look back at the year so far, I can't believe how much we've already done and seen! I felt so at home at the Conclave and it's amazing how fast everyone became friends. Music Midtown will always be one of my fondest memories and I wouldn't hesitate to repeat it (next year anyone?). From our shambles-turned-actually-quite-good trip to Nashville, to exploring the whole of NYC, to squeezing 16 people into one Airbnb in Miami, I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know multiple cultures and also attempting to learn new languages. The GRSP weekends were vital in this and allowed us all to get to know each other better and become a little family (especially you Louise; I couldn't ask for someone better to room with each weekend).

I can't believe the year is almost over already and whilst I miss home, I know I am going to miss Georgia and the people here with me more. I'm already looking forward to reuniting and everyone is welcome to come visit Edinburgh- there's plenty of places to stay with all the Scots on the programme! And I don't know if any Rotarians reading this are involved with Chick-Fil-A but if they are, please open a UK branch!!

This year has been awesome and I already wish I could do it all over again. Thank you to Rotary for providing this amazing experience and also to all the students who have helped to make this year so special. I would also like to thank Southern culture for sending me home with an extra roll of fat (totally worth it)!

See y'all at the reunion!

Rachel Dunnett



## **SOFIA LINNEA MARIA ERLANDSSON**

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University of North Georgia

I had never been abroad for a long period of time before. Despite that, I did not hesitate when I, almost a year ago, found out that I had been offered the Georgia Rotary Student Program scholarship. I was not completely sure what I was expecting from my year far away from home. I was certain I was going to miss my family, but I was also sure that this would be a one in a lifetime opportunity for me. I figured that I would experience a new culture and gain memories that would last me a lifetime. But despite getting on a plane with all these hopes and thoughts in my head, I was unprepared for what would really make my year in Georgia amazing; I had not taken into account the people I would meet.

Arriving in a new country and into a new culture is a very strange experience. The first morning I had trouble turning on the light, using the shower, and flushing the toilet. Everything was different from what I was used to back home, everything had a slightly different design which left my mind reeling. Orientating myself through everything that was new and strange was not an easy task, but without my host families it would have been even more so. From the first day, I felt safe knowing that in the midst of everything new and crazy I always had someone to turn to. Knowing that my host families were there to support me and answer any questions lifted an enormous weight off my back. They did not only take care of me but cared for me which made all the difference. Robin, Jim, Stacy and Tim, thank you for being the most amazing host parents I could have ever asked for.

Attending university in a small village, high up in the mountains, offered me a gorgeous view every morning. I found one of my best friends in my roommate and another of my best friends right down the hall. With the two of them, and many others, I discovered new states, went road tripping, skiing, tubing, and hiking parts of the Appalachian trail. Thanks to the endless stream of adventures there were barely a weekend where I did not have anything to do. And thanks to all of them, I felt like I was not only in the US but part of it.

I also found friends from all over the world in the other GRSP students. By meeting up during the GRSP weekends and taking part in all the amazing experiences they offered we got to know each other. Together we did everything from zip-lining to climbing a light house. Every new weekend was more fun than the last because we got to know one another better and better.

My GRSP year has been amazing so far and I already dread for it to end. I have made myself a new family here in the USA consisting of host parents and close friends. I would like to thank both of my host clubs as well as the GRSP administration for making this possible for me. For helping me out with the dozens of forms and documents needed to get me here. For quickly answering any questions I asked and for going out of their way to make this year one of the best years of my life. Because my year here has been filled with so much laughter, adventures, and friends. Because, truth be told, I have come to realize that to me, the GRSP is not only an experience that will last a year, but rather an experience that undoubtedly will last a lifetime.

Sofia Erlandsson



# MHAIRI GORMLEY

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Oglethorpe University

I started off this year quite nervous as this is the longest that I've been away from home and I would end up missing a lot of events and activities as a result, but I am so thankful that I decided to go with it and that I was given the opportunity to come here. Coming here has meant that I have met some amazing people and have definitely formed friendships that will last a lifetime! I'm so grateful for all the incredible opportunities that this program has presented me and the number of things that get put on for us. The weekends are definite highlights of the year!

In the beginning it was very overwhelming as left and right people were asking you all about yourself and there was the adjustment to living in a different country, but the Rotarians in my club and my host families have been amazing. They helped me settle in and have given me ways to explore the surrounding areas. The Rotarians have been great as they've been so flexible and if they can't help me then they will find someone else within their club or a partnering club to help out, which has meant that I have gotten the opportunity to interact with a lot of the Rotarians out with the regular meetings. I feel that this was very important as you got to experience their daily lives and really get to know them instead of the sometimes brief and fleeting conversations you may get occasionally.

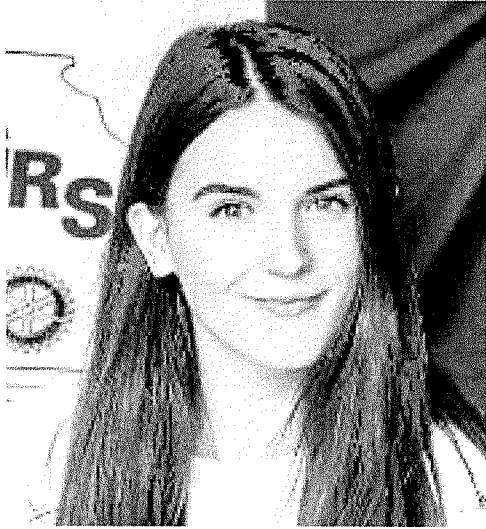
Not only the Rotarians, but the other students have been amazing! Thanks to this program I have gained many connections in other countries, many of which I consider good friends. I have managed to travel with them and see some of the country with them; even just hung out when we've been free. It's great to have others that you can relate to and really bond with and because of this they've really helped make the year for me.

Living in a different country definitely gives a new insight to how the culture is different and how things work, which has been extremely interesting to me. At times it has been hard navigating and knowing when not to express something, but it's all part of the experience and I think that I've learnt a lot from it.

This year really showed me how much in common people from all over the world can have and how much unity we can have if we sit down and get to know each other. This gives me hope for the future and I think Rotary will have a big influence too.

The time has gone too quickly, and I will be sad to leave in a couple of months, as I will dearly miss the people I have met. However, I know that this isn't really the end for me or the group, it's just the beginning and I can't wait to see where we go from here!

Mhairi Gormley



## LOUISE VIVECA HALLBERG

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College of Coastal Georgia

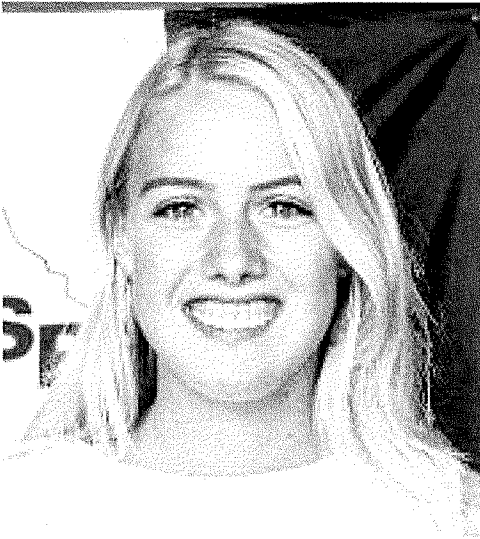
My school year in Georgia has been unforgettable. From previously living in northern Sweden to living in a sunny place like Brunswick has been amazing, I especially enjoyed being able to lay on the beach in February and not to lose my toes to frostbite. The beaches and the weather were not the only upside of my year here. I have gained so many new friends and family. My host families have all been incredible and they really made me feel like home. My host dad Victor took me fishing outside Jekyll island which I really loved and enjoyed. All my Rotary clubs have been very welcoming, and I truly appreciate everything they have done for me.

During my time at College of Coastal Georgia I have taught many people about the difference between Sweden and Switzerland, which has been interesting and some what entertaining. I have met a lot of friends that I'm sure I'll keep in contact with when I move back to Sweden and some of them are already planning on visiting. I have lived with a girl named Madi and she has taught me a lot about the Georgia culture, and I could honestly not have asked for a better roommate. CCGA is a small school with only 600 students living on campus, but it's a nice community where you run into friends all the time and the teachers know you by name.

My favorite thing about being a GRSP has been the weekends arranged by the Rotary clubs where I get to meet all the other GRSP students. It has been not only fun but educational to get to know people from all around the world with completely different backgrounds. Instantly I felt a good connection with all the students because we all had one thing in common, we were all on the same journey.

During this year I have been to Florida many times, I've traveled around Georgia, I also went to Boston once and South Carolina. Many of the other GRSP students went on a lot of trips around the US, but I liked staying around the Golden Isles. For me this was the best place I could have ended up in Georgia.

Louise Hallberg



## **SIGNE LINDEGAARD HELMS**

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Georgia Gwinnett College

In September 2017 I googled "college experience" in the US. I found GRSP and I sent my application two weeks later than the due date - without knowing if I was ready to leave my family and friends for one year. It was the best spontaneous application I have ever sent.

This GRSP year has definitely been the best year of my life so far. To share a year with 45 other international students makes it even better. We have travelled together from state to state and experienced each other's cultures and American culture together. We have gone from Nashville to Denver and to Miami to celebrate New Year's Eve with Pitbull and more trips to go. The American College experience would not have been rounded off without going on Spring Break, so we went to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Spending time with my host parents has been a huge part of my GRSP experience, too. Together we have celebrated holidays, gone travelling and spent dozens of weekends together. I have probably spent as many nights at college as at my host parents' place, because there is no place like home - even a home away from home. My host parents, Carla and Scott Evans, showed me the brightest side of Hog Mountain and Southern hospitality; I am now looking forward to showing them "Danish hospitality" next Summer.

The bonds of friendship I have made from GRSP are indescribable. This year I have realized that crossing cultures creates the best friendships, knowledge, and future adventures.

I have especially spent a lot of weekends with the GRSP students from North Georgia and I have visited University of North Georgia almost once a month to spend quality time with them.

