

GENERATION STEM

Newsletter

COMMENCEMENT

2021

Special Issue



SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY

Georgia



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SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Georgia

About SDSU Georgia

San Diego State University Georgia, through funding from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and Millennium Challenge Account Georgia (MCA Georgia), offers students an exciting educational opportunity to study in Tbilisi, Georgia. Here, in the heart of the Caucasus, students are able to earn a professionally accredited, internationally recognized U.S. bachelor's degree. San Diego State University (SDSU), along with three top Georgian Universities, Georgian Technical University (GTU), Ilia State University (ISU), and Tbilisi State University (TSU), offers courses leading to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) internationally accredited bachelor's degrees. Programs offered by the university support the development of engineering, science, and technology fields, as well as Georgia's human capital capacity for economic growth.

In five cohorts, SDSU Georgia offered six Bachelor's degree programs:

- Chemistry/Biochemistry
- Civil Engineering
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Science
- Construction Engineering
- Electrical Engineering

American degree programs include a well-rounded liberal arts education and feature accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, the Accreditations Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), and the American Chemical Society (ACS). SDSU Georgia graduates will leave with a broad base of knowledge and the critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in a STEM career locally, regionally, or internationally.

Members of the SDSU Georgia community form a unique and special cohort of individuals who will earn regionally and nationally accredited and internationally recognized high-quality STEM bachelor's degrees. Additionally, SDSU Georgia students will be exposed to the same academic benefits available to their peers at SDSU's main campus in California, including state-of-the-art technology and laboratories. The San Diego State University Aztecs alumni family includes over 400,000 national and international leaders. At SDSU Georgia, we empower our students to achieve academic, professional, and personal goals.

The Newsletter of San Diego State University Georgia is published by the Student Services department and distributed to SDSU Georgia stakeholders, faculty, students, and friends.

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Adela de la Torre
President

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY GEORGIA

Halil Güven
Dean

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ADELA DE LA TORRE, PH.D.

President's Message

On behalf of our entire SDSU family, I offer my warmest and heartfelt congratulations to our outstanding SDSU Georgia graduates from the classes of 2020 and 2021!

It will be my honor to join you in person on June 8 for my third trip to Tbilisi as SDSU president, and my second in-person Commencement.



We are so proud of what you have accomplished as our second and third cohorts of graduates. You are now part of an alumni community which is 110 individuals stronger, and joined by our very first civil and construction engineering graduates here in Georgia.

This past year you and your families endured and survived the sudden upheaval created by a global pandemic, social unrest, and economic uncertainty. These graduating classes will be remembered for your incredible resilience. For remaining focused and achieving your dreams.

Your hopeful optimism seeded your persistence, which fueled your academic success.

SDSU Georgia and SDSU Global Campus are each part of our University's future. They are essential to our vision to be a global leader in providing innovative education programs that transform lives all over the world.

In fact, SDSU Georgia is a prominent and important part of our new five-year strategic plan. We are committed to extending opportunities for Georgian students and scholars for years to come. Together, we have accomplished and will continue a new path forward to create access and opportunity for Georgian students to pursue their professional dreams.

Bringing SDSU's U.S. degree programs to Georgia targets a critical shortage of STEM professionals educated to current international standards. Our efforts are building capacity at Tbilisi State University, which has adopted the standards of education SDSU has brought to Georgia and achieved ABET accreditation for its STEM programs. Ilia State University and Georgian Technical University are also on the ABET track.

Graduates, you now stand ready for your next step, to join the workforce of Georgia, and to make the many contributions for which your SDSU education has prepared you, and to help others reach their potential!

I hope you will always consider San Diego State University as your home. You are each a permanent part of this family, and now our alumni family as well. I urge you to stay connected to the university and to one another, no matter where your passion and careers may take you.

The best is yet to come, and I look forward to staying in touch as you become leaders in your professional fields.

With warmest regards,

Adela de la Torre, Ph.D.

President



SDSU President Adela de la Torre speaking at the main campus commencement ceremony on May 24, 2021



Dean's Message

In 2019, SDSU Georgia held its inaugural Commencement Ceremony, celebrating the first graduates of the unique partnership program in Georgia. This year, we will have 109 more graduates, which will include the first Civil and Construction Engineering program alumni in Georgia. Last year, due to the COVID-19 world pandemic, we were unable to honor the Class of 2020 with a well-deserved live celebration. So, on June 8, they will join the Class of 2021 for the Commencement Ceremony where the Academic delegation from SDSU, headed by SDSU President, Adela de la Torre and the members of the Georgian Government will congratulate them on their great achievement.

We were confronted with some difficult times over the past year. However, it has also been a great challenge that has inspired us to find innovative solutions for teaching, learning, collaboration, and celebration. Our outstanding graduates have stood strong in the face of the challenge and have managed to complete their education successfully. SDSU Georgia strives to ensure that, like

their predecessors, the students who graduate this year will continue their successful career, and enter the graduate studies, or the workforce, utilizing their professional qualifications. At the end of this academic year, SDSU Georgia will have more than 250 outstanding alumni on their path to a successful career, who will honor the investment made in their future by the public and private partners of SDSU Georgia.

SDSU Georgia is also continuing capacity building and sustainability activities and is looking forward to new projects in collaboration with SDSU, Government of Georgia, and our Georgian partner universities. We look forward to the opportunities and challenges in the future.

Dear students:

On behalf of the SDSU Georgia team, I want to congratulate you all! The graduation day is something you never forget so you should all remember how you continued learning, despite all the hardships over the past year. This makes your accomplishments that much more memorable and valuable. We are proud and confident that because of our collective efforts for all these years, you are ready to move forward and greatly contribute to a very bright future for yourselves and the country of Georgia because Leadership Starts Here at SDSU!



SAN DIEGO STATE
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Georgia



The SDSU Georgia staff's annual Christmas card was virtual this year

SDSU Georgia Hybrid Commencement Ceremony Takes Place on June 8

SDSU Georgia is holding a unique hybrid commencement ceremony on June 8, 2021.

