Hello all!

A lot has been going on at the FDC over the last few months, and that is why you haven’t seen a newsletter since last spring. As you may recall, one of my staff, Amy Waldrep, suffered a massive aneurysm and a series of strokes. Thanks to the quick thinking of another staff member, David Lloyd, she, against all odds, is alive and recovering. However, it will be a long and difficult journey to recovery. We wish her all the best.

Shortly thereafter, longtime employee Matias Marabotto finished his MBA degree and took a position as a system administrator with Desire2Learn. Then, our instructional designer, Dr. Debra Robinson, decided to return to working in the K-12 system so that she could be on a similar schedule with her husband and kids. So we were short three team members for several months and forced to hunker down into survival mode—hence, no newsletter. But I am glad to report we now have some amazing new folks hired and are back with a vengeance!

Associate Dean’s Corner
with Dr. Jason Huett

Welcome to the November Newsletter
The first of our new hires is Jessica Loiacono. She is our new Online Learning Innovation Coordinator and self-appointed Chief of “Awesome.” Her position is actually being funded by the state as part of our Complete College Georgia action plan. You can read about her in the “Meet the Staff” section of this newsletter. Next up is Dale Lyles—our new Director of the Online Faculty Development Center. Dale has been a classroom teacher, a media specialist, and more recently, the Director of the Governor’s Honors Program in Georgia. We also have a new Online Instructional Designer, Wendy Grisham. Wendy comes to us from Georgia Northwestern Technical College where she worked as a department chair and as the Assistant Dean of General and Learning Support Education. She has a strong background in liberal arts and online education. Finally, we have a new casual labor employee, Toni Drake, who is helping to make sure things run smoothly around the office. This is truly a dream team.

In the coming months, Dale will be leading an outreach initiative and a series of town halls where you can get to know the new staff; get more information about the rollout of version 10.2 of Desire2Learn/CourseDen coming in January; learn about using the tools in our newly adopted Google Suite of applications; and hear more about our newly launched Quality Matters Faculty Development trainings. As always, I encourage all of you to stop by the office or give us a call. As Dale says, “We are from the near future, and we are here to help.”

On with the newsletter!

In our “Online Student Spotlight” we meet Natasha Wright—a 36-year-old freshman with three children. Her story is a powerful and transformative one, and I encourage you to read it. In the “Meet the Staff” section, we profile Alex Oplesnin, an outstanding graduate assistant, and we highlight our new Online Learning Innovation Coordinator, Jessica Loiacono.

As usual, the rest of the newsletter is filled with some great information, and if you have any feedback or ideas for inclusion, please send them our way.

Cheers,
Jason
Meet the Staff

Alex Oplesnin
Graduate Assistant

I started my college career as a physics major at Syktyvkar State University, Russia; after 3 years I switched majors, universities and countries of living. I hold my bachelor’s degree in Computer Science from Georgia College and State University.

I have been working for the Distance Learning and Distributed Education department here at West Georgia as a Graduate Assistant for two years while pursuing my M.S. degree in Applied Computer Science. I am a computer programmer. My areas of interest include software development and algorithms.

My work experience is diverse. I have held multiple jobs which included customer service, technical support, sales, and research responsibilities.

Working for UWG|Online, I have had an opportunity to apply my computer programming and customer service skills while learning new and fascinating tools used in online classes here at the University of West Georgia. I write scripts for our department website and Learning Management System, Desire2Learn.

We provide face-to-face and over-the-phone technical support to both faculty and students, assist faculty with instructional design support and technology issues, facilitate workshops and trainings, as well as create solutions that help online instruction. Each day brings new challenges which we are eager to assist with.

Despite the fact that online education is more flexible, it also raises a number of obstacles which prevent students from learning efficiently. On such major obstacle is the lack of communication from student to student and from student to faculty. Our team is using solutions developed by various companies such as Blackboard and Desire2Learn to eliminate this drawback.