I went to Georgia Gwinnett College, a rapidly growing college in North Atlanta. It is a commuter college, which means that there are approximately 13,000 students, but only 1,000 of them live in the dorms. I have experienced both sides of the college as I have friends in and outside the dorms. GGC is full of opportunities and if you are willing to reach out, I believe you can come a long way. I took a variety of different classes, classes I would have never been able to take in Denmark: Everything from Volleyball to French to Business Communication to Weight lifting. I could not have had a more amazing college experience when my two GRSP fellows at GGC were Takunda Chikundura from Zimbabwe and Fahmida Rahman from Scotland; together we were a perfect combination. That is why TK and I were devastated when Fahmida had to resign from the program in January. Here, we realized what GRSP is all about: friendship. Thank you for everything.

Signe Lindegaard Helms



## SYDNEY ROBYN HENCIL

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Brenau University

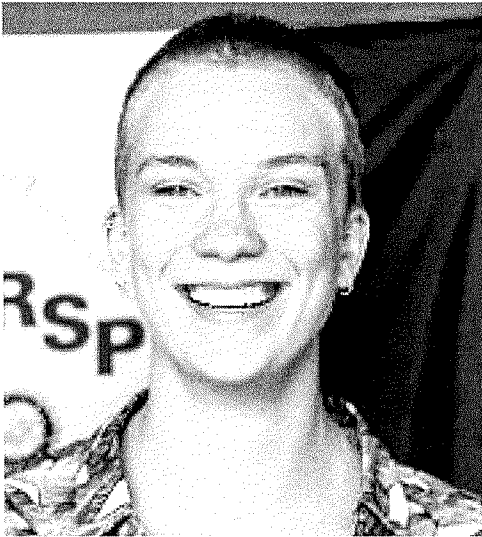
A year has passed and when I sit back I can't help but smile as I reminisce about the experience I have had this past year. One of the craziest experiences I have had since stepping foot on American soil was in Washington DC. I had met this lady who after finding out that I have never had Dunkin Doughnuts bought me at least four different types. I will never forget her excitement of meeting someone from another country and helping them experience one of many firsts. This simple 'first' experience was one of the many amazing and crazy adventures that I was bound to have coming to the United States for the first time.

I arrived in America last year early August. I was filled with excitement, so much that I had not slept the two day journey here. I just had this gut feeling that the year ahead of me was going to be filled with some amazing memories - a lifetime in a year. My host parents Warren and Dena Almand were very welcoming. They took me to a Mexican restaurant where I had another first - tacos. One of the very few things my American friends could not seem to fathom, why I had never had tacos before. I soon became a member of the Almand family, spending all of my holidays with them and their children's families.

My three host clubs, Gainesville Rotary Club, Hall County Rotary Club and White Hall County Rotary club were nothing but welcoming. The excitement and happiness on their faces whenever I went to a meeting always made me feel welcome. I learnt a lot about what Rotary does and how some of the clubs helped their communities. Meeting my fellow GRSP students was one of the best Rotary experiences for me. This gave me chances to not only learn about America, but also about some of the cultures of the different students. Through our shared experiences, friendships were created and a family was formed.

For me, a big part of my whole experience was the friends and family I gained through attending Brenau University. The small college located in Gainesville prides itself on their community. A community that easily accepted me. I ended up joining two dance teams, the Competition Dance Team and Tau Sigma Dance Fraternity, and HerCampus which is an online magazine for college women written by college women. The dance teams really helped in making new friends and soon became like family, supporting me when I needed it. Even going so far as to take me to Wal-Mart when I needed to stock up on snacks. One of the best experiences I will never forget was when though the Dance Team, I got to be a part of the Pregame and Halftime show for the SuperBowl. My first time in America and I got to hold the American flag while Gladys Knight sang the national anthem.

I learnt many things having visited the United States. My general idea of the country as a whole had been broadened. Having my Rotary family behind me in this journey has definitely helped. I will be eternally grateful for this opportunity. Through interaction with the other students in my school and the GRSP students, I gained a better world understanding. I realised that although we may come from different parts of the world, we are more similar than we think. It has been a great honour to be a part of this program. Thank you so much for the opportunity, I have had a wonderful year.



# MARIE KAROLINE HENNICKE

Germany

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Wesleyan College

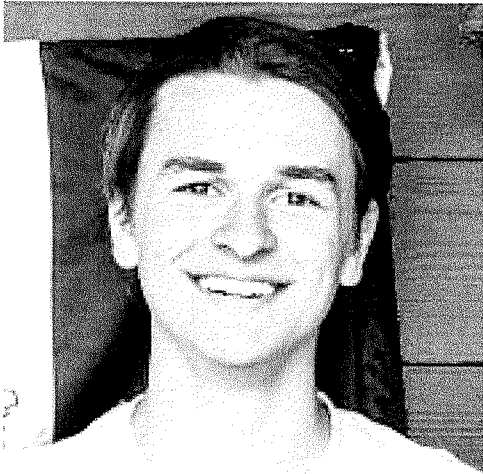
Before I came to the US, everyone told me it would be one of the best years of my life. And it really was. I was nervous leaving home and the thought of being by myself in a (more or less) foreign country for an entire year terrified me. But as soon as I arrived I felt welcome and realized I was not "by myself" at all. All of my host parents and my trustee were incredibly nice and made me feel right at home. I knew that if I ever needed anything at all, I wouldn't have to hesitate to ask them. It was incredibly relieving to know that I had people that supported me and were there for me.

College was scary at first, but since Wesleyan is such a small school they made sure that all freshmen were able to settle in well, which was a huge relief. Throughout the school year however it got less exciting and more stressful, but I was prepared for that. I luckily managed to make some really good friends, who improved the time spent at college immensely. I really hope that we will stay in contact and that I will see them again after I leave.

When I was not at college I was either spending time with my host parents or travelling. I got to see a lot of Georgia, but also Florida, South Carolina, Canada and I will be going to the West Coast in the summer before I go home. I am really happy that I got the chance to see all of these places.

I am really grateful that I got the opportunity to take part in the program and I will cherish the memories I've made and the people I've met for a long time!

Marie Hennicke



# CHRISTIAN HJORTH

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University of Georgia

Wow... What a year! This has truly been the best year of my life. Although it was tough leaving my family and the comforts of home, I was welcomed with open arms by everyone. My university, host families Shannon & Donna and Michael & Natalie, and most importantly, the other students, really made this year incredible.

Even though I've been to Georgia before my GRSP year, living here gave me a new perspective on life here. Coming from a very small country like Denmark, the size of everything in the States is crazy. Food, cities, trucks, etc. are massive compared to Denmark, but especially the sense of distance is really something else. Back home, driving an hour is a pretty big trip, whereas over here, driving 3 hours is no big deal.

The conclave in August was where this year really started. This is where we meet the other students, and instantly enjoyed each other's company. Although we are from so many different countries and cultures, we all came here with the same goals and objectives, as well as the will to make new friends that are different than ourselves. The talent show celebrated our differences in culture, but the rest of the conclave really showed how easy we all got talking and formed friendships that we would enjoy for the rest of our GRSP year, and hopefully later on in life.

I was lucky enough to attend University of Georgia, one of the biggest colleges in Georgia with the best college team in the US (not arguable)! Again, the size of everything and the opportunities there are amazing.

I have also been fortunate to go on some incredible trips with some of my new friends, who turned out to become some of my closest friends. I bought a car and have driven more than 20,000 miles, including roadtrips to New York, Washington DC, Miami, Key West, Amelia Island and many others. I'm also currently writing this from my spring break in Cuba.

However, out of all these friendships and experiences, what stands out to me is how similar we all are, despite our differences in culture, language, skin color etc. GRSP has really shown us how well people get along just by having similar goals and interests, and most importantly, just meeting the people of countries that we usually only hear about in the news.

I think a lot of people, me included, have changed a lot as a person as well. I'm really going to miss all the experiences, the UGA football games, the country music, shooting, and maybe not so much the grits... Most of all, I'm really glad to have gotten an insight into the Southern culture. I've learned to appreciate fried chicken, love Chick-fil-A, big trucks, etc., and I finally understand the Southern accent completely! It has also been really wonderful to experience the hospitality down here. Naturally from my own host families, but also from other host families who have invited me to weekend trips, dinners and more.

To end it off I'd just like to say thank you to everyone who made this year possible and made it the best year of my life! I'm going to miss everyone, and Georgia will definitely be on my mind?

Thanks y'all, and GO DAWGS!





# SOFIE LYNGE HOLST-HANSEN

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University of North Georgia

My year as a GRSP student has been an incredible experience. I have gained so many amazing experiences and friends through the program which I am very grateful for. I am so happy to have had this experience that I can look back on for the rest of my life and share with my friends and family in Denmark and around the world. I was beyond excited to find out that I got granted the GRSP scholarship because I had heard so many great things about it through my brother who is a former GRSP student. I was so lucky that my brother was studying in Emory University in Atlanta the first semester of my stay in the US, which made us a lot closer and meant that we had the chance to spend a lot of time together.

Now that I am almost done with my GRSP year I have really come to love Dahlonega and UNG where I have been studying during my exchange. Dahlonega has a beautiful nature and has a quaint and cute little town which I will really miss when I go back to Denmark. UNG is an amazing University and I have come to know a lot of the amazing people who go there. The two GRSP girls, Rachel and Sofia, I have been so fortunate to share my college experience with. Rachel and I have basically been inseparable at UNG and we have become very close and I am so happy to have met her and I will forever have a Scottish friend.

None of my experiences would have been the same if it wasn't for the other GRSP student which some of them I have become very close to and they mean a lot to be and they are the ones who made my GRSP year an unforgettable experience. Another GRSP person who have made my year amazing and so fun is Signe. Signe and I only knew each other vaguely before getting on the program even though we are from the same city in Denmark. She has had an incredible impact on my GRSP year, and I am so grateful that I had her to share this experience with, and I know that this experience we have shared is just the beginning of a life long friendship. For New Year's I went to Miami and for Spring Break I went to Puerto Rico, these travels were some of the most incredible moments of my GRSP year which I shared with my closest GRSP friends.