SDSU Georgia held its first commencement ceremony in 2019, graduating the first cohort of 55 students. This year there will be 109 graduates, including the first Civil and Construction Engineering program graduates in Georgia! These graduates will enter the workforce and address a critical need within the Georgian economy.

Due to the pandemic situation disrupting commencement activities in 2020, this event celebrates the graduates of both the Class of 2020 and the Class of 2021. This means there are approximately 175 graduates attending the commencement celebration.

The event was planned with several contingencies in place to respond to swiftly changing regulations. Depending on the pandemic situation at the time, the event occurs in one of two forms:

■ Face-to-face with adherence to all social distancing requirements. This event is attended only by graduates and invited guests, with the event streamed for family members to watch.

■ In a hybrid format, with the delegation of attendees from SDSU, partner universities, and the government participating from different locations throughout Tbilisi.

The 2021 Commencement Ceremony is being held at the Palace of State Ceremonies. This is an open air venue, allowing the event to adhere to the Government of Georgia's COVID-19 regulations. The ceremony is being streamed live for viewing on Youtube, social media, and the SDSU Georgia website.

The event is being attended by a delegation from San Diego State University. This academic delegation is led by SDSU President Dr. Adela De La Torre and attended by SDSU Associate Vice President for International Affairs Dr. Cristina Alfaro, SDSU Vice Provost Dr. William Tong, SDSU College of Sciences Dean Dr. Jeffrey T. Roberts, SDSU College of Engineering Interim Dean Dr. Eugene Olevsky, SDSU Electrical and Computer Engineering Chair Dr. Chungting Mi, and SDSU Georgia Associate Dean Dr. Asfaw Beyene.

Additionally, there are invited guests from the Government of Georgia, the U.S. Embassy, The Millennium Foundation, partner university rectors and deans, Advisory Board members, Public-Private Partnership Fund donors, and other partners of SDSU Georgia. The opening remarks are being given by several of these distinguished guests to celebrate the achievements of our graduates.



The SDSU Georgia 2021 Commencement Ceremony is being held at the Palace of State Ceremonies

Learning Online

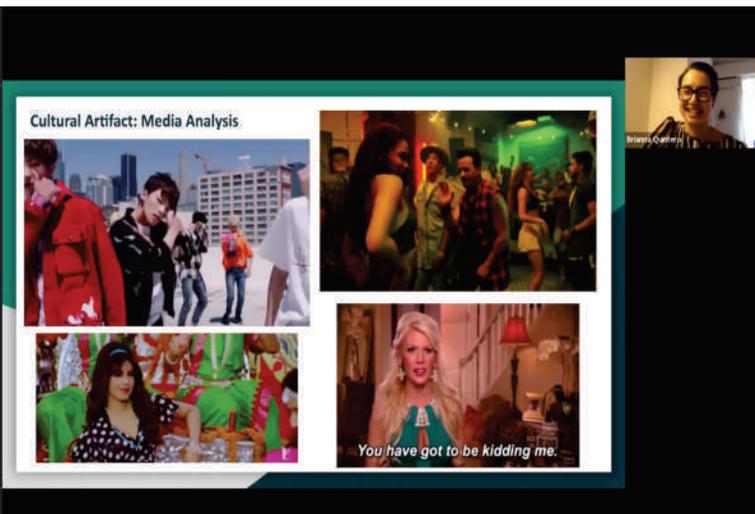
SDSU Georgia suspended in-person learning on March 2, 2020, in response to the covid-19 pandemic situation in Georgia. This sudden shift to virtual learning required flexibility and patience from SDSU Georgia staff, faculty, and students.

Virtual courses were offered using a combination of online tools. Classes have been conducted using the Zoom video conferencing platform. Students have access to their online materials and are able to submit their homework assignments using the Canvas learning management system, which was introduced in 2020 as a replacement to the previous software.

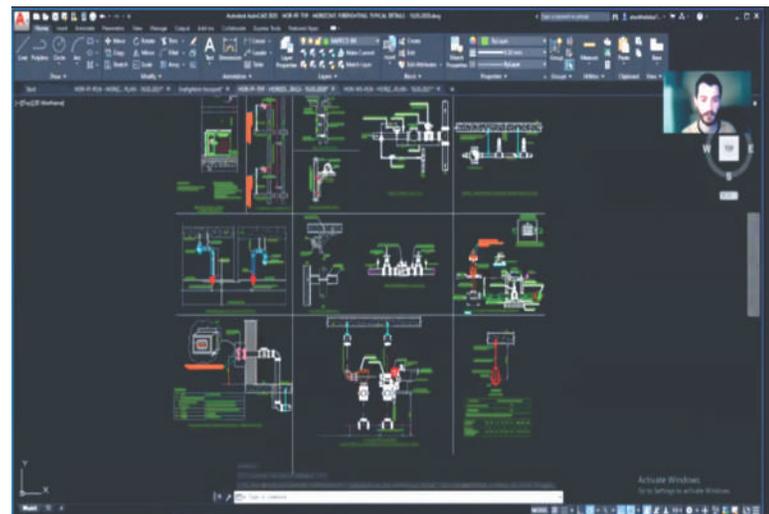
The switch to virtual education required our faculty to think outside the box when it came to making their lessons work in an online environment. Different courses, both major-specific and general education, required different approaches in order to ensure the successful delivery of materials.

basically have a tablet and pen and whatever you write on your tablet is transferred to your screen for the students to see live. It was great for formulas and maths-related subjects!"

Brianna Quintero, a General Education faculty member said, "My goal this year was to create interactive online courses that encouraged students to engage with the class material. To do this, I included music, games, live quizzes and activities. To create a sense of community and encourage students to get to know one another, students were put into groups and worked together to create collaborative research papers and video presentations. The results were positive - attendance and participation was high and students were able to demonstrate their knowledge with the class while having fun."