*UWG Online would like to thank Alex for his service to our department, and congratulate him on his graduation from the University of West Georgia. We wish him well on his future endeavors.*
UWGIOnline

UWGIOnline Faculty and Student Services Helpdesk has been consolidated and relocated to the Wagner Honor House to better serve our body of users. The Helpdesk is now under the direction of Michael Post, who was serving as the primary UWGleCore advisor. The helpdesk is continuing its efforts to provide consistent and efficient service as it assists faculty, staff and students with technology support for fully online, hybrid and technology-enhanced classes. We are committed to continually training and personal improvement so that we can meet and exceed our users’ expectations. We strive for easy access by being available via phone, email, chat and face-to-face appointments.

For more information visit: online.westga.edu.

Beginner Tech

Evernote: A great tool for capturing photos, storing data, saving a document, clearing paper clutter, and remembering everything. It organizes your digital info where you can access it from any device. Everything that you find important can be retrieved when and where you need it most.

Advanced Tech

Penultimate: This is an awesome tool for the visual learner! It is a handwriting app that has the feel of pen and paper for the iPad. It has the ability to synch to Evernote, and your information is able to be retrieved from any computer or mobile device. Write and create pictures and doodles to help remind yourself of important ideas. You can even color your drawings and share your information with others.

Free Software Training

Try out Atomic Learning. It includes software training tutorials for hundreds of pieces of software, including Camtasia and Premiere. Give them a try at www.atomiclearning.com/highed/ The username is “UWG,” and the password is “college.”
**Course Den Upgrade Spring 2014**

CourseDen’s Desire2Learn (D2L) will be upgraded to version 10.2. The upgrade will make D2L unavailable beginning some time on 12/19, with an expected return to service by midnight on 12/26. Students will be able to log in and access a student orientation course by noon on 01/02. However, they will not be able to access their Spring 2014 classes until the official start date of January 6th. This upgrade improves and fixes usability and added functionality that will enhance instructor and student experiences. For technical assistance over the winter holidays (12/18/2013—01/01/2014), please refer to the 24 hr. University System of Georgia’s D2L Helpdesk at: http://D2Lhelp.view.usg.edu/ Toll Free For Hearing Impaired 1-800-892-4315 *Appropriate adaptive technology (hardware) is necessary to use this number. Any issue that USG’s 24-hr. D2L Helpdesk cannot resolve will be escalated to UWG Online Helpdesk administrators to resolve upon campus’s reopening on 01/02/2014.

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**UWG ONLINE: Happenings, etc.**

**Join us on Google Hangouts on Air!**

From your desk, log in to the iApollo Community on the first and third Fridays of every month from 11:00 - 11:30 for Google Hangouts on Air.

Join the iApollo Community for the latest updates and event information. You must have a Google+ profile to join the iApollo Community Page.

[http://tinyurl.com/kz5cbx2](http://tinyurl.com/kz5cbx2)

11/15/13 11:00am iApollo: Respondus

12/06/13 10:30—11:30 iApollo: Thinking Ahead

Email Jessica Loiacono jloiacon@westga.edu to join our iApollo mailing list.

*** Streaming Live on Google Hangouts on Air***

Video will be available on YouTube.

11/6/13 10:00—12:00 Using Dropbox/ Assignment Tool

11/8/13 10:00—12:00 Collaborate and Virtual Classroom

Campus-wide training sessions are conducted by the Faculty Development Center.

For more Information, contact David Lloyd at dlloyd@westga.edu
## Online Faculty Kudos

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HI! My name is Jessica Loiacono, and I’m your new Online Learning Innovation Coordinator. I joined the University of West Georgia in August of 2013. My responsibilities include mentoring faculty and staff, promoting best practices in online and hybrid teaching, and facilitating the development of cutting-edge delivery models that promote accessibility, scalability, and student success.

When people ask me “Where are you from?” I usually give them the short answer of Savannah, which doesn’t exactly answer very much. Born in New York, raised in Miami, educated in Statesboro, and interning in Charleston, I call the East Coast home. Where I’ve lived has provided me some of the best learning experiences I could ever ask for.

I currently hold a Master of Education degree in School Psychology from Georgia Southern University and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Georgia Southern University. I am a perpetual student, but life-long learner sounds better.