I have met so many amazing and welcoming people such as my host family, my trustee, Signe's host family, Rachel host family who have been so kind to let me into their lives and has help me having a great GRSP year. The Georgia Rotary Student Program takes great pride in educating their selected students in the values of the program and teaching us about the US, whilst at the same time giving the students the opportunity to do presentations for different Rotary clubs about our home countries and thus act as ambassadors for our countries, which has been a great learning experience. The experiences I have gained through being an international student have been both profound and educational as it has required me to think independently and I feel that I have gained an understanding of another culture from an every-day perspective. My current experience as an international student in the US has taught me about the difference in our respective cultures and developed me as a person. With this experience living abroad in the US as a GRSP student, I have come to acquire a deeper understanding of different and diverse cultures which I wish to use in the future. Mostly I am so grateful to have meet so many amazing people from around the world through the GRSP program. Thank you so much to all the GRSP students who I have been close with this year, to have let me into their lives and shared their stories with me, I will never forget y'all! I look forward to visiting y'all around the world in your home countries.

Sofie Lyngge Holst-Hansen



## ZOE JUNE HOPPER

England

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Clayton State University

I don't know how I can sum up this truly amazing and unforgettable year in just one page but I'm going to try!

I know everyone says that the best part about GRSP is the friends you make but that's because it's true! I've had wonderful times on the GRSP weekends away where all 46 of us students got to spend time together and I've learnt so much about the world and really how similar we all are to each other. I know I've now got friends around the world and I can't wait for the adventures I know I'll have in the future with the special people I've met.

I have been living in the suburbs of Atlanta and attending Clayton State University where I've definitely made the most of my first experience of college. Spending time with my roommates who have become some of my best friends, I've learnt about modern American culture and their perspective on worldwide politics through classes in US government and global issues. I've loved living in the city, being close to stadiums for concerts and football games, and to museums, theatres and restaurants with any kind of food you could ever want from classic American Diners and fast food to Mexican, Vietnamese, Thai - you name it, it's in Atlanta! I feel this year has given me so much valuable life experience, making me more independent and improving my confidence in presenting and talking with new people and most importantly, teaching me to take advantage of all opportunities given to me.

I have been so lucky with my lovely host families who invited me into their homes and made sure I know I always have a place to go to or someone to speak to. By spending weekends and holidays with them at Thanksgiving and Christmas I really felt like a part of the family. I've shared in meetings and activities with my greater "family" of wonderful Rotarians in my host clubs of Clayton County and Lake Spivey and Henry County. So many have welcomed me with open arms to join them for dinner, to transport me around and given me such memorable experiences - I have truly discovered just what "southern hospitality" is.

One of my favourite parts about GRSP is that it has given me so many opportunities to travel in and around America. I'll have been to over eight states by the end of the year including a New Years' trip to Miami FL with lots of other GRSP students, which was probably the best way to start 2019, surrounded by friends at an outdoor concert right by the beach! I spent fun weekends away with my host family in Auburn AL, and Charleston SC, listened to live music in Nashville TN and explored New Orleans LA with my family when they visited at Christmas to name a few! I've tried to spend every bit of time I could travelling, whether within Georgia to visit friends at their homes or universities or much, much further north to a snowy Toronto, Ottawa and Niagara Falls on a trip to Canada in spring break!

Thank y'all for an amazing year!



# MATHILDE AAGOT ILLUM

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Oglethorpe University

To describe this year with one word is a considerable challenge. The word, like my year here, must be complicated, yet simple; meaningful to me, yet to other people, a thing said in passing and never considered again. With these criteria (and my cousin) in mind, I decided that the best word would be some physics term, and what better than "a singularity," in every sense of the word.

In one sense, this year is singular to me, as it still seems inexplicable that I should be given this amazing year when others are deprived of it by my very presence in this country. It truly has been the best year of my life. I have experienced so many different aspects of existence here, including some I didn't know were there: the life of a college student, a friend, a Dane in America, a European who hasn't been drinking since July, a Scandinavian living in a "Communist nation", a teenager who gets up at 5:45 every Friday to go to her Rotary meetings, and last but absolutely not least, an eternally grateful GRSP student.

At Oglethorpe University, I have many, many new friends, and gone from being "that girl who speaks Dutch" to "our friend, Mathilde from Denmark, who we'll dearly miss." This brings me to some significant cultural differences between the US and Denmark: where Danish people are relatively closed off, most Americans are at first glance much more open and hospitable. Danish people have a shell around them that you must crack before truly getting to know a Dane, but this shell is non-existent for Americans. They love so fiercely and truly that it's baffling, and that is something I will do my best to bring home with me.

On the Rotary side of things, I believe I've been blessed with one of the best clubs. The Rotary Club of Dunwoody is riddled with loving, kind, giving people, who accepted me with open arms from day one. This especially includes my host moms and my Trustee: y'all were amazing. From volunteer work to the student weekend, I've had the time of life I never thought I'd have. Turns out, I just jam hard with retirees, whether we're packing books or selling raffle tickets.

Another definition of the word "singularity" is that a huge space is condensed into an infinitely small space. This is exactly what this year feels like. So many people, feelings, experiences, and memories, all condensed into one tiny year. For me, this was anything and everything: My Ogle-friends complaining about deadlines and yelling at me for not knowing the difference between Powerade and Gatorade (trick question: there is no difference), Jackie's kittens and Sunday dinners. Browsing Goodwill with my Good friend, Will. Student weekends and long bus rides. Host families and the SuperBowl. Buying cowboy boots and tentative plans to purchase a matching hat. Knowing that Atlanta is the home of Waffle House and Coca Cola. Most of all, new friends, both at Oglethorpe and in the GRSP, two new moms, and a new country to call home.

Mathilde Aagot Illum



## **LUISE BRIGITTE SIEGLINDE JASCHE**

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Georgia Southern University-Armstrong

Since I was in middle school, I always wanted to study in the US. I was so fascinated by the idea, that there are so many people from different nationalities and backgrounds living together in one country. And although I already started University in Germany two years ago, I really wanted to experience studying abroad. Since Halle, the city I live in, is the sister city of Savannah, I was glad to get the opportunity to actually attend the University there.

I am more than thankful for Rotary to make that dream come true.

I found so many good friends from different countries and learned not only about the American, but also about other and my own culture. Moreover I got to study my major, Music, in a completely different way which helped me a lot with my artistic career. I got to conduct the orchestra, I wrote and performed pieces for choir and piano and played many different concerts. These are moments I will never forget.

So I thank everyone who helped me with that experience. Thank you for showing me new perspectives on life, for giving me a second family away from home (who I will miss dearly) and for sending me to sunny Savannah which I will always keep in my heart.



# ALBERTE DALSTRO JORGENSEN

Denmark

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ABAC

Hi!

My name is Alberte Dalsro Jørgensen and I'm from Denmark. I'm sponsored by the Tifton Rotary Club and I'm attending Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. My host family is Cindy and Andrew Marzen.

So far, this year has been the best year in my life - I've had so many great experiences and met countless nice and hospitable people!

I've been met with the "Southern Hospitality" everywhere by Rotarians, fellow students and other Americans, which I really appreciate. Especially my American family have been amazing by the way that they have opened their home for me and let me be a part of their family! We have had lots of great times together both here in Tifton but also on trips in both Georgia, Alabama and Florida.

Also, by my fellow GRSP-students, I've met by lots of friendly people. I'm very thankful for the friendships I have made with all these people!

It was quite overwhelming coming here to Georgia in August where the temperature hit almost 100 degrees and the humidity is around 90%. However, what surprised me the most coming here was the size of everything. Already when I left the airport in Orlando entered the car park, I was surprised that all the cars were enormous. Also, the roads, portions of food and supermarkets are way bigger over here.

I'm happy that I got the opportunity to attend ABAC in South Georgia. This has given me a chance to experience the culture in the rural areas of the South. Blue jeans, boots, lifted trucks, dirt roads, fried chicken and country music are just a few examples of important aspects of this culture. It also took me quite some time to get used to the dialect and slang that are used in this area. After a couple of weeks, I finally understood when people said "y'all", "over younder" and "bless your heart".

Throughout this year, I've been fortunate to have the possibility to travel around the country. Before Christmas a couple of us GRSP-students went to first Washington DC and then New York. I've always wanted to go to these cities, so it was a really great experience to finally be there. For New Years a couple of us went to Miami and the Keys which was also really fun.

I'll use this opportunity to thank Rotary for allowing students all around the world to get these experiences. This is a unique program that teaches us a lot about different cultures which also puts our own culture into perspective. I have learned a lot about both the culture here in the U.S. but also in the countries of other GRSP students which have given me a better understanding of my own. At the same time, we also build important friendships and relations across countries that I'm sure will last for a lifetime. I'm very happy and grateful for being a part of the GRSP-program, thank you!



## LINNEA HEDDA LARSSON

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Augusta University

This year has been all about learning for me. Every day since I arrived, I've learnt something new. I learn from class in school, and I learn about everything else that is America the rest of the time. I've tried to take in and absorb as much as I can. I greatly appreciate being given the opportunity to spend a whole year in the United States, because I know I've learnt things one would never have been able to learn from a shorter visit. There are differences that are obvious, for example the food and the cars, and then there are things that takes some time and a great deal of thinking and processing to understand, or at least partially understand. I think about social interaction, communication styles and underlying meaning, political views and values, just to mention a few.

Being in the United States has not only helped me learn about the American culture, but it has also given me insight about my own, and about myself. You don't really realize what values you have until you're surrounded by another culture, and things and thoughts start to clash. In your own culture, everybody is on the same page, and these beliefs you have are more thought of as facts than values.

I know that Americans rather not talk about and discuss topics that can upset feelings, but I'd still like to mention a few things about politics. I suppose most people know that the country I come from, Sweden, has political values very far from those held by President Trump and many American citizens with him. Everybody at home - news media, politicians and regular citizens - have very strong opinions, and they're all one sided. Coming here, I'd only seen and heard things through one perspective. I was very curious, and through discussion I learnt about other viewpoints, which indeed was eye opening. As I had expected, our media only reports parts of the picture, and it's the same parts over and over again. It's frustrating to realize, especially when you think it wouldn't take much to find out about the other side of the story. I still don't understand it. Maybe it's because it's so much easier to look down on and talk trash about others while feeling superior yourself, than it is to make an effort to understand. And I know it goes the other way around too, because I've encountered quite a few, not so pleasant, very strong opinions and beliefs about my country.

