

MAKING YOUR OWN PATH

By Kelyisha Hayden

In college, different types of people come and go, many seeking skills to help them find a future career or fulfill their passions. But there's that small percent; the few already chasing their dreams by running their own small businesses. These students make their own path.

Aaron Copley, a senior and communication major, has been building his own way with LEGOs for years. Copley shares his passion for LEGO-building on his YouTube channel, aptly named "Brickspiration." He said that he aspires to give inspiration to people because he was inspired by his family to share his creations with the world.

"Eventually, someone suggested I should upload [videos] to Youtube," said Copley. "I was like, 'I'm going to give this a try,' and I started... uploading LEGO builds and reviews. Then, it snowballed from there."

Since 2018, the Brickspiration channel has generated interest among the online LEGO community. It surpassed 53,000 subscribers in April 2025 and features over 80 videos of Copley constructing and reviewing LEGO sets of popular shows and characters. Each video takes about eight to ten hours to create, including planning out content, scripting and editing. Copley uploads one to two videos per



Aaron Copley advertised his Youtube channel, "Brickspiration," and displayed some of his LEGO builds at a recent convention. (photo furnished by Aaron Copley)

month and most are between six and thirteen minutes long.

Copley attends LEGO conventions and events to showcase his builds and promote his channel. He described getting to meet his fans as a highlight and shared a recent experience that meant a lot to him.

"It was exciting because a thousand people showed up," said Copley, "and kids who are subscribed to my channel saw me in person. So, they were able to put a face to the person they watch on TV and it was a lot more fulfilling."

Copley said that in an "ideal universe," he would make his channel his full-time job even though internet fame and money may not be forever or consistent. He encouraged others to explore their creativity to make something they can call their own as well.

"You don't have to sacrifice your individuality by going to a 9-to-5 job," said Copley, and added, "If you put enough time and work into something, you can make your own business, and that's really what content creation is all about."

For some, joining the community of influencers and creatives while putting a piece of positivity out there intrigues them. They can seek partnership or sponsorship opportunities that offer several new sources of income. YouTube's Partnership Program (YPP) gives creators greater access to Youtube resources and monetization features, along with access to Youtube's creative support team.

The platform's requirements for monetization are first, that channels are up and running with consistent posts and next, that it has at least 1,000 subscribers with 4,000 public watch hours in the last year or 10 million public "shorts" views in the last 90 days. Shorts are 10 to 60 second videos that are restricted to vertical formatting. By setting uploading schedules, creators can stay active and make more money, even with as little as two videos or five shorts per month.

Lia Barnes, a junior majoring in digital and visual storytelling, has chosen to express her creativity in a different way. She founded "Jewe-Li," a line of hand-crafted jewelry of her own design.

Barnes began practicing her craft at the age of 7 and continued for several years. After attending a few jewelry-making classes, her skill evolved over time. While in school, she has used the positive community around her to promote her craft and create flyers to boost her name. Barnes said that the appreciative look on someone's face when they get something uniquely theirs is her reward.

"I recently made a beaded waist chain for a friend," she



Lia Barnes sells hand-crafted jewelry through her small business, Jewe-Li. (photo furnished by Lia Barnes)

said, "and the look on her face was one of the most beautiful things I've seen in a long time."

To many small business owners and artists, receiving appreciation from others for things they've devoted themselves to is a milestone they aspire to reach. To go out on a limb and make a successful career out of something new is what many people only dream of. Barnes stated she is still learning to properly brand herself. While she desires to be unique and professional, she stated she also wants an approachable and personable brand.

"I am not the business," she said. "I have a business."

Barnes prefers her jewelry business to stay relatively small so she can continue her work on film projects and experiments. Though Jewe-Li is not her ultimate career goal, she said she'd like it to be more broadly known so she can give people more joy and show others what she can do for them. She offered advice to anyone interested in creating their own business too.