Academically, a variety of subject matters, from increasing literacy rates in bilingual students to how the War on Drugs impacts minorities, interest me. Since joining UWG, I’ve focused much of my time on learning about student engagement, student retention, adult learning theories, and technology in the classroom. Outside of work my interests include painting, photography, spending time with my family, and watching movies to the point where I can have conversations only in movie quotes. I also play a mean game of Dominos.

The best tech tool so far would have to be Google Drive. It makes sharing documents and leaving feedback between students easier. Groups can share Docs and Presentations back and forth without having to keep up with multiple documents. The Drive itself is a great storage system and can be basically accessed anywhere.
As a little girl, I developed a love of learning; however, growing up in a home where spiritual devotion was priority, pursuing a college education was strongly discouraged. Looking to secure the most profitable skill set that would not require additional years of education landed me in the Practical Nursing Program at my high school. Despite graduating at 16 years old as a Licensed Practical Nurse, I quickly became a statistic when I became a teenage mother just one month after my graduation. While I enjoyed the work I did, I quickly discovered that you get little respect as a nurse unless you are an RN. When I turned 18, I decided to enroll in the RN Bridge Program at my local community college.

My first attempt at obtaining my degree failed. I was discouraged to discover I would not receive any credit for any of the courses I took during my Nursing Program. I had 2 years of prerequisites to complete before I would even start the Bridge Program. I felt defeated but started school anyway. Those 3 semesters of school were the worst. My boyfriend totaled my car during my first semester, leaving me with no transportation for the next 2 years. I found out I was pregnant with my second child during the following semester. I continued in school, but I missed a lot of time due to a very difficult pregnancy. In addition to that, I worked full time and had a terminally ill mother and younger brother at home for whom I was the primary caregiver for. My mother passed away a year after my last semester at the school. I did attempt to return to school after I had my daughter, even bringing her to class with me, but it just became too difficult. I have never been one to ask for help, and being young and ignorant to the college process, I just stopped going to school and told myself it was not meant to be.

Over the next 15 years, I was pressured to get my degree to stay relevant and marketable in the workforce. I dreaded the idea that I would have to start all over again with school; many of my classes were only valid for a set number of years. I tried to avoid this and ended up spending thousands of dollars in a home study program trying to obtain my ASN. All of that felt like more wasted time, once I learned that Georgia would no longer recognize a degree from the school, preventing me from obtaining a license to work in the state. I have tried many things to get around going back to school for my RN. I obtained my Real Estate License, became a Licensed Nursing Home Administrator, started a non-emergency transportation company, a clinical reimbursement education and consulting company, and a subcontracting company in Maryland, just to name a few things. However, it always seems to come back to my degree; people respect the
letters behind your name more than your skills.

Watching my firstborn, who for many years did not share my thirst for knowledge, leave home to pursue his college education lit a spark in me to pursue my dreams. I made the decision to return to school to obtain my BSN no matter how long it would take. UWG had everything I was looking for, including the Distance Learning Program, which offered me the ability to take all of my core classes online. After submitting my application, I eagerly awaited a response. I was heartbroken and devastated when I received a letter notifying me that my admission had been deferred due to my GPA. I learned that I had failed to drop/withdraw from several classes when I left school 16 years ago, and now I had several F’s on my transcript that I was not previously aware of. Determined not to give up, I wrote a letter of appeal, and I was overjoyed when I was granted provisional admission for the Spring 2013 semester.

I started my first semester excited and nervous; I worried about the challenges I would face as a 36-year-old freshman with 3 children. My worst nightmare was being the “old lady” in the class, but to my surprise, several of my professors and classmates were shocked when they learned my true age. The workload was a little overwhelming in the beginning. My peers have always considered me smart, but all of a sudden, I now felt stupid. My vocabulary used to be extensive, but after years of being told to “dumb it down” or “speak in layman’s terms,” I had lost it. I was now sitting in my English class thinking to myself - I need a dictionary just to understand what my professor is saying. I was thankful and grateful to have professors who were knowledgeable and passionate about their subjects. This helped tremendously; they were extremely accommodating and willing to offer any assistance I needed. My son also proved to be a great support for me; I could call him and vent my frustrations of the day. He would understand what I was going through, listen and offer me the guidance and encouragement I needed. The option to take a combination of traditional and online classes allowed me to maintain flexibility in my schedule and eliminated the need to drive to campus every day.