That being said, I wish more people would make the effort to understand. Now, all people don't have the opportunity to discuss with Rotarians, but everyone can choose to be critical of what they see and hear. The P in the GRSP mission statement "Promote peace through understanding" should be valued highly. I believe understanding, not necessarily agreeing, reduces hostile feelings. I'll bring with me the importance of holding back judgements until one has considered what perspectives the other part may be approaching from.

I am so thankful for all of the Rotarians with whom I have discussed, who have opened up, tried to explain, and helped me understand. I believe that it's by discussing the more sensitive topics, like politics, religion and ethical values, that you really get to know the people and the culture, because these things so fundamentally shape who we are. I am equally thankful for all beautiful places I got the chance to visit, and all fun and exiting events I got to experience, but ultimately, it's the bonds I've formed with Rotarians and their families that matters the most to me. During this year, I've been deeply cared about, and I've been shown immense generosity. I've now got new family and friends, and insights, experiences and knowledge that I'll benefit from my whole lifetime. Being here has been a privilege. I am very grateful.

Linnea Larsson



# DAVID RICHARD LIGHTFOOT

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Dalton State College

## My GRSP Year

This year on the GRSP programme for me has been better than I could've imagined. The year has allowed me to gain an understanding into what life living in America really means and how both Scotland and America have more similarities than differences - something that if it weren't for the GRSP I wouldn't have been able to do.

During my time in the States I've been able to make lifelong friends not just on the programme but also with Americans who go to my college - people who if it weren't for the GRSP I would never have met, just one of the many great opportunities the programme offers.

During my time here in the States I've managed to travel to many places such as New York, New Orleans and Charleston places I most likely wouldn't have travelled to this year with fellow GRSP students and as retreats with my college. From some of these trips I've learned how hard it is to get things planned well - from having to find new accommodation in Nashville last minute after our first place cancelled or having your buses being delayed by hours coming home from Miami at new year.

Joining clubs on campus and taking classes that I won't be able to take back home such as American history has allowed me to gain a better understanding into what life in an American college is like and will help me when I get back to Scotland and continue my education.

The biggest bonus for me from the programme was being able to meet all the students from the programme and become good friends with many of them by travelling around the States together as well as the GRSP student weekends - my favourite so far being the Savannah weekend.

Overall, the GRSP has been a wonderful opportunity and would like to thank all the Rotarians involved in the programme, my host family, trustee and host clubs who has helped me with a lot during my time here and made life in the US be awesome.

David Lightfoot (Scotland)



## FELIPE FERNANDES LOPEZ

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Valdosta State University

I was coming here, people said that this year was going to be awesome, and so I was expecting a lot. As I came here, my expectations were completely fulfilled. I met here many different people, both americans as well as people from other countries, and both in the GRSP program as well as in the university. It was my first time interacting so much with internationals, and I can say it was a great experience.

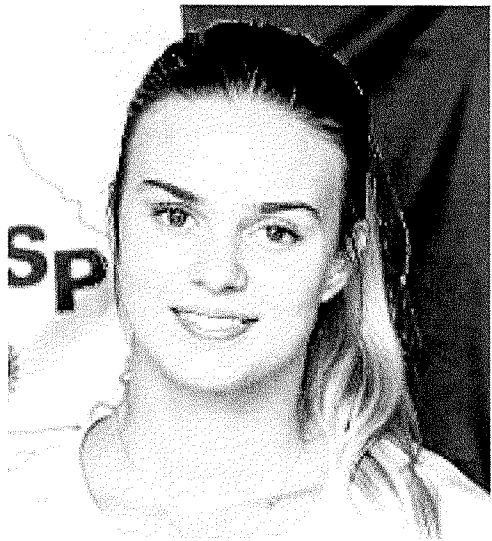
About every month we had the GRSP weekends. These weekends, all the students from GRSP gathered and it was always awesome. Not only we had chance of having time together with other students, but we would meet another Rotarians. The Rotarians I met, were always very nice to us and I had good time with them. Talking and learning about them was always interesting as each one was from different place here the US, and they had their own story to tell.

Also, ever since I come here to the US, I learned many different things. One of them is a new sport: Football. A few weeks after I got here the football season began. The first game I watched was a high school game where the grandsons of my host family played. They killed the other team! It was a very good experience and Arlen (my host dad) was teaching me about football rules. After this game, there was games in the university around every 15 days or so. I have been to a few ones, and it was also very good! By the end of the season, Valdosta State ended up as undefeated champion!

As I came here to experience new culture, I also decided to take Japanese Language class. As I had little knowledge about it, it was not so hard at first. I dedicated myself mostly for this class, and so I skipped two grades and achieve intermediate Japanese. The professor was from Japan and it was a very sweet person and very patient with me, as I always kept asking question about things we had yet to learn. I'm very thankful to her, as she was always ready to teach me even if my questions were about things that we did not go over yet. One of my biggest experience here was being able to camp for the first time. In 2018, on the fall semester, I had the experience to go with a group from my university to the "Pigeon Mountains" to camp, rock climb and cave explore. I would never think that in my year here I would try to climb a real rock wall. We climbed a 50 ft wall and 15 ft boulders. The cave we went was also an amazing experience, probably one of the best I had here. I also visited different cities here in the US and got to experience my first "real winter". It was the first time that I have experience a temperature under 32°F. Also, on winter break I went to the north in NY and MA, and although I did not see snow falling, I saw ice on the lake and iced water on the streets for the first time. It was very different as this is something I have never seen in Brazil.

In summary this year was amazing and I'm very happy I had to opportunity to come here. I'm very thankful for the Rotarians I met, especially my host family and his family, as they treat me with great care. I feel like now I have a second family here in the US and many friends from all the host families I stayed in the weekends.





# CHARLOTT KARIN LUNDBERG

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Georgia Southwestern State University

Four words to summarize my experience? Knowledge, experience and line dance.

The day I left Sweden I ordered at a cute little sushi bar during my layover at Heathrow airport. The sushi chef looked at me and said: "You look tired. Where are you going?". "Georgia" I replied. He looked at me and smiled. "Vacation in South of Europe! What a nice little trip!" If he only knew.

That feeling of a short two-week vacation has very little to do with that feeling of 42 weeks abroad. I have been through the best feelings of euphoria when meeting the coolest host family, or seeing the amazing mountain tops of north Georgia or getting to know the wonderful Rotarians of Americus - but also the worst feelings of leaving people behind and having to give space to this new lifestyle as a traveler.

So many questions came out of this year. For example to you, all GRSP students, that are not from Sweden. How do you survive a year in Georgia, without an IKEA of your own? Without the meatballs of your country? And why do Colombians dance so freakin good while my hips are barely moving?

There are also some questions I probably won't find an answer to. How many liters of ranch is consumed in America every day? Is there something you can't add fried chicken to, and why am I the only one not eating grits with cheese..?

I also got so many answers. For example that Coca Cola actually is the coolest drink in the world. That big trucks are essential for every single college student and that T-shirts and shorts are not overrated. And most importantly: That even when I leave this continent I will have a 4,9 foot Colombian on the other side of the world that now knows me better than anyone else.

I also learned that happiness is not what I thought. That happiness is about that moment you share with yourself or others. That even the hardest part of giving something up that you love - will make you realize what you actually had and what you now will value going forward, even though it hurts. There are more to life than a spotless career or a fancy lifestyle and sometimes it will take a whole year to finally get realizations of what happiness means to you. I am grateful to every single person, both here and at home in Sweden, that put up with me this year and had the patience to let me explore and find myself and to figure out where I'm going - how cliché that may even sound!

There are people from all these different countries in the world that reason and think just as I do. Sharing experiences with 46 of these have after all been one of the best feelings I have ever had. But no feeling will ever beat the feeling of standing on Heathrow Airport, with two bags by my side knowing that I left all I had behind, ready for something new, settling in somewhere I have never been. A place where the homes are open, people greet you in the halls, restaurants offer you free refills and make sure you are a part of the Rotary family, even if you don't drink Ice Tea!

I do not know much about "Sweet Home Alabama" but when it comes to Georgia - I do agree! A big thank you to y'all! \*Wareagle!

Charlott Lundberg  
aka. The Sweedie



# GEETH PINSARA MAHAGAMAGE

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Piedmont College

To me, the GRSP is the exemplar of a life-changing program. When I heard that I was selected for the GRSP, I knew I was in for an experience, but I did not sign up for this: for all this hospitality, love and affection, the relationships that I have built and all this experience. It did not take me long after meeting my host parents, Rotarians and fellow GRSP students to understand that this year was going to be great, and so it has been. The GRSP genuinely changed my life in ways that nobody would have ever imagined, helped me grow, changed how I see the world, gave me and keeps giving me more and more experiences.

I had a great time with my host-parents, Tara and Dale Van Cantfort, who not only made me feel at home but also took care of me as their own son. I made so many memories from my first college football experience (Go Dawgs!!) to my first Christmas experience with them. They helped me throughout this year and taught me so much about American culture and so many life lessons. Rotarians from all three of my sponsoring clubs were very kind and welcoming. They invited me to various events, and they enriched my experience as a GRSP student.

I was so fortunate that I got the opportunity to get involved both on campus and in the community, giving me the opportunity to network with more people and learn from them and their experiences while making more friends and having a good time.

The best part about the GRSP was making new friends. The group of friends that I met since I came to the US made every day more and more memorable. We enjoyed everything from the 15 hour-long bus rides to New York, to Friendsgiving, thanksgiving, and even volunteering to build houses in Florida. I will cherish these memories for a lifetime.

At the end of the year, I believe there are more similarities between people from around the world than we talk about, and that by coming together we can indeed make this world a better place. For all of this, I am ever grateful to all the individuals and the Rotary clubs involved in this life-changing program.