Professor Brianna Quintero leading an engaging lecture for her COMM course



Avtandil Takvelidze presenting a water engineering system produced in AutoCAD

SDSU Georgia faculty Dr. Michael Saunders discussed his experience switching to virtual education, "Online teaching is a learning process not just for the students, but also for us teachers. Although it is amazing how many tools have popped up to imitate traditional teaching methods, such as the 'XP-Pen' provided to several of us instructors, which imitates writing on a blackboard/whiteboard while giving a class - you

Guga Esitashvili, a senior student in Quintero's COMM 371 Intercultural Communication course, appreciated the methods of virtual delivery, stating that, "Group presentations were a good way of bringing people close and doing something together. The whole semester we were learning new ways to communicate with anyone from different cultures and different values. It was definitely a good way to bring all the information we learned throughout the semester together."

Face-to-Face Labs Resumed in March

Fortunately, following changing regulations and an improving pandemic situation, certain labs were permitted to resume their face-to-face classes in March 2021. Hands-on laboratory courses are an essential component of STEM education.

In order to become effective participants in Georgia's STEM economy, students need practical experience in their chosen discipline. This practical experience on state-of-the-art tools makes them such valuable potential employees. While virtual labs took place during the worst of the pandemic, once restrictions were lifted it was important that students were able to return to face-to-face instruction.

15 courses were able to resume their face-to-face lab component. Five Chemistry labs, five Civil Engineering labs, three Electrical Engineering labs, one Computer Engineering lab, and one Construction Engineering lab resumed in March 2021.

All in-person labs have been conducted with strict adherence to all Covid-19 guidelines. Each course

contained 6-8 students, depending on the space, in order to comply with social distancing regulations and minimize the risk of infection. Students and faculty were required to go through mandatory temperature checks before entering university buildings and were required to wear personal protective materials at all times.

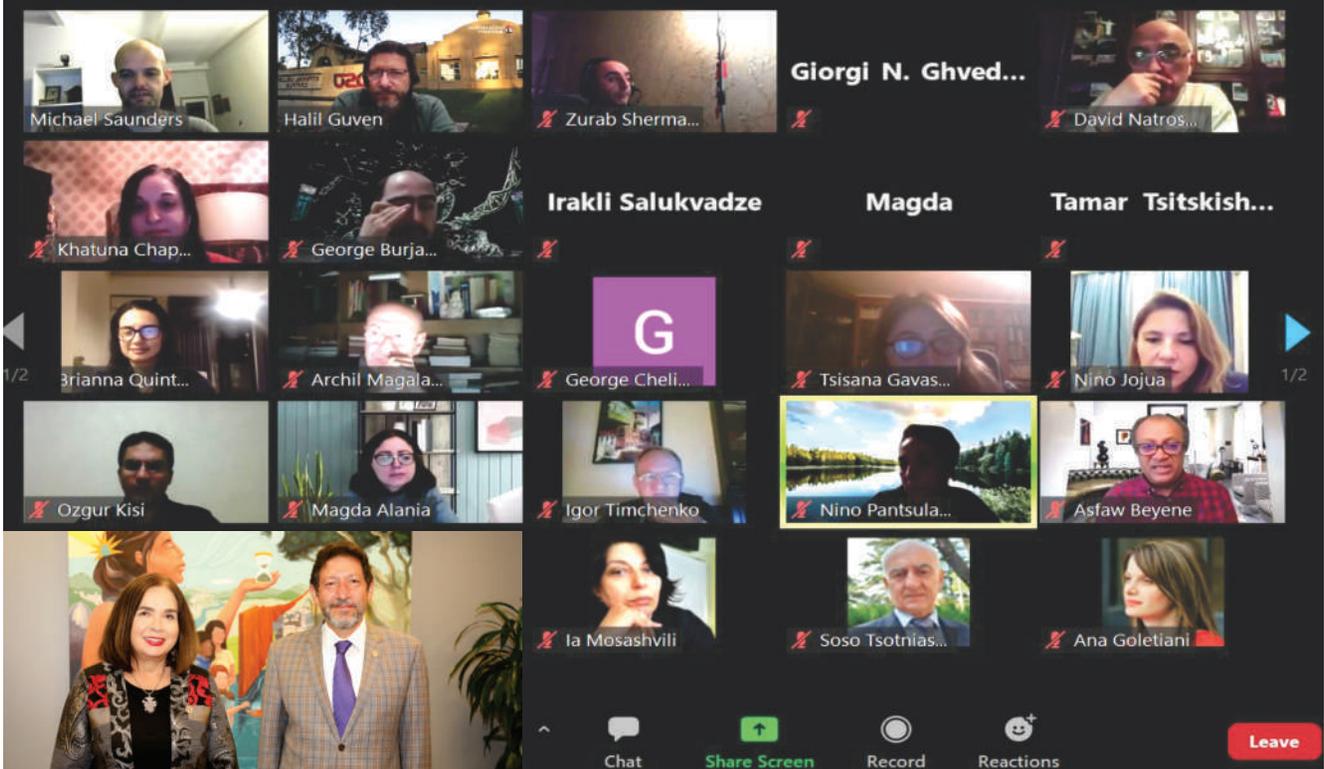


SDSU Georgia Strengthens Connections with Partner Universities and Advisory Board Members



Tbilisi State University Rector Dr. George Sharvashidze and Millennium Foundation CEO Ms. Magda Magradze

Georgian Technical University Rector, Dr. David Gugenidze, at a GTU laboratory



Dr. Adela de la Torre and Dr. Guven at SDSU in April 2021

A SDSU Georgia faculty meeting

Advisory Board Meeting 2021

The Spring 2021 Advisory Board Meeting will take place on June 7th. These meetings, which bring together SDSU leadership and private industry partners, are designed to ensure that the SDSU Georgia program is on track to produce skilled STEM professionals that will grow Georgia's STEM economy and meet the real needs of the nation's leading industrial organizations.