As an introvert, I often struggle with social interaction and feel very awkward at times; the Distance Learning Program allowed me to gradually ease my way back into college life at a comfortable and adjustable pace. Being able to adjust the number of classes I took online each semester to satisfy my comfort level and personal schedule was priceless. I was not forced to walk into an intimidating room full of people I did not know for every class. I could interact with my classmates and professor online at my convenience, and this allowed me to maintain my demanding schedule as a track mom during the busy summer season. My professor was awesome; she really went above and beyond to insure we felt her presence online; she even had an optional first class meeting so we could get a chance to meet her in person. It was required that we become comfortable with using technology to communicate and to seek assistance from our peers. Initially, I was overwhelmed with the numerous apps and sites we needed to use, but by the end of the class, I must admit I felt empowered to use those new tools to my benefit. We were even able to complete group assignments without being required to meet in person; I was surprised. The
online classes gently pushed me out of my comfort zone, and I could sense a change in my mindset developing.

An unexpected growth in my personal development and a greater sense of self-awareness emerged during the first semester. I have always had a love of number crunching and a passion for entrepreneurship. I now understood that nursing was the path I chose when I felt my options were limited. Although I had given 20 years of my life to the profession, my heart was no longer in it. I made the decision to change my major to something that would allow me to use my skills in a career I could be passionate about, accounting and finance. Even as a nurse, I specialized in billing and reimbursement. My ultimate goal is to become a CPA, and with several of the business classes available online for short 21-day sessions during the summer, I know it is a goal I will achieve. So many aspiring business owners fail to fully understand the financial aspects of business, which makes securing loans and investments extremely difficult. I want to help bridge that gap and be of service to those individuals in pursuit of the American Dream.

Regardless of who you are, we all will face obstacles and experience setbacks in our pursuit of happiness. The key to being successful is to keep pushing forward towards your goal. I call myself “the comeback kid” because I refuse to stay down no matter how many times I may fall. I hope my story inspires and encourages others out there who may think it is too hard or too late to pursue your degree. Just take the first step. The Distance Learning Program at UWG offers flexibility and options to help the non-traditional student entering college. Despite my challenging start and concerns with my GPA, I achieved the Dean’s List my first 2 semesters and full-fledged sophomore status. In 2016 I plan to graduate together with my son, and in 2014 my daughter will start her college journey as well. What a joy it is to travel this path together with two of my children!
The UWG/Online Faculty Development Center is hosting a TOWN HALL to promote the rollout of version 10.2 of Desire2Learn/CourseDen in January

Join us at any of the three sessions to learn more about

- The FDC staff
- The 10.2 D2L rollout and future online training
- Quality Matters, and how you can leverage these national standards for online instruction
- Google Apps, and all the tools available to you as a UWG instructor, online or not

When: November 15, November 22, and December 6, 12:00—1:00
(all sessions are identical)

Where: TLC 1303

If you have any questions that you’d like to see addressed on any of these topics, you may email those to Dale Lyles, Ed.S.
Director/Online Faculty Development
dlyles@westga.edu or 678 839-8237
Questions & Submissions

For questions, suggestions, or items to include in the next newsletter such as:

*Upcoming Events, Workshops, & Training
*Publications & Other Achievements
*Online Teaching/Learning News & Insights

Please contact Toni Drake:

tdrake@westga.edu

We look forward to learning about and sharing your experiences and achievements.
Thank you for your contributions!

UWG ONLINE CHALLENGE

The first three people to email the correct answers to the following questions will win something cool!
1. What is a great tool that allows a person to get rid of the paper clutter?
2. How many things did Natasha try to get around the idea of obtaining her degree?
3. Where can you go on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of every month to learn without even leaving your desk?
4. What academic subject matters interest Jessica?

Please email your responses to tdrake@westga.edu. List your full name, contact information and department. All questions must be answered correctly. Items awarded are for faculty use and will be transferred to department inventory. Thank you!