Geeth Mahagamage  
GRSP 2018/19  
Sri Lanka



## **IVONNE NOBUHLE MEARES**

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Kennesaw State University

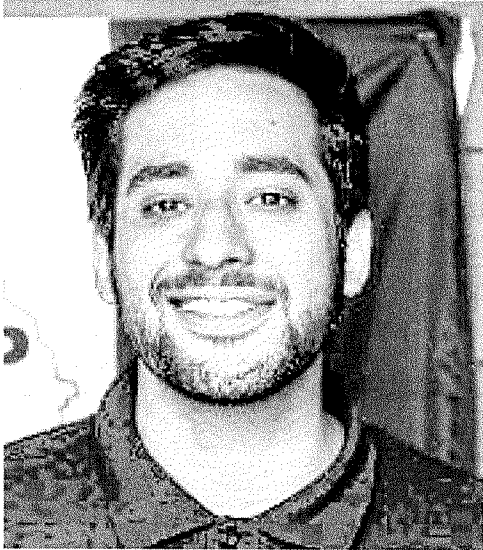
Going to a foreign country, in another continent, thousands of miles away from home...if that doesn't sound terrifying enough, imagine counting on people that are at the time just names at the end of emails or on documents, to be waiting at the airport when you land. They were there when I landed holding a placard that read "Welcome Ivy!" They were there throughout the year. They became my other family and Georgia, my other home.

Attending college, going on outings with other GRSP students, and travelling with my host parents were the most exciting things to do during the year. Going to school gave me the opportunity to make friends for a lifetime and learn about the American culture from a local's perspective. It was fun celebrating Halloween and eating so much pumpkin pie, turkey and stuffing on Thanksgiving day, picking out a Christmas tree, decorating it and opening presents on Christmas day, watching the oyster drop in Biloxi a few seconds before the new year and the fireworks that follow, and finding the baby in my piece of King Cake. I also discovered that my absolute favorite water activity was tubing and I learnt the hard way that one needed to be physically fit before taking on the water skis. The best part of it all was having friends, host families and exchange students to share each laughter and every moment with.

As I got to know all the other GRSP students coming from all over the world, I gained knowledge about their cultures and I became proud, and more appreciative of my own culture and theirs. I expanded my global horizons.

It is a very difficult task to sum up a year into a few paragraphs because there's so many experiences- home sickness, culture shocks, awkward moments and adventures. GRSP is a life in one year. I now have 4 families in counting, 9 siblings, 4 dogs and 1 cat, whom I love and I am absolutely grateful for. This year has been one of the best years of my life!

Ivonne Meares



# DANIYAL AJMAL NASIR

**Pakistan**

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University of Georgia

I came to America with a fearful mindset; I was paranoid about how I would be received by the people of Georgia (or the south as a whole). With the divisive rhetoric often used by the politicians and political commentators of this country to describe an outsider: a brown man coming from Pakistan can naturally be skeptical about how life would be on this side of the world. I learnt, however, a lesson that is crucial for all people to learn in this day and age; we cannot gauge how a country is like by simply viewing what is presented to us at face value. It is important for us, as people, to inquire, be curious and be careful about the preconceived notions we make up in our own mind about a country and its people. The fear I felt coming to these United States of America is the same kind of fear that people unfortunately have when they think about my country of Pakistan. I learnt, through the people I've met and had the pleasure of knowing, that there exists no fundamental difference in our own individual humanity. Pakistanis and the people of the South are both God fearing people, tolerant, welcoming, hospitable and have some of the best food in the world. Athens feels like home away from home, and that's primarily because where I am isn't too different from home.

What makes this scholarship special is that it allows us students to build a close personal connection with people who are generous and loving enough to welcome us into their houses and lives without any hesitation. My host mother, Sylvia Shortt, is one of the most influential people in my life. Through her actions alone, I've learnt invaluable lessons in what it means to be compassionate and at peace with your being. She has passed on to me a greater understanding of the world around us and how we must view it if we are to fix it. She possesses a passion for her beliefs and for fixing the problems in society that may not even affect her personally; I feel fortunate to have even met such a morally correct and generous human being let alone have the pleasure of calling her a second mother and a close personal friend. Her family welcomed me as one of their own from the moment we met. My host sister, Marisol, is a friend I've made for life. My host father, Robin, is one of the coolest and calmest people I've ever met (I secretly aspire to be like him one day). This scholarship has given me a group of people I can call my family, and for that I am forever indebted to the GRSP.

The commitment Rotary has shown in attempting to bridge barriers in such a unique way is not only outstanding, but is something that should be expanded to as many parts of the world as possible. As a person of color, it is my hope that more and more people from third world countries can come and experience the things I have experienced and live the experience I've lived through. This year was all about being the inspiration; we must inspire ourselves to reach out to all parts of the world; the Middle East, Asia and beyond to get students from all walks of life to avail this scholarship and be evidence of the fact that human beings, regardless of the color of their skin, religion and nationality can call each other "friends", "brothers", "sisters" and "family". Whilst being in Georgia, I have made a commitment to welcome any and all Rotarians of Georgia to my home in Pakistan. This initiative, I hope, can allow people to come and see Pakistan in the same light as I have seen Georgia. My doors are open to you all as yours were open to me. The spirit of the GRSP is to make a commitment to end any nationalistic, xenophobic and racist sentiments that surround us; we must all play our part to further this mission in whatever way we can. I hope more people from my country can come and see what I have seen through this scholarship. It is only through our compassion and common humanity that we can continue healing the world. I hope we see the world truly healed one day.

Daniyal Nasir



# ERIK CARL NEMAN

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Valdosta State University

Most of the GRSP students didn't know what to expect from a year in Georgia. I did, or at least I thought so! My sister was a GRSP student last year so I knew first hand what to expect. However, this was going to be my year, not hers, and I was very happy when I knew I was going to Valdosta near the border to Florida, a long way from Dalton where she lived.

After meeting everyone at the Conclave in Young Harris I knew this was going to be a wonderful, adventurous but also a challenging year. This was the first time I was out of my comfort zone and it was a little bit scary at first. But I didn't have to worry! Everyone was incredibly welcoming and my Rotary club also made me feel at home in Valdosta from the beginning. I have made a lot of new friends, both among the GRSP students but also among the students at Valdosta State. My American friends, both students and Rotarians, have taught me a lot about America but also a lot about myself. I didn't grow up in Sweden and have spent most part of my life in other countries so I was very well aware of the cultural differences that exists in the world. It has been very interesting to meet people who do not have that experience and it has been very fulfilling telling them about Sweden and Europe and compare, complain and laugh about things that are different. I had no clue college football was such a big thing, I mean it's just college football, no? And Swedish Fish are not Swedish after all!

As I am writing this, I am packing, Spring Break is here and I am heading to the Grand Canyon where I am going to hike and camp. This will just be one of many amazing trips I have been able to make while in Valdosta. I have seen many parts of Georgia thanks to the GRSP weekends but I have also travelled with other GRSP students and on my own, to explore other parts of the United States. I have seen parts of Tennessee, Florida, Omaha, Iowa, New York, Chicago and Utah and I will see more before leaving for Sweden in June. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to explore your beautiful country and to meet the American people. All thanks to GRSP!

I have also learned by now how to be an official Southerner. Saying morning y'all, eating chicken fingers, drinking sweet tea and enjoying Wally World at night. Driving Pickup trucks and eating out every day. I have played softball, which I still don't understand how to play by the way, and lost a cornhole competition. This has been a lot of fun!

I don't know how to show how grateful I am, there is no words to describe how I feel about the experience I have had. It's overwhelming! I will definitely miss this year, which has been the best of my life so far. But the journey doesn't end here, I will have lifelong contact with all of the other GRSP Students and of course with the many Rotarians I've met here. This year has brought me so much and I have honestly enjoyed every moment even though some experiences have been less fun, but not less important to me. I will always be truly grateful to all whom have made my year in Georgia possible.

Thank you!

Erik Neman



## **ADAOBI PRINCESS NWOFOR**

**Nigeria**

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Oglethorpe University

I remember vividly the day I got accepted into the GRSP program, I screamed and woke my family up in the middle of the night, I could not contain my joy. Coming to America for the first time in my life I would say was a bit scary because I did not know what to expect and how I would be treated but so far my experience has been nothing short of amazing. I arrived here and the people who welcomed me were as warm as ever, and that was when I knew that this would be the best year of my life.

One of my greatest joy in being part of GRSP was meeting my host families and clubs and honestly they felt like being home, I never felt different with any of them and was treated like I was part of the family. We had breakfast together, cooked and baked together and whenever I spoke to my family back home, they were always excited to know that I was being well taken care of and believe me I was truly happy.

Being a graduate from my home country, I was also looking forward to the college life in the US and due to the program, I was able to explore it and for that I am so grateful. It was different and it was good, I learnt a lot and also noted the differences which made me decide to pursue a second degree here, all these would not have been possible if I was not part of the GRSP program and I am so blessed to be here. I made some friends here, met people from all over the world and I came to the conclusion that peace is possible despite race, age, status etc. We could exist together and still be happy. GRSP taught me that, I will forever be grateful to my uncle who told me about the program, to my rotary clubs: Midtown, Tucker and Sandy Springs who made it possible for me to be here and to have a home away from home.

Thank you GRSP for the best year  
GRACIAS!!

ADAOBI PRINCESS NWOFOR- NIGERIA  
OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY.



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Georgia Southern University - Armstrong

It is really a great opportunity to go somewhere alone for a year as an exchange student. I learned so much about my life and about myself...it was a school of life! I am so glad that I had the chance to get all these experiences and to improve myself.

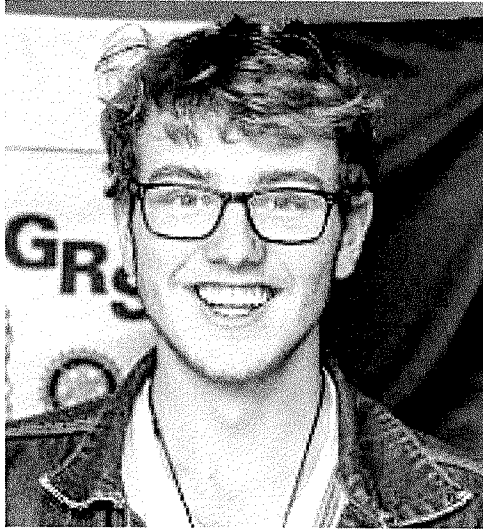
This time here made me stronger and more mature, I got to know different cultures, different ways of life and all of this made me have a better understanding of the world, it expanded my horizon. I had amazing opportunities! I went to New Orleans, Orlando, Florida, Savannah, Atlanta, Disney World and I still plan to go to other places at the end of this semester!