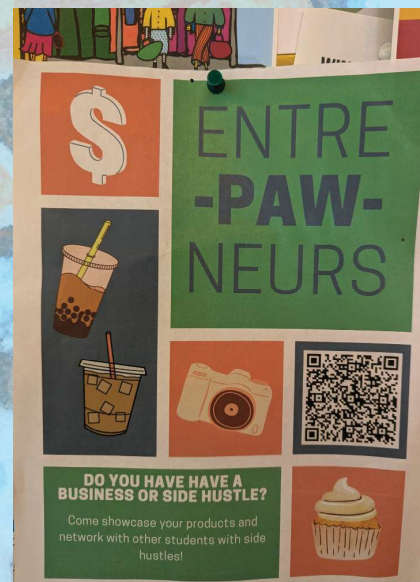
"Don't let people talk you out of what you've said you want to do and stay confident," she said. "You can do it."

For many college students, their primary worries are studying for exams and keeping up good grades. But if a student can also manage to turn something they are passionate about into something else that motivates and brings happiness to others, they should go for it.

One of the greatest things a person can do for themselves is survive in a challenging environment even when others have looked down on their goals.

To believe in yourself is to love yourself.

Film director Tim Burton said it best: "Visions are worth fighting for. Why spend your life making someone else's dream?"



The first AU Student Entrepreneur Expo was advertised on student bulletin boards and held on March 18, 2025 on the JSAC patio. (photo by CM Wahl)

Connecting Through Culture

By Tyliyah Mosley

Cultural immersion can be a beautiful way for humans to connect. Purposely seeking out experiences and interactions with other cultures can produce authentic engagement, deepen understanding and appreciation of others, and increase overall cultural awareness.

The Oxford English dictionary defines the word “immerse” as “to involve oneself deeply in a particular activity or interest.” There are many conscious and unconscious ways Americans are culturally influenced, but not everyone attempts true immersion or fully embraces other cultures. This can lead to bias, misconceptions or discrimination.

In the South, there are people who place greater intention and emphasis on defining our relationship to a certain culture rather than connecting to its influence through its vibrancy, honesty and boldness. The Hispanic and Latino culture in particular has often been undervalued, even though the prevalence of its cultural influence is all around us.

Famed ethicist Mahatma Gandhi said, “A nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people.”

Cultural immersion is more than knowing the best Mexican spot in town, vacationing in

the Dominican Republic or clubbing with Latino friends. There are other impactful ways to celebrate and integrate with Hispanic and Latino culture. By encouraging immersion and embracing the challenges surrounding it, people can better empathize and connect with migrant communities, bilingual speakers and other cultural groups.

For Moniqua Acosta, lecturer at Augusta University, some significant immersive experiences exist beyond just learning the language. Though not having any known Hispanic origins herself, she teaches Spanish and often shares its importance with others.



Moniqua Acosta is a lecturer at Augusta University. (photo source: AU Faculty Profile, used with permission)

“I just always tell people it’s really a survival skill,” she said. “It’s not a party trick.”

Growing up in what she called a “closed kind of community,” Acosta said she didn’t “cognitively understand” that Spanish was a language spoken by people all over the world. She experienced her own cultural immersion at 21, when she sold everything she had and bought a one-way ticket to France.

“I didn’t even have a cell phone,” said Acosta. “The internet was so new at that time that... you could go to like, an internet café and you could email people, but most people didn’t have an email address at that time.”

Acosta said it took her three months to learn French. She recalled the times when she offended people due to her lack of awareness of their culture.

“I couldn’t understand the cultural humor,” she said. “So, I would try in my little broken French to be funny and it wouldn’t land. I remember thinking, ‘this is really hurting my ego.’”

Acosta said that experience gave her compassion and empathy for migrant communities, because she understands how difficult it is to be in a foreign country or culture. She considers the travel opportunity she got as a young adult to be a “luxury” and feels it

was a privilege to have been able to do it.

Acosta's husband and family are Ecuadorian and together they own Relic Coffee, the proudly Ecuadorian cafe and bakery located on Monte Sano Avenue. At the shop, Acosta said she often finds herself receiving praise for speaking Spanish as a non-Hispanic.



Relic coffee shop is located on Monte Sano Avenue in Augusta. (photo by CM Wahl)

"Nothing is impressive about this thing that I'm doing," she said. "What's impressive is what [my husband's family has] done... I just find that little juxtaposition really interesting, the way that we culturally elevate certain people."