The upcoming meeting will be attended by a delegation from SDSU's main campus in San Diego, led by university president Adela de la Torre. It will include academic deans, as well as our partner university rectors and private industry partners.

The following Advisory Board meeting is scheduled to take place in San Diego this December.

Transitioning SDSU Programs & Facilities to Partner Universities

The goal of the SDSU Georgia program is not simply to contribute highly trained professionals to Georgia's STEM economy. It is also to build capacity among educators and to provide new facilities and physical infrastructure for STEM education. In this regard, SDSU Georgia has begun handing over the facilities built or renovated during the project to the partner universities (PU).

In 2019, SDSU Georgia transferred ownership of several facilities including smart classrooms to Georgian Technical University. In January of 2021, an asset transfer letter was signed with Ilia State University, giving them control over the newly constructed STEM building.

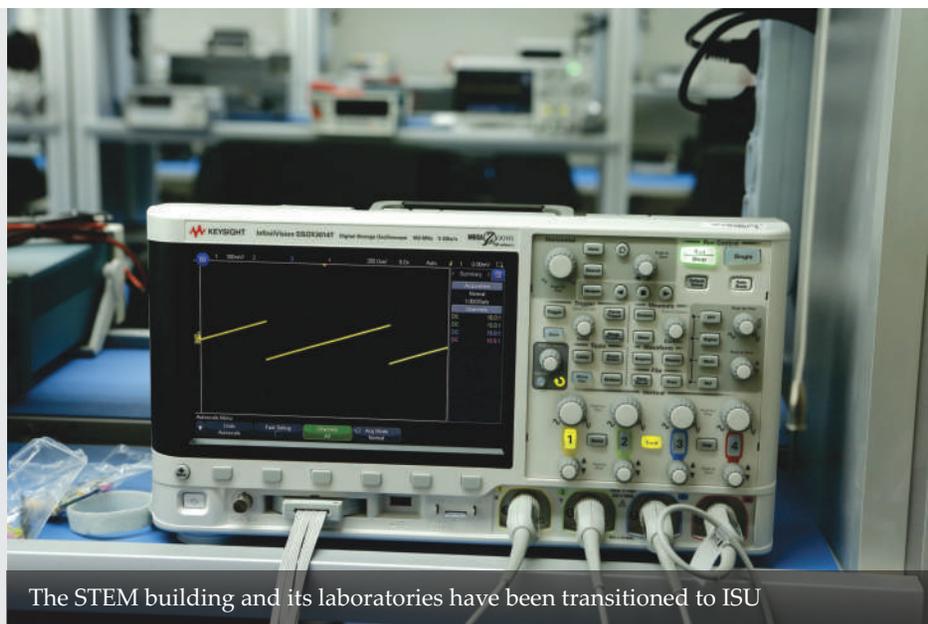
All assets will be transferred to their respective partner universities by 2023. Transfers will occur once partner universities demonstrate their ability to ensure the operation and maintenance of all included assets.

In order to ensure that these assets, both physical and programmatic, are successfully transitioned to partner universities, regular training visits to San Diego have taken place through the Faculty Development Program, which has given PU faculty members the opportunity to learn about SDSU teaching methodology and requirements. As we begin to transition more of the physical assets into the possession of our partner



Rector of Ilia State University, Dr. Giga Zedania, outside of the new STEM building

universities, plans are underway to provide training to the facilities and IT staff as well. A group of IT and facilities management professionals will be participating in a planned training visit to San Diego early next year.



The STEM building and its laboratories have been transitioned to ISU



TSU Hosts Chemistry Program Recruitment Webinar for High School Students



TSU Hosts Chemistry Program Recruitment Webinar for High School Students



Dr. Giorgi Jibuti hosting the TSU Chemistry webinar

Tbilisi State University (TSU) is recruiting students for its Chemistry program, modeled after the SDSU Chemistry/Biochemistry program. It will share most of its courses with the SDSU program, as well as using faculty trained in San Diego, and the same labs that the SDSU Georgia program currently uses.

TSU's English-language Chemistry program was developed according to the standards of the American Chemical Society, as well as local regulations, and is currently on track to receive ACS certification. The program has already received international accreditation through the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE).

As this course is conducted exclusively in English, it opens up more opportunities for its future graduates. They will have an easier time pursuing professional experience and further education in the field. Holding an ACS-certified diploma will give them a further competitive edge in the job market when they graduate.

In order to promote this program, TSU held an

information webinar on March 26, 2021. The event was hosted by Dr. Giorgi Jibuti, Dr. Ana Gogolashvili, and TSU Junior University staff. Approximately 20 participants joined the meeting, which was taped and posted online for other interested applicants.

The hosts presented information about the TSU Chemistry English-language program. They discussed the benefits this program offers over other Chemistry programs and went over how to apply.



GTU organized a Pre-ABET Mini-Symposium

Pre-ABET Mini-Symposium Ahead of Annual ABET Symposium

The ABET Symposium, the annual premier event for accreditation, assessment, and the global exchange of best practices in STEM education, took place virtually on April 14-16, 2021. This symposium, held virtually for the first time in response to the global pandemic situation, offered useful keynote presentations on STEM accreditation and assessment, as well as opportunities for our partner universities to network with their global counterparts. The event also covered foundational topics and emerging trends. Each of our partner universities attended the symposium.

Shortly before the symposium took place on March 31, 2021, Georgian Technical University held a virtual Pre-ABET Mini-Symposium, attended by the Millennium Foundation and SDSU Georgia, where representatives from GTU shared the present standing of GTU ABET-track programs and their plans for strengthening their STEM programs moving forward.



Faculty Development Program Alumni (FADEPA) Recognition Event



The Faculty Development Program (FADEPA) is an essential part of SDSU Georgia's capacity-building strategy. Ten cohorts of faculty from our partner universities have traveled to San Diego to participate in this program since 2014.