Furthermore, I want to say thank you to my host families, you all gave me experiences and completed my year in the USA. I will miss you all! Rotary makes a wonderful work with the GRSP program, it is a year that I will never forget.

And at this point, I want to give special thanks to my trustee Susan that supported me in the beginning and has helped me a lot. I also made great friends that I want to take for the rest of my life, thanks to all of you that made this year easier and were there when I missed my family.

Right now, a strange feeling is starting to grow. I feel happy to go back home and to meet my family, but at the same time it hurts to leave all of this behind, I will miss these people a lot! I am grateful for everyone that made this year possible for me. I will never forget you all.

Thank you, Vitoria.



# WILLIAM ANDREW PATERSON

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LaGrange College

The GRSP was first brought forth to my attention by a previous scholar when I started high school. I had always wanted the opportunity to visit and live in America so when I heard about this opportunity I made sure to find out more. I was, of course, devastated to hear that you had to be 18 or over (at the time I was 12) but from then on I did what I could to find out more and prepare for this year - such as the SAT and talking to a couple of previous students about their experiences and how they got themselves ready.

I would like to thank my host family (Mark, Jolene and Chase) immediately made me feel at home and showed me what the true southern hospitality was. Giving me a lovely bed to stay in, helping me get set up and organised for the start of Fall semester in August, and of course, taking me to Walt Disney World, Florida. The process for getting my driver's licence back home had been delayed. Thanks to Mark and Jolene, however, both gave me tips on driving and helped me get my Georgia ID. I also appreciate my trustee Ken for having taken me to so many student weekends, like: Savannah, Young Harris, Alpharetta, Oglethorpe. I owe so much to the Rotary Club of LaGrange for having been so welcoming.

The courses I've taken overall have been Music Theory, Acting, Choir, and Math. I hadn't sung properly until I came here. And I am now part of two choral groups - LaGrange College Choir and West Georgia Choral Society amongst whom area number of fellow Rotarians. I thoroughly enjoyed my brief time on stage for my acting practical exam (I did *The Odd Couple*) and having been a part of the theatre department's black-box show *Blithe Spirit* - I was but a mere butler and stage hand but had a great time nonetheless. Music Theory (which I'm taking further this semester) has been fascinating and has well-improved my appreciation for classical and modern music. For Jan-term I was lucky enough to be able to take two courses: a study of musicals, in which we went to see and review various musicals; and a car mechanic/Thai Chi/cooking/first aid course - great for student life-skills.

I have been adopted by the Danes from GRSP and plan to visit as many of the countries that my fellow students come from in the future. I am so thankful to Rotary for having provided this opportunity of a lifetime and realise that I am incredibly lucky to have been chosen. The memories I've made from this experience will stay with me for a very longtime.





## FAHMIDA RAHMAN

**Scotland**

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Georgia Gwinnett College

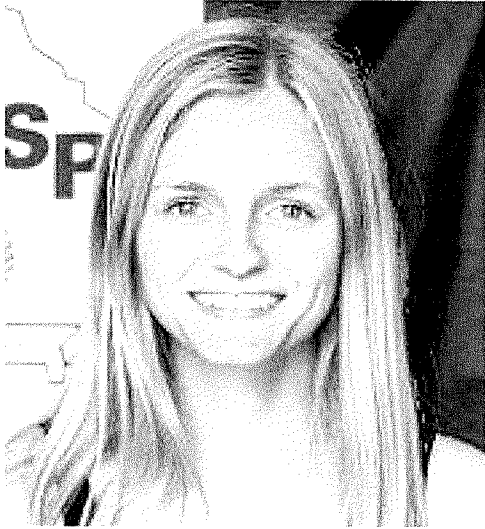
When I first received my offer to be part of the GRSP, I expected to experience American college life and its culture. What I didn't expect was to make lifelong friends and gain two extra families. To say this programme went beyond any presumptions I had would be an understatement. I was told, "GRSP is life changing" by a fellow Rotarian from my home club, and I can undoubtedly agree with him.

To tell the truth, I was not sure if I would be well suited at Georgia Gwinnett College, as it initially didn't fit my image of what I believed to be a 'typical American college'. However, that thought quickly escalated after a week of staying at GGC. I met my roommate Signe, from Denmark, and Takunda from Zimbabwe (who lived downstairs) on the first day of college, and I do not remember a time when we were not together after that. Actually, I was never with them when they both went to the gym at 7 am, even after much persuasion from Signe. I don't think that's part of the 'American culture', so I was happily missing out. Instead, I gained a couple of pounds and I heard that is part of the culture - bless southern food. As an international student at GGC myself, I was easily able to meet other internationals attending and I loved it. Alongside GRSP, my actual college gave me opportunities to interact with many different cultures. Canadians, Swedes, Nigerians and countless more. Met some English folk and definitely appreciated the accents, felt like I was already closer to home. Although, the Scottish accents are better as biased as it sounds (apologies to Zoe, Southampton accents are cool too). Having a Chick-Fil-A on campus was phenomenal, I fully understand why Americans rave about it now. Isn't it time to open a franchise of it in Scotland? GGC has provided me with so many memories to take home and I can't be thankful enough. I cannot visualise my time there with anyone else but my two other GRSP kids.

From the travels we all ventured on as GRSP kids, Miami for New Years was probably my favourite. There were so many of us under one roof, it was bound to be a memorable (and awesome) trip. I did establish that most of us are rubbish at planning things through and everyone else realised Anna (from Scotland) and I can't be trusted to go out to buy things for everyone. We got lost and arrived back two hours late. Overall, I will happily take Miami's sunny days over Edinburgh's rainy days.

Over to my two amazing host families, I cannot appreciate 'y'all' enough for welcoming me into your homes. It was only possible for me to travel to other states as Khady and Wayne were always there when I needed a ride to the bus stops/airports. Even though Khady was not a big fan of good old 'greyhound' buses and decided a tracking app was a necessity for me, both her and Wayne never failed to be my family away from home. They really showed me what southern hospitality is about in Virginia for my first ever 'Thanksgiving'. The food was amazing, but I cannot call myself a fan of 'grits' or those strange 'egg looking' items, sorry! Fun fact: my first ever breakfast in Georgia was indeed a Chick-fil-A biscuit and I was in love, (thank you, Wayne). Angela and Mark were my second host family - how lucky was I to have gotten not one, but two host families?! I felt as if I already knew Angela when I first arrived in Atlanta airport as she wrote me emails just before I was due to arrive. I was very grateful for this as she answered any queries I had. Angela, Mark and their family showed me what an American Christmas is like and it's maybe better than Scottish Christmas. I'm going to miss forcefully picking up Sally the cat, I think he secretly liked me although he didn't show it. I also want to say thank you to Takunda and Signe's host families for hosting us a few times. Scott and Carla will make you want to visit Texas, I promise. Also, Shawna and Pat literally opened their home to 12-14 of us GRSP kids, and we thought they were so great for doing that. That was one heck of a sleepover! To wrap this up, Rotary is an incredible organisation and I will be forever thankful to each and everyone involved who made this opportunity possible for me. Not a lot of people can say they have friends and families around the world, but we certainly can.

Fahmida Rahman, all the way from Scotland



## KATRINE RAMHOJ

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Georgia Southern University

I was nervous going into this year - excited, but nervous. Nervous about leaving behind my apartment, my friends, my family, and nervous about moving my whole life to "the South". A place that in many ways stand for the opposite of where I come from. But any preconceived notions I might have had have been replaced completely by all the truly nice and welcoming people I've met here. I've gained a better understanding of our differences and have been met with nothing but interest and respect. I've loved teaching people about Denmark and in turn learning all the things about the US that you don't see in movies or newspapers.

For me, this year has really been all about new experiences and meeting new people. There have been all the people I hang out with daily at Georgia Southern University and then all the other GRSP students that I got to hang out with a few times throughout the year. After the conclave, I was amazed at how quickly we all became friends - something I think came from the fact that we're all in the exact same situation regardless of where we were placed geographically. We were all in a new country, away from our families, and just ready to have fun and get to know new people. My only regret is that I haven't been able to spend more time with all the other GRSPs; whenever we've been together we've had so much fun. I hope to see you all again, whether that'll be in Denmark or in your corner of the world.

This year would not have been the same without Steve and Shanda, my family away from home. They are the sweetest people, and they have been a great part of my experiences - from taking me to North Georgia to experience the mountains and white-water rafting, to taking me to dinner, to the movies, driving me when I needed a ride, and letting me spend the holidays with them. Thank you so much for welcoming me into your home!

I can't believe it's already almost over and that I'll be going home soon. Thank you so much to Rotary for this amazing opportunity and thank you to all my fellow GRSPs for being part of making this an amazing year!



## ALEXANDRE ROY

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Clayton State University

Learning that I was accepted into the GRSP program was most probably the best news of 2018. Receiving a one-year scholarship to study in the United States was such a great and unexpected opportunity that I quickly cancelled all my other study plans. Indeed, GRSP taught me so much and I couldn't be more grateful. I was very surprised when I noticed the great English level of all the GRSP students, and thankfully this year offered me a chance to make big progress in this language (as well as questioning the way of teaching language in the French educational system). Being the only French in the program also allowed me to be totally immersed in the American culture and to learn faster.

During this year, I had the chance to travel a lot. Not only all over Georgia, but also in Nashville, Charleston, Miami, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. This made me realize that the United States and its surroundings have so much diversity and so much to experience. The year is not over yet and I hope to have the chance to discover even more of this awesome country and make other lifetime memories.