However someone chooses to immerse themselves in another culture, retaining the value gained from those experiences can be life-changing. Developing a willingness to understand the experience of a large community can help you adapt to it. Cultural immersion is a selfless act that becomes rewarding when you discover new parts of yourself in the process.

Nicole Idana is a student at Georgia State University who comes from migrant parents. Currently serving in the Army, Nicole's father is originally from Honduras. Her mother, from El Salvador, came to the United States by herself at just 14.

"Yeah, it's kind of crazy," said Idana of her mom's experience. "It's just really scary and weird to think about. Like, it's my own mom."

Idana remembered helping her mother study for her citizenship test when she was barely in middle school.

"[My mom] did great," she said. "We took her to go take her test. She passed and then she had her ceremony with the judge."

Idana described her experience as a second generation Honduran-Salvadorian as "nostalgic, bittersweet and liberating." She has become active on her school's campus to protest the current political climate.

"I feel like now with everything that's going on," she said, "I

have a bigger appreciation for holding onto my culture. But honestly, I was just very grateful that my mom was able to have the opportunity to get that citizenship."

There's no shame in wanting to immerse yourself into another culture or community, no matter how messy or uninformed you may feel in the process. Wanting to connect to another's experience and culture is a beautiful, valuable part of being human.

It isn't as intimidating as you would think to go outside of your familiar cultural lines. The Hispanic and Latino community deserves support and by learning Spanish, inquiring about their culture, expanding your curiosity and listening to their stories, you can become more supportive and compassionate, while also enhancing your human experience.

Resistance occurs when we break boundaries and fearlessly and even more so, joyously, step outside the lines.



Nicole Idana (right) and friend Audrey Ruiz-Escutia (left) protested at Georgia State University. (photo provided by Nicole Idana)

BEHIND THE BLUE

By Leanne Dudash

Many students see campus police as strict security guards, tasked with enforcing rules. Campus police do more than just enforce policies. They are trained officials who play an important role in shaping Augusta University's community, culture and well-being.

Officer Conrad Kooring has been with the AU Police Department for six years and has found joy in his job duties. He said having the ability to help others in a time of need is something he truly enjoys.

"What I appreciate most is being part of this community," said Kooring. "While the campus may seem small, it brings together individuals from a wide range of backgrounds. I find it incredibly rewarding to hear the diverse life experiences of the people here."



Officer Conrad Kooring has served on the AUPD for six years. (photo by Leanne Dudash)



Augusta University Police Department vehicles are parked at their 15th Street headquarters. (photo by Leanne Dudash)

Inspired by his grandfather, who served with the Utah State Patrol, Kooring chose a career in law enforcement during a challenging time in his life. To him, the most difficult part of his job is the possibility that some of his decisions may negatively impact someone's life.

"There are times when individuals may not fully grasp the long-term consequences of their actions," said Kooring. "It's particularly hard when young people face serious repercussions, such as incarceration, which could shape their future in ways they don't fully understand."

While campus police share some similarities with local law enforcement, their jurisdiction, duties and focuses differ. They are responsible for maintaining safety within the borders of AU and often take on mentorship

roles, participate in student events, such as orientation and community outreach programs, and help students create a positive campus environment.

Kooring said he understands that college can be stressful and overwhelming, but that it's good when students feel these emotions because it's a sign that they care about their education and their future.

"Don't let temporary setbacks discourage you from reaching your goals," he said. "And always remember that we're here if you ever need someone to talk to or a helping hand."

Although some students think of campus police as stern officers with a badge and a ticket book, ready to write them up for a forgotten parking permit or a late-night noise complaint, AUPD are also here to help out in difficult situations, such as when students have safety concerns, mental health crises or need personal guidance. These officers are passionate about

serving and protecting the student community.

Officer Britton Erb-Scarborough has been on the force for a little over a year and shares this same passion. He said he became a police officer because he likes helping people and keeping things safe, citing his own name as inspiration.

"My middle name is Edward," he stated, "which in Biblical terms means, 'Protector.' I've lived by that philosophy and love translating it to my job now."