During their visits, Georgian faculty are paired with counterparts from SDSU. This mentorship program has several different goals. First, the program aims to build familiarity with SDSU as an institution and its curricula, then develop teaching and laboratory skills, and finally to establish connections between Georgian and SDSU faculty in order to support future teaching and research collaborations.

Visiting faculty in the engineering disciplines also receive training in ABET accreditation standards to better assist in the transitioning of SDSU programs to partner universities.

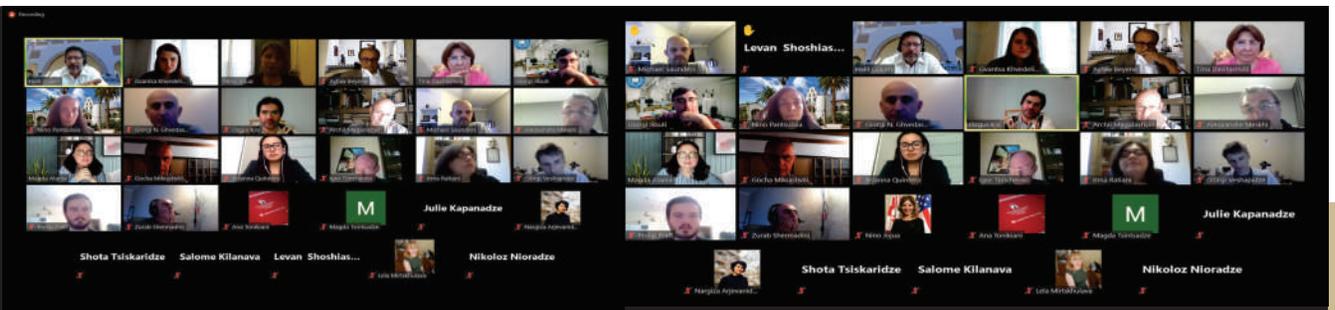
As the SDSU Georgia program graduates its remaining cohorts, certain courses will no longer be offered. This means that not all members of the SDSU Georgia faculty will be returning for the next academic year.

These faculty members, who have worked and grown with us during the last five years, were honored at the Faculty Development Program Virtual Certificate Ceremony on March 19. They received Certificates of Appreciation, recognizing their contributions to the



Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs at SDSU Georgia.

The ceremony was hosted by SDSU Georgia Dean Dr. Halil Guven, who reiterated the importance of the FADEPA program and expressed his gratitude to the instructors. The event was also attended by SDSU Georgia Associate Dean Dr. Asfaw Beyene, Millennium Foundation Chief Executive Officer Ms. Magda Magradze, and Millennium Foundation Tertiary and Vocational Education Project Manager Mr. Nodar Surguladze.



SDSU Georgia faculty and staff attending the Faculty Development Association recognition event

Thank you to our faculty members!

Mariam Nebieridze,
David Natroshvili,
Nino Kokiashvili,
Tinatin Tabidze,
Irakli Murtskhvaladze,
Petre Babilua,
Ketevan Kalandadze,
Sophio Totibadze,
Zaza Khechinashvili,

Ia Kupatadze,
Mzia Nadiradze,
Levan Bogveradze,
Soso Tsotniashvili,
Mikheil Tutberidze,
Davit Tutberidze,
Alexander Shengelaia,
David Kakulia,
Ekaterina Abzianidze,

Irakli Gogoladze,
Khatuna Sichinava,
Nana Odishelidze,
Nikoloz Abzianidze,
Nino Manjavidze,
Revaz Kurdiani,
Tamar Goguaдзе,
Tamar Matchavariani,
Tamta Melashvili

Millennium Foundation CEO Talks About the Launch of the Long-Term Student Loan Program

The Millennium Foundation and Terabank unveiled a new student loan program, designed to increase student access to funding opportunities that will allow them to continue their studies at internationally accredited universities, with priority going to students enrolled in the STEM subjects. Millennium Foundation CEO Magda Magradze joined us to talk about how this program can help our students.



What is the Long Term Student Loan program?

When the Millennium Challenge Account Georgia finished working on the implementation of the MCC Second Compact to Georgia, one of the projects that we funded was in higher education. We have been trying to ensure that this project and its programs, offered by SDSU and funded by us, are sustainable.

When the Compact started in 2013, the economic situation was different and the prognosis was that the earning potential of Georgian families would increase gradually. Nobody could foresee the challenges, financial and otherwise, that the country would have to face. It was clear to us that the \$7500 tuition fees, although very low for a US education, were quite a lot of money for Georgian families.

The Government of Georgia (GoG) subsidized this program and is covering 2250 GEL per student who enrolls in SDSU Georgia programs. If you divide that and put it into USD, it's a very small amount. We had to find other means to support talented students who wanted to study in SDSU Georgia programs.

In addition to establishing the Public-Private Partnership Fund (PPPF) with industrial partners, we started talking with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and we started talking with the Government of Georgia because the MCC grant is state-funded. MCC was very generous to agree to allocate \$1 million to subsidize the student loan scheme.

Who is the Long Term Student Loan Program available to?

This student loan program is available only to students in internationally accredited programs and those in the process of accreditation offered by universities in Georgia or vocational education colleges implemented grant facility under the MCC Industry-led Skills and Workforce Development project (ISWD).

Every quarter our partner organization, Terabank, looks to see if there are new programs that have received international accreditation, both in vocational education and higher education.

Our priority was SDSU Georgia and the Technical Vocational Educational Training (TVET) that we have launched. However, we did not want to restrict this. We have made this program available to all students who are Georgian citizens studying in Georgia in qualifying programs.

Currently, the Long-Term Student Loan program is available for 30 programs at seven universities. 18 universities and 10 vocational colleges are currently in the pipeline to become eligible for the program upon receipt of international accreditation.

How does the Long-Term Student Loan program differ from options already available for students?

The idea of the Student Loans Program is to pilot whether a student loan program will be successful in Georgia. There was skepticism that families would not be interested in student loans. This is partially because all of the loan programs that are currently offered have terrible conditions for families. They have very high-interest rates and repayment starts as soon as you take the loan; there is no grace period.