More than anything, GRSP taught me to be more independent and organized which I am sure will be beneficial to me in the future. Being a part of this program allowed me to meet so many great people that I would not have met otherwise, and I now have an excuse to visit lots of new countries.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all the wonderful people who made that year even more special to me. My host Terry, my trustee Kerry and his wife Sydney, as well as my sponsoring Rotary clubs (Atlanta Airport, Senoia, Westend, Newnan) and all their members. I really hope that this program will prosper and allow students like me to look back on this incredible experience for many years.

Alexandre ROY



## JOÃO FELIPE KRAMBECK SANTOS

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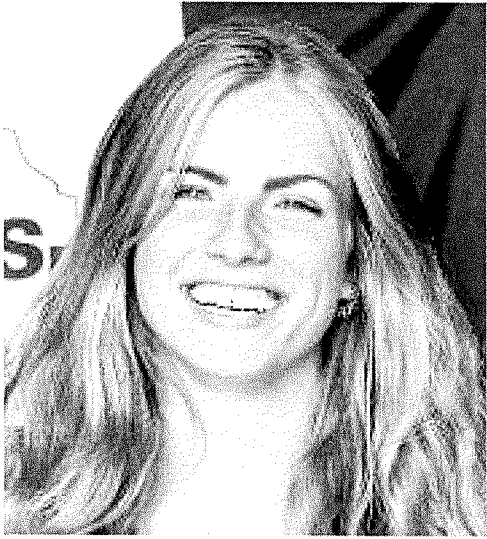
Valdosta State University

Before coming to the United States for this one year of experiences, I didn't have many opinions about what it would be, I just tried to keep my mind open to enjoy all of it. My only fear was because of the warm culture that I bring from my country, that people could think of me as invasive, and maybe they could be cold with me. But from the very first day here I was very well received and treated by my host family (Jack and Jaclyn Donovan), they really treated me like family.

From then on, I became more and more impressed with all the people I've met, whether Rotarians or other GRSP students, at different times such as club meetings and the program weekends. We have shared many experiences and stories from different cultures in such a short period of time and I really cannot imagine another experience that puts me in such great diversity. It is very gratifying to see that so many people are willing to know new ones, so that by learning from each other we can little by little promote the common good. In addition to all these events, Rotary also encouraged us to meet Americans who are not involved in this cause, so that we could be inserted into the day-to-day life of the US. This was an experience that made me very happy this year, I had the pleasure of meeting incredible people, of all kinds, within Valdosta State University I've met many students, teachers and employees in general. Everyone treated me very well, I understood the meaning of the southern hospitality of the USA. I had incentives here and even revelations thinking about professions in the future, which really changed my perspective.

In summary, this year made me a better person, I focused on subjects I never thought I would discuss and made great friends. I'll have this for all my life.

João Felipe Krambeck dos Santos



## PERNILLE SCHMIDT

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Valdosta State University

This year has been crazy! I don't know where to start. It sounds cliché, but it has been a really wild journey. I have never experienced so many different things in such a short time. It has been a unique opportunity to attend an American university and be a part of the college life at Valdosta State University.

I have visited 12 different states, been on a road trip from Georgia to New York, celebrated New Year's Eve in Miami and am going across America when school is over. It has been a dream to see different parts of the states and see how different they all are. All together with my new "family" of friends from the GRSP. Friendships that are strong enough to survive when we all go back.

In addition to my family of friends, I have been lucky to get 3 really different host families that has shown me different lifestyles, parts of the US and traditions such as football and Thanksgiving. The amazing part is that they let me become a part of their family. To get the experience of Thanksgiving and Christmas with my American families have been a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The Conclave was the turning point for me. Before that, it was hard to be away from the comforts and security back home. At the Conclave I met the 45 other students from all over the world. To be a part of this group, sing the GRSP song, carry the flags in and get to know each other was wonderful. There was a feeling that we became one big family after a few minutes. We have done fun things like zip lining, team work at the escape room, softball and laser tag. All the student weekends and events have brought us all closer and given us the opportunity to get to know new host families for the weekends.

I want to thank everyone for a wonderful year with all the people from GRSP, host families for the student weekends, my 3 host families and all the people behind the scenes that are the reason why this has been possible and made this year unforgettable. I'm now rich in experiences around the US, a lot of friendships around the world and a lot of experiences that I can use in a lot of situations later in life. This year has given me memories for life. I wish everyone could get this opportunity.

Thanks, y'all!

Pernille Schmidt



## ELLINOR OFELIA SEGERSTEN

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Georgia Southern University - Armstrong

How do you summarize this year in a couple of words? One of my favorite aspects of coming to a new place and culture is certainly trying new foods. Food is so much more than something you put in your mouth. It is community, culture, festivities, creativity and fuel for your body. During my year in Georgia, I have had the possibility to experience so many new things, and that definitely include the food. Therefore, I would like to share 7 of my favorite food experiences I have had during my year in Georgia:

1. Fried Chicken: Something that I learned quickly living in Georgia was that fried chicken in the South is really more of a staple, and highly regarded. Don't even mention Chick-fil-a... And it didn't take long until I had also fallen in love with this crispy golden-brown dish, much thanks to the Rotary Club of Savannah and their wonderful Monday lunches. And who on earth would believe that you could even excel it by adding a waffle to it? Chicken and waffles!
2. Oyster roast: I am so thankful for all the events I have been able to attend through Rotary. One of them was an oyster roast party in December. Never having eaten oysters before, I remember thinking that I would maybe taste 3 or 4 of them. It ended up being probably around 30 to 40... Having such an abundance of seafood and especially oysters is something I have truly loved about my year in Savannah!
3. Meals at the Gompels': I can't even imagine what my year would have been like without my host family: Nina and Mark Gompels. I feel so extremely blessed and grateful for having had them during the year and for all the care and support they have showed towards me. It is beyond words! Then, it is just an extra plus that they cook the most amazing foods. From Sunday dinners to holiday foods to Super Bowl buffet....And not to mention the compulsory bag of foods Nina would always force me to bring back to campus. THANK YOU!
4. Grits: Is it like polenta? Or more like a porridge? When do you eat it? And together with what? Describing grits can be a hard task. I would just say: deliciousness! The absolutely best one is made by my host mum, Nina. Receiving a box with grits back to campus is such cherished memory of mine.
5. Krispy Kreme Doughnut: I am so grateful for the friends I have made during my year in Savannah. And food certainly played a big role here! One of my best memories is when my friend Adam, late one evening, took me to Krispy Kreme to taste their glazed doughnuts that came directly from the fryer. I had no idea a doughnut could ever taste so good! It also ended up with us buying two dozen doughnuts a few days later...
6. S'mores: S'mores was really that American thing I had only seen on tv and heard about before I came to the U.S. Therefore, I was very excited to try what it would taste like. But what could go wrong with combining three sweet things and then letting them melt together, especially if you are surrounded by good company?
7. Sweet Potato Casserole with Marshmallows: During this year, I got to participate in the American holidays, one of them being Thanksgiving. This was also the first time I dared to try sweet potato casserole with marshmallows. At first, this idea just sounded crazy to me. Why would you ever add sugar and candy to a vegetable that is already sweet in itself? But now, I am so glad I dared to try it. Yes, sometimes more is actually more!

Ellinor Segersten



# MAGNO SORIA TONIOLO

**Brazil**

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University of West Georgia

My name is Magno, I am from Brazil, and my experience here in the United States has been amazing! It is my first time abroad, far from home, far from my family, and, if you stop to think about it, it can definitely be an obstacle for people that want to live something like that but do not want to leave some things behind. I love my country, my parents and everything I left in Brazil. Of course, I miss that, but I would never trade this experience for being back home. That is because I got a new family and a new mind here. All the Rotarians, my host families (especially John and Sherry, they have been so kind to me), my new friends (Americans and internationals), I have no words to describe how important they were and still are in my life.

This experience has being so open-minded. I have learned so many things about American culture and even about myself. I think the most important thing that I realized is that we are all human beings. It does not matter in which country we live, which color or which ethnicity we are. We can bring peace to the world. We can bring happiness. We can make the difference just as Rotary Club is making in the lives of the students that come here and spend a year in a very different environment.

So far, I have done many things. I went to the Falcons game twice (they lost both, unfortunately, but it was amazing to be in the Mercedes Stadium), I have also been to the Braves game and, my highlight was at Christmas, when I went to Las Vegas with my host family. Who does not want to go there! Everybody wants it and I had the opportunity to spend a week there. What a great experience. In addition, we drove to the Grand Canyon and Hoover Dam. After that, I can tell you, the Grand Canyon is the most beautiful and impressive place that I have ever seen. Anyway, these things are just a little bit of everything I have lived here. I am very grateful to Rotary community for giving me this incredible opportunity. I will carry this with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you for everything!



## NORA STAURHEIM

Norway

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Wesleyan

### A year (in a life and a life) in a year

Seven months into this experience in the United States I find that one of the most commonly used metaphors for Youth Exchange fit more than ever. A year abroad really feels like a life in a year. Although this is my second long-term stay in a foreign country, and although we technically are not exchange students, the experience is very similar to the metaphor. By learning how to function in a different society, by learning how to make friends and keep them through the duration of our stay, by learning and participating in college-level classes, by learning to live away from our family and friends back home, we really do live through almost a whole "life of experiences". Some of us may have had similar experiences before, but that does not make those we have had now any less life changing nor important.

To me, this year has been a proof of my own ability to thrive and find a place for myself regardless of circumstances. It has by far been my best year in school, and I have made friends which I will cherish for as long as I live. I have made friendships with people of all ages, although most were with people my own age, and I have been warmly and openly welcomed into a culture which is not my own. I have also been incredibly lucky, primarily for having been able to receive this scholarship - as it is no secret that I was selected last minute. Not only that, but I was given a wonderful host family who really have done their very best to give me a year of dreams, have been placed in a school which I love, and for having been placed with incredible people to share the GRSP experience.