Erb-Scarborough said he most enjoys the team he works with, the people he's met along the way and the variation of his tasks. He described no day as being the same, which keeps things interesting for him. Still, when a job's primary responsibility is to be a first responder to those in need, it is inevitable to also have challenging moments.

"Hurricane Helene hit Augusta like a ton of bricks," he said, adding, "Just watching the wind tear everything to shreds was memorable but also scary. There were transformers exploding in the rain and trees falling and all you could do was sit there helplessly as the world got turned upside down."

Erb-Scarborough stressed the importance of students and staff walking safely on campus. He stated crosswalks should always be used and urged commuters not to run across busy streets in a hurry. He recommended students practice time management to avoid those situations.

"You can't graduate if you're not here with us," he said.

According to the AUPD website, they strive to represent



Officer Britton Erb-Scarborough has served on the AUPD for almost a year. (photo by Leanne Dudash)

integrity, professionalism, respect and excellence. Their vision is to become "a nationally recognized leader" in innovative and community-based higher education law enforcement. Their roles include responding to emergencies, handling thefts or assaults and providing help during medical crises, as well as conducting regular patrols and overseeing security measures.

The department offers multiple ways for students to stay safe on campus, including police-approved walking paths, escorts for students and staff when walking alone or late at night, emergency phone terminals, self-defense classes and the "Rave Guardian" app, which is free for students.

Campus police are here for every student at Augusta University. They want to help make our lives easier and safer. One student, Lia Carter, learned this in her first interaction with campus police during her freshman year when she moved into campus housing.

"I remember the Jag officers being there in the check-in area," she said. "They were reassuring parents and students of their safety. They... were showing students how to download the Guardian app to contact them or make a report. I felt better knowing I had this option if I needed it."

Campus police play an essential, though often misunderstood, role in maintaining safety and fostering a positive campus environment here at AU. While a lot of students may encounter them in everyday situations such as parking tickets or safety escorts, these officers are trained professionals committed to creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for all students.

"It's moments like these," noted Koorring, "when you can make a real difference in someone's life, that remind me why I chose this profession. The ability to help others during their time of need is what makes this job so fulfilling."



AUPD posts safety reminders across both campuses and offers several safety resources to the AU community. (photo by Leanne Dudash)

Crossing the Finish

By CM Wahl

“Finishing is better than starting,” wrote King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:8 (NLT). “Patience is better than pride.”

Many people start things they never finish. Some have a good excuse why. I did.

Some blame time getting away from them and that it’s “too hard” to pick it back up or start again. Others say circumstances beyond their control prevented or delayed them, and now the moment has passed. Then there are those who want to believe they can achieve their goals but they’re convinced by the “well-meaning” that it’s impossible. To all of those people, I say, you can finish.

In Philippians 3:14, Paul described “pressing on” to reach the end of the race and in Hebrews 12:1, the author said we must “strip off every weight that slows us down” and “run with endurance the race God has set before us.”

These verses make it clear that discouragement, insecurity and worry are nothing new. There will always be an obstacle but it is up to us to work around it. Even if you’ve tried before and failed, you can try again and succeed.

Senior Cody Robertson experienced this firsthand. An All-American wrestler in high school, Robertson started at Purdue University in 2011 on a



Cody Robertson will graduate with a bachelor’s in Communication and currently co-hosts the “Gamer Guild” video game podcast. (photo by CM Wahl)

scholarship. He dropped out a year later.

“I completely washed out,” he said, “because I was an 18-year-old kid that was not ready to go to school, just at all. Wasn’t mature enough, you know? Just couldn’t hack it [and] wasn’t ready to be out of the house.”

Robertson spent the next few years making minimum wage at different jobs until he joined the Marines to “get the discipline” he desired. He worked as a helicopter mechanic for six years, but when he later returned to school to pursue aeronautical engineering, he realized he didn’t have a passion for the work.

Robertson became interested in podcasting during Covid and now hosts the “Gamer Guild” video game

podcast for AU. He works in the Television and Cinema Lab in University Hall editing, producing and doing what he loves.

“Know your industry before you know your school,” he said. “Know what work you want to do. Don’t just know the school you want to do.”