We studied the sector to see what was available and have offered a student loan program that is quite similar to the principles of US student loan programs. Under this program, students have a grace period of at least 12 months upon the conclusion or termination of their studies and pay a reasonable annual interest rate of 11.9%.

The Millennium Foundation partnered with Terabank to implement this project. Can you tell us about that partnership?

MCA Georgia announced an international procurement. We did not expect the level of interest on the financial side in developing this program. All the large banks in Georgia applied. The bidders had to present their unique proposals based on our request and the best proposal was selected by an independent technical evaluation panel. Terabank was the winner.

An important condition for applying by the financial institution is that it should be co-funded by them. Terabank allocated \$1 million, in addition to the \$1 million allocated by MCC/MCA Georgia. Overall the student loans facility is \$2 million.

In May 2020 we launched this program and continue to work with Terabank through this long-term partnership. We will work with them until all the funds have been spent.

Are there plans to expand this program in the future to support more students and universities?

We hope to expand offering student loans to new programs and universities. One of the challenges in Georgia is the cap on tuition fees for Georgian state universities. For undergraduate degrees they can only charge 2250 GEL per student per year. This amount is very low considering the market prices and public universities have been saying that they cannot afford to offer international diploma programs.

International programs are quite expensive. For the universities, this is a great support because their students can apply to receive these loans. We hope to expand the number of universities that can apply, but it depends on them receiving international certification or accreditation.



How does this program help current SDSU Georgia students?

We would like to promote this program among the SDSU students. We believe that SDSU Georgia's current students should take advantage of this great opportunity and not look for funding from other places. Students have approached me to ask for funding from the Public-Private Partnership Fund.

If they are socially vulnerable students from low-income families, we direct them to that grant program because they cannot afford student loans. But others, they should be more courageous and apply for loans. [Students] are a little bit afraid of the word 'loans,' but I would really like to encourage them to use this opportunity and utilize this great program that exists for them.

SDSU Georgia Covid Relief Fund Supports Students

The covid-19 pandemic has had a crippling impact on the Georgian economy. As a result, many of our students saw their family's financial situation change. In recognition of the increased hardship students were experiencing, SDSU Georgia reallocated a portion of its budget so that it could offer additional financial aid to socially vulnerable students.

In the spring semester of 2021 alone, SDSU Georgia provided a total of \$20,000 in additional financial aid to more than 130 students who were impacted by the pandemic.



Project to Support STEM Research and Graduate Education in Georgia

Distinguished Professor of Biology Dr. Walter Oechel of San Diego State University (PI) and Dr. Halil Guven, Dean of San Diego State University Georgia (Co-PI) were awarded a U.S Embassy federal award in order to implement the project “Supporting STEM research and graduate education in Georgia” in partnership with SDSU’s main campus.

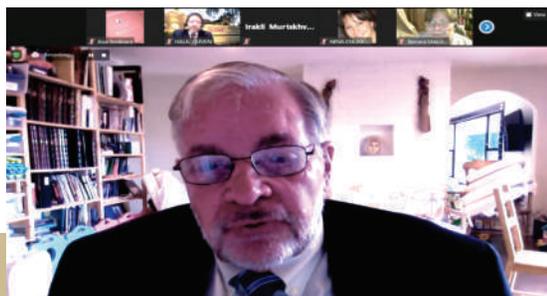
This project aims to strengthen the research and academic writing skills of young Georgian scholars; raise the scholars’ research capacity to international standards; increase interaction between Georgian and American academics and researchers, and mentor and coach Georgian scholars for publishing research papers in Georgian and Western academic peer-reviewed journals in STEM fields.

SDSU Georgia has supported this project from its inception, with the Project Coordinator from SDSU Georgia, Ana Tonikiani, providing organizational support and facilities, in addition to fostering connections between the project’s organizer and

Principal Investigator (PI), Dr. Walter Oechel, and potential counterparts within SDSU Georgia’s partner organizations. Millennium Foundation CEO Ms. Magda Magradze and Tertiary Education Director Dr. Nodar Surguladze have also contributed to the project’s success.

One of the aspects of the project is a series of short courses held in Georgia. Due to the pandemic situation, these courses have been offered via Zoom. Each course is conducted by SDSU home campus professors and STEM researchers. Each course covers a different aspect of modern, western approaches to research methodology, scientific writing, publishing, communication, use of scientific literature, preparation of modern bibliographic resources, and scientific publications and ethics.

Since October 2020, four mini-courses have been offered, including one three-part series, covering a variety of specific topics relevant to STEM students, professionals, and academics.



Project PI Walter Oechel speaking at one of the mini-lectures



Cultural Attaché of the US Embassy in Georgia Christopher Anderson delivering opening remarks

■ **Scientific Writing for Publication in International ISI Journals**, hosted by Dr. John Crocket, Associate VP for Research and Advancement at SDSU

■ **Open-Source Data Sources and Building an International Network of Collaborators and Collaborations**, hosted by Dr. Erik Frost, Co-Director of SDSU Graduate Program in Homeland Security (HSEC) and Director of SDSU Visualization Center.

■ **The US System of Graduate Schools**, hosted by Dr. Ed Balsdon, Interim Dean of Graduate Studies at SDSU.

■ **Financial Aid at the Graduate Level**, hosted by Dali Khomeriki, a consultant for EducationUSA.

■ **SDSU Doctoral Program in STEM - Sciences**, hosted by a panel of seven program directors from SDSU.

■ **SDSU Doctoral Programs in STEM - Computational and Engineering Sciences**, hosted by a panel of two program directors from SDSU.

■ **SDSU Doctoral Programs in STEM - Education and Health-Related Fields**, hosted by a panel of five program directors from SDSU.

■ **The U.S. Government-Supported Exchange Program Opportunities for Georgian Scholars**, hosted by Irakli Malania, a representative from the U.S. Embassy of Tbilisi Public Affairs Section.

■ **Responsible Conduct of Scientific Research with an Emphasis on Accepted Practices in the United States and Case Studies Worldwide**, hosted by Dr. Sanford Bernstein, Distinguished Professor of Biology.

Project to Support STEM Research and Graduate Education in Georgia

Applications Open for Georgian Scholars to Conduct Research at SDSU

The second core mission of the project is to give young Georgian scholars the opportunity to spend three months at San Diego State University. Students will be able to conduct graduate research and studies under the guidance of an SDSU faculty mentor and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to conduct STEM research in a U.S. setting. These students will have access to state-of-the-art equipment and benefit from learning new approaches and collaborating with their SDSU mentors.

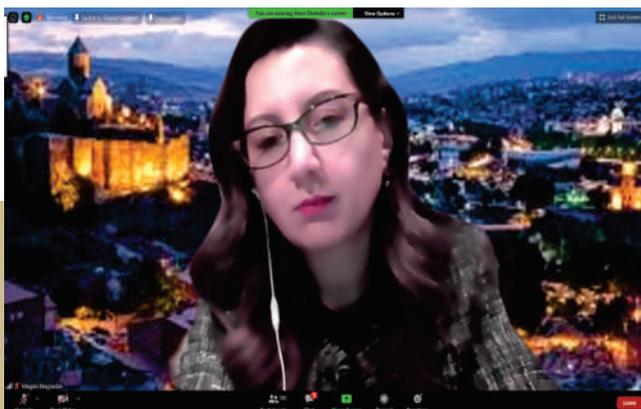
According to their performance, participants may be able to extend their stay for an additional three months, or longer if the candidate is selected by their SDSU mentor to work on a mutually agreed research project. In this way, mentors may even continue to be involved with the candidate's ongoing research upon their return to Georgia.

The candidate's selection criteria will be competitive and dependent on the number of meritorious proposals.

The program will support up to 18 Georgian Ph.D. students. The maximum duration of the program may range from 3-24 months.

The program "Supporting STEM Research and Graduate Education in Georgia" is open to all potential applicants matriculated as graduate students at any accredited Georgian university. Interested candidates are invited to apply through an open, national competition for participation in both short-term and long-term graduate research positions at SDSU. The application process is open until all available slots are filled. For more details, please visit: www.sig.sdsu.edu.ge

The selection committee will be comprised of both SDSU and Georgian faculty who will rank the applicants. Final selections will be made by the mentoring faculty, choosing students based on the interests and backgrounds which align best with individual areas of research.



Millennium Foundation CEO Magda Magradze delivering opening remarks



Tertiary Education Director of the Millennium Foundation Dr. Nodar Surguladze hosting a Q&A session



FEATURED ARTICLE

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Post-Compact SDSU Joint Degree Feasibility Study Underway

In 2020, Millennium Foundation provided funding to SDSU to explore different possibilities for maintaining its presence and its STEM degree programs in Georgia beyond 2023. One possible avenue is the Joint Degree Program. The exact format of this program is still being determined together with our partner institutions.

Through this program, students would be able to earn an SDSU degree without having to leave Georgia. This will take advantage of the resources introduced through the SDSU Georgia program. Students will learn in internationally accredited programs, using renovated laboratories and classrooms, under the instruction of faculty who have been through the Faculty Development Program and trained in San Diego with the mentorship of current SDSU professors.

While our partner university degree programs offer ample math and/or science education, an SDSU degree will include general education, including public speaking, critical thinking, and advanced writing

courses. These general education courses strengthen their English language skills, which makes them more valuable on the job market. Students must also complete a Capstone Project in order to graduate with an SDSU degree, allowing them the opportunity to partner with industry representatives and receive hands-on experience working on real-world problems.

An analysis of the partner university programs is currently underway to determine the feasibility of the Joint Degree Program. This involves analyzing the degree requirements from the partner universities and SDSU to determine how they can align to meet both the necessary Georgian and California State University degree requirements within a reasonable time frame. At this time, we are conducting the feasibility study for TSU's ABET-approved Computer Science and Electrical Engineering programs, as well as ISU's Computer and Civil Engineering programs.



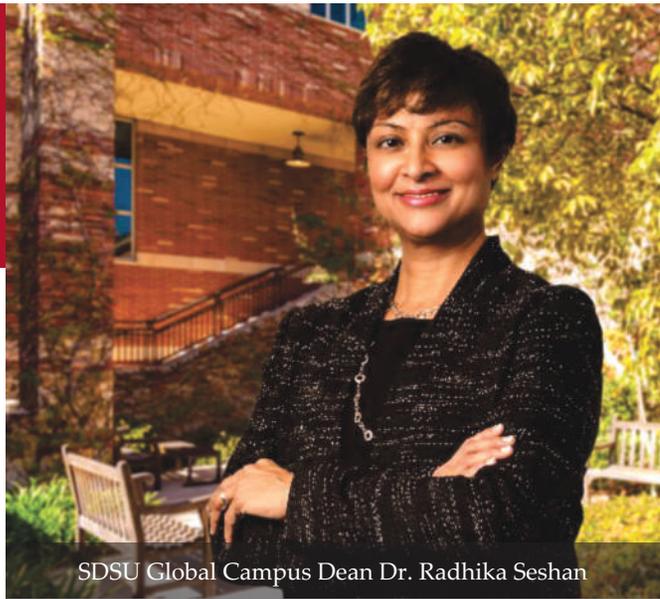
Members of the Joint-Degree Committee meeting to discuss partnership with TSU



Joint-Degree Committee meeting in the STEM building to discuss partnership with ISU

SDSU to Sign New MOU With the Government of Georgia

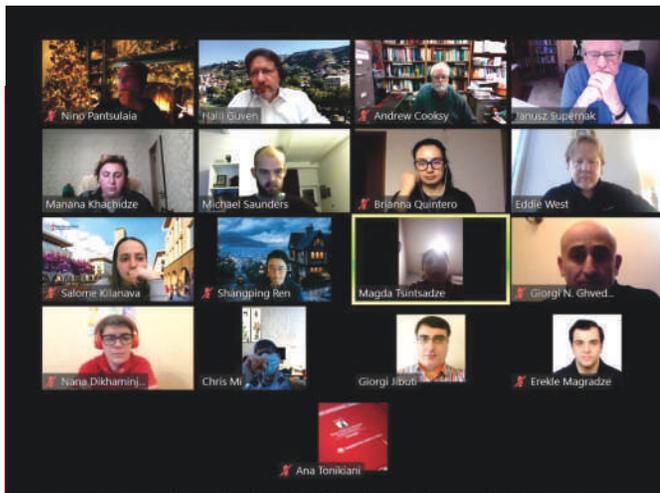
In order to reaffirm SDSU's commitment to maintaining a presence in Georgia beyond the current program's limits, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is to be signed between SDSU and the Government of Georgia. The MOU will be signed at the 2021 Commencement Ceremony, to be held on June 8, by SDSU President Dr. Adela de la Torre, and the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia, Dr. Mikheil Chkhenkeli. This MOU will confirm both parties' goals of identifying new opportunities for joint projects and the strengthening of the current SDSU Georgia program.



SDSU Global Campus Dean Dr. Radhika Seshan

Keeping SDSU Georgia Sustainable

SDSU Global Campus will administer the potential joint degree programs between TSU and SDSU and between ISU and SDSU. These will be followed by possible joint degree programs between GTU and SDSU in the future. SDSU-GC Dean, Radhika Seshan, visited Georgia in 2019 and SDSU-GC Assistant Dean Eddie West visited Georgia in February 2020 to explore new ways to maintain SDSU's presence in Georgia after we have graduated our final Compact cohort in 2023. After the pandemic restrictions, SDSU-GC, led by Dean Seshan held countless Zoom meetings on the subject. This task has involved the hard work and dedication of many people both at SDSU, SDSU Georgia, TSU, and ISU.



From SDSU & SDSU Georgia:

- Halil Guven, Dean, SDSU Georgia
- Radhika Seshan, Dean, SDSU Global Campus
- Stephen Schellenberger, SDSU Associate Vice President for Curriculum, Assessment, and Accreditation WSCUC Accreditation Liaison Officer
- Ronnie Schreiber, Associate Dean, College of Arts and Letters
- Eddie West, Assistant Dean, SDSU Global Campus
- Luis Vega, Director, International Partnerships, SDSU Global Campus
- Chris Mi, Chair, SDSU Electrical and Computer Engineering
- Shangping Ren, Chair, SDSU Computer Science
- Janusz Supernak, Chair, SDSU Civil, Construction and Environmental Engineering
- Mohmoud Tarokh, Professor, SDSU Computer Science
- Brianna Quintero, GE Coordinator, SDSU Georgia
- Giga Gotsiridze, IT Director, SDSU Georgia



From TSU (Joint degree in Computer Science and Electrical Engineering):

- Ramaz Khomeriki, Dean, Faculty of Natural and Exact Sciences
- Irma Grdzeldze, Director of QA, TSU
- Manana Khachidze, Chair, TSU Computer Science
- Giorgi Ghvedahvili, Chair, TSU Electrical and Electronics Engineering
- Magda Tsistsadze, Associate Professor, TSU of Computer Science



From ISU (Joint Degree in Computer Engineering and Civil Engineering):

- Nana Dikhaminjia, Vice Rector and Chair of Computer Engineering, ISU
- Nino Zhvania, Director of QA, ISU
- Vakhtang Balazadze, Director of QA of School of Business, Technology and Education
- Michael Saunders, Chair, ISU Civil Engineering

Joint-Degree Committee virtual meetings attended by representatives from both San Diego and Georgia

Career Month and Job Fair at SDSU Georgia

The SDSU Georgia Career Service Department hosted Career Month between February 15 - March 15, 2021. The event consisted of a variety of activities to help students gain interview skills and connect with companies. Over 180 students participated in the various career fair activities, which ranged from preparatory workshops to open-door industry meetings.

Seven companies held Open Door Industry Meetings, including Domson's Engineering, Soluutivo, and Heidelberg Cement. These meetings, conducted via Zoom, gave students the opportunity to engage directly with companies. They were given insight into business processes and hiring and professional development opportunities within each company.

Company representatives introduced their companies to interested students. They discussed hiring practices and the development and motivational tools that they use. Students were able to ask any questions that they had concerning the company and what was being discussed. Interested students were also invited to apply to ongoing job opportunities.

In addition to the Open Door Industry Meetings, the Career Services Department held a series of helpful workshops during Career Month. The workshops were designed to meet student needs and requests for additional interview and networking skills, especially in a virtual environment.

David Khutsishvili, a senior student, said, "The Career Month workshops were a great opportunity that supported both my personal and professional

development...I realized that during my undergraduate years, SDSU Georgia has equipped me with the powerful tools to be successful in whatever path I choose. As I communicate with people who have gone through this path, they are surprised by how prepared I am in terms of planning and foreseeing my future at this stage in my life."

Over 100 Interviews Took Place at Spring Job Fair

Following the successful completion of SDSU Georgia Career Month, the university hosted a Job Fair on April 21-22 to help the junior and senior students secure employment and internships, giving them practical experience in their fields and as members of Georgia's STEM workforce.

24 organizations participated in the virtual Spring Job Fair. Unlike a traditional face-to-face job fair, this event took place online. Junior and senior students were able to register ahead of time to interview with the organizations of their choice. There were organizations looking to hire from each of our six programs.

Over the course of the two-day event, over 100 interviews took place. In spite of the virtual format, the job fair was a great success. Students went into their interviews prepared with the skills and knowledge they gained through the workshops and industry meetings during Career Month.

CAREER MONTH
AT