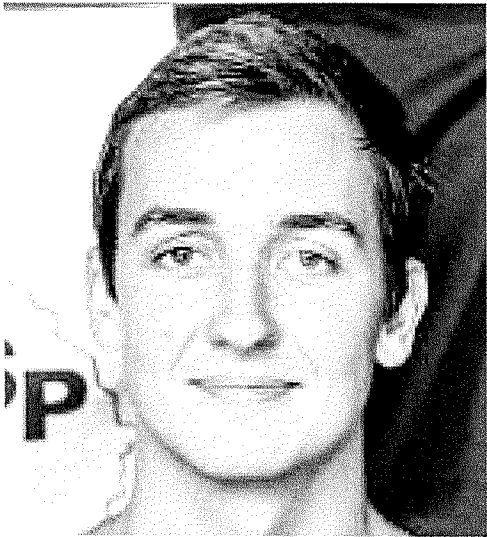
If I were to pick one thing which stood out to me from this experience with Rotary it would be the warmth with which I have been welcomed and included both during the weekly meetings, as well as during the conferences and weekends. The weekends have been especially great. The highlights have been divided between seeing the other GRSPs again, and our stays with the weekend host families.

The way Rotarians open their homes to all of us international students, make us feel welcome, and want to get to know us has been a heartwarming surprise. Another positive consequence of the host families is the way different students have been distributed during weekends. Being so many people it is hard to get to know the students who do not belong to the same "friend group" as us. By always matching us together with different students during the weekends, we are given the opportunity to get to know better the people we have not gotten as close to.

The weekend host families also make it possible for us to see different parts of the American culture. Of course, we are able to experience this both at school and with our host family/ies, but having the opportunity of living with and getting to know several more families expands upon our understanding. For although each family although belonging to the same macro-culture (The US), every single one still have their own traditions and micro-culture. What might be American to one family might not be to another, and exposure to different host families make this distinction more visible to us.

To me, the cultural experience has been the most valuable part of my stay here. It has been my greatest pleasure to see how, although we are from different countries and parts of the world, we are still fundamentally the same. There are differences yes, and the cultures should both be celebrated and preserved, but we are all people underneath. Programs such as GRSP are important because they show exactly how important intercultural understanding is. By giving us the opportunity of getting to know each other, foreign names and countries become more than they were before. Suddenly they also become your friends and acquaintances. And I know at least for myself, it becomes very difficult to ignore harmful stereotypes, labels and misconceptions about a country when I know someone from there or have been there myself.





## PETER STEINER-JOHNSEN

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Berry College

Considering that I was about to spend a year away from the comforts of home, I was not all that nervous when I stepped out of the airplane in Atlanta Airport on August 12. For some reason I felt like this year was destined to be amazing. The humidity in Georgia during this time of the year was so extreme that I thought to myself "I might as well just swim to Rome". Luckily, I chose not to swim. Instead I walked to the arrival area where I met the wonderful families of Rome, who were going to make sure that my year in Georgia was going to be the best year of my life. I was surprised that they had all driven an hour and half just to greet me, and then they would have to drive an hour and a half again to get back to Rome. That seemed crazy to me coming from a tiny country like Denmark.

I spent my first days in Georgia with Lauren and Joe Adams and Pete and Jane McDonald, who really helped me a lot in the transition of coming from Denmark to the USA. They were all very supportive and helpful. At the GRSP Conclave in August I met the other GRSP students. It was almost overwhelming to meet so many different people. We are all so different, yet still so alike. I appreciate everyone in the GRSP class of 18/19. I have really had an amazing time with all of you, whether it is at the GRSP-weekends, in New York City, or Miami.

I remember seeing Berry College for the first time. It was grand. Maybe not by American standards, but it was unlike anything I had ever seen before. After having experienced quite a few other colleges in Georgia, I am convinced that Berry College is the most beautiful college in all of Georgia. I have learnt the value of a good, late-night porch conversation, that can stretch on for hours. The openness and pure honesty of the American college students are incredible. In fact, during my time at Berry College I have often forgotten that I was an international student, as my fellow students did not make me feel like one. I have visited other students' homes in Alpharetta, South Carolina and North Carolina. I can proudly say that I rode my first horse in South Carolina, and I live to tell the tale.

I will miss all the things that Berry College has to offer: the beautiful trails, the House of Dreams, The Reservoir, Mountain Campus, The Ford Buildings, even the absurd amount of deer on campus. I have many fond memories, some which include cave exploring in Alabama, volunteering at the "One Table" event in Rome, and nearly winning the intramural indoor soccer tournament (still upset about that one).

Cheryl Huffman has acted as an incredibly attentive trustee the entire year, and I am so thankful for everything she has done. I could not have wished for a better trustee.

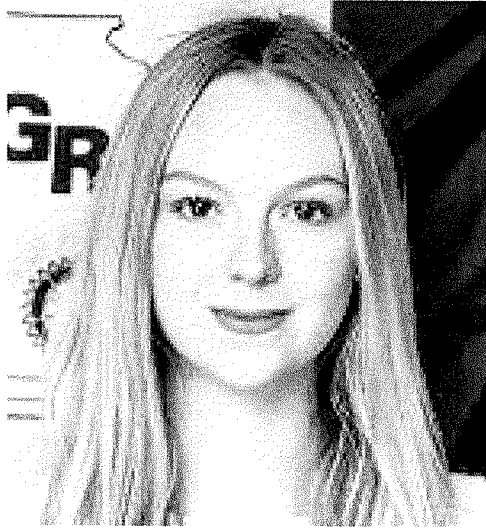
Thomas and Shannon Kislak have been a huge part of my year here in Georgia. Thank you for countless dinners, inviting me over for Halloween and Thanksgiving, taking me to Rome International Film Festival, ice skating, "The Sound of Music"-musical and many other things. Thank you Thomas for letting me assist you in coaching U10-Boys in soccer. That was a great experience.

Thank you Rotarians of Rome for making me feel welcome in Rome and Rotary. It has been an enjoyable experience to get to know many of you over countless of meetings.

There are many things that I will miss about this country. A few hundred words will never be enough words to explain how much I have experienced this year, or how thankful I am. So I will keep it simple.

To the families of Rome who were going to make sure that my year in Georgia was going to be the best year of my life: you succeeded.

Thank you.



## AGNES BUCH THINGSTRUP

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Oglethorpe University

One of the things I cherished the most about this stay was spending time with the other GRSP students on student weekends. A highlight for me was the conclave where we all got to meet for the first time and see each other perform and wear native clothes. Playing softball the same weekend was also so much fun, and a great way to get to know the rest of the students. Another highlight was the weekend in Alpharetta, where we went to Tree Top Questand it was nice to spend time in nature while challenging ourselves.

I also really enjoyed participating in the weekly meetings with my sponsoring club, Peachtree City Rotary Club. Every program gave me an opportunity to learn something new about different peoples and topics. The Rotary Club of Peachtree City's Annual Dragon Boat Race was also a great experience, where multiple other GRSP students participated as volunteers alongside with me. Spending time with my host family in PTC, especially cruising on golf carts, was something I enjoyed a lot, and they have been the greatest support during the time being here.

My time here has given me unique opportunities to travel to lots of amazing places. My host family invited me with them on a cruise for Thanksgiving, where we went to Saint Thomas, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and Grand Turk. It was a great experience and never have I seen so many palm trees, crystal clear oceans, and eaten so much food in one week! I can't possibly thank them enough for bringing me. Visiting New York and Miami alongside with other GRSP students was also a great experience. It was very cold in New York, but it was all worth it going at Christmas time, where we saw the Rockefeller Christmas Tree and enjoyed ice-skating in Central Park. New Year's Eve in Miami was a blast, where we enjoyed a free concert from Pitbull along with fireworks at Bayfront Park.

This year gave me the opportunity of studying multiple different fields. I studied principles of Micro- and Macroeconomics and introduction to German during my first semester at Oglethorpe University. The professors were great and I learned a whole lot, including new approaches to studying. Taking notes on a computer was switched out with handwriting, leaving me with blisters on my fingers for the first period of the semester, as I hadn't really been taking notes by hand since 6th grade. But writing by hand was very helpful when studying economics, and I was less distracted by shopping adds during the lectures. In the spring semester I studied introduction to sociology and psychology, along with principles of management. Sociology and psychology were fields within the social sciences I had no prior knowledge of, but it turned out to be very interesting, and relevant to the studies which I intend to pursue next year. My studies here in general helped me to finally decide that I wish to study Market- and Culture analysis at Copenhagen Business School when I return to Denmark.



## CATHARINA ILLUM VANDEKERCKHOVE

Denmark

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Georgia State University

I'm from Denmark and have been studying at Georgia State University for my GRSP year. It's been a very enlightening and wonderful experience. Studying in the middle of Downtown Atlanta has given me insight into the ups and downs of urban culture in the south and direct meeting with the people there. Attending a university without an actual campus has definitely been very interesting.

I have taken the most wonderful classes at GSU. Most of these have been music classes: Music Theory, Aural Skills, Choir, Composition, Applied Voice and Applied Piano. The music life in Atlanta is also amazing and I've attended concerts with musical groups I love like Celtic Woman and Voces 8. I also studied Chinese for both semesters, which is definitely one of my favorite classes. It has opened me to a whole new world of language that I will explore much more even after I stop taking classes. I took Spanish Advanced Grammar the first semester to refresh my Spanish skills, and then I took Organic Chemistry in my second semester which is really interesting and a wonderful contrast to all of my other classes. I will study Nano Science back home, and Chemistry is a great introduction to that.

The teachers at GSU are wonderful and the whole classroom environment is really nice. Most of my classes have less than 20 people, except Chemistry with 150 people. I have had the opportunity to speak with and get to know the teachers one-on-one which has been great because I myself would like to end up in academia and love to get to know people who are passionate about something.

Although I never made close friends at GSU, I have definitely met a lot of great people in my classes, that I love talking to.

I have made the closest bond with my wonderful host parents Mark and Dee. They've become my bonus parents and some of my closest friends. I can always rely on them, and they are like a safe base for me when I need it. We've had so many wonderful conversations and I will cherish our time together forever.

Lastly I have made some fantastic GRSP friends that I will stay in contact with after we go home to each our country. There is something great about knowing people from all over the world. You get a lot of respect for different cultures and what they have to offer, and why they do like they do. I really do believe that if everyone got to know people from all kinds of cultures, there would be no war or fear of the foreign. I will definitely do my part to spread love and understanding.

Catharina Illum Vandekerckhove