Senior Michael Fortino learned a similar lesson. He started at AU 14 years

ago but left school multiple times to pursue his personal interests. A jack-of-all-trades, Fortino works on the live broadcast team at AU, directs an improv group at Le Chat Noir theatre, serves and manages the social media for a local restaurant and auditions for acting roles whenever he can.

“I really want[ed] to start pursuing acting,” he said, “because I’d been acting my whole life and I had done some professional work, but I really wanted to give



Michael Fortino will graduate with a bachelor’s in communication and works on the broadcast team and as a director, actor and server in the local community. (photo by CM Wahl)



it a real college try.”

While Fortino did the Disney college program and other internships, his father continually encouraged him to return to school. Fortino was not sure he wanted to go back, but after his father passed away, he decided it was time.

“I promised him I would come back and finish,” said Fortino, “and so I’ve been very determined to get this degree. Not just for him, but for myself.”

Fortino is thankful for AU faculty like Pamela Hayward, PhD., and David Bulla, PhD., who supported his return to school with enthusiasm. He stated he is ready to move beyond AU to pursue his next chapter and he’s glad he was able to finish in his own time.

“Take it slow,” he said. “You don’t have to get it over with right away... You don’t need to overload yourself with it. Make it, like, a bearable thing.”

Junior Carrington Johnson understands the benefit of taking things slow. In 2015, she started at Georgia State University as a biology pre-med major. When life became too stressful, Johnson had to make the tough decision to step away from college.

After starting a family, Johnson began attending AU, though she was unsure which career path she would take.

“Ever since I was a little kid,” she said, “I always wanted to be a doctor. Anybody [who] asked me, I wanted to be a doctor. And so, that was the plan I was going to stick with.”

Now caring for her young son Connor, the path to becoming a doctor became daunting. Then she had an “eye-opening” conver-



Carrington Johnson cares for her son Connor while attending AU full-time and will pursue a career in health communication after graduating in May 2026. (photo by CM Wahl)

sation with her public speaking professor that provided her great relief. Johnson switched her major and now intends to enter the field of health communication.

No longer worried about not being able to care for her children while doing a residency, Johnson utilizes the “great support system” of her husband to attend school full-time. In addition to her bachelor’s, she is working on obtaining certificates in both public relations and media production. While she describes her life as hectic, she also finds it “very rewarding.”

“Don’t worry about how old you are,” said Johnson, “or like, how busy life seems. Because if you put in the effort, you can make time. And it seems impossible. For me, it seems impossible sometimes. But it’s possible and it’s worth it.”

And I am living proof. This is my second run at college and my first run was barely a walk. I endured fake friends, poor choices, homelessness, trauma, addiction, hateful rumors, and severe anxiety and depression. I left that place with a disdain I didn’t think would ever go away.

But God made it possible for me to have a “do-over.” Even after serving in the Army, pursuing a career and starting a family, I did what I considered to be the impossible. And I finished!

You can too. Find what inspires you and just start somewhere. Even if you don’t think you can or it seems like an impossible feat. Remember, anyone can start, but not everyone finishes.

For me, Jesus Christ is the greatest example of what it means to stay focused and undeterred despite the challenges ahead. Hebrews 12 says that no matter what happened to Him or around Him, Jesus kept his eyes focused “on the joy set before Him.” He didn’t give up, and neither should we.

Whatever you want to finish, don’t let anyone discourage you. You can achieve whatever you set your mind to.

As musician Frank Zappa said, “Progress is progress; even if it’s one inch at a time.”



CM Wahl, seen here with son Hudson, will graduate with a bachelor’s in communication and a certificate in media production. She plans to become a professional copy editor, director and TV writer. (photo by Angel Zapata)

WINGSPAN



OUTSIDE THE LINES



“TWIN VISION”

by Lydia Williams

Featuring Megan Fogarty and
Madison Fogarty

“HEART OF GOLD”

by Lydia Williams

Featuring Emily Davis





“DINNER TIME”

by Isabel Brown



“JINXED”
by Kelyisha Hayden



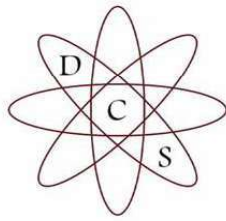
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“GRAFFITI”
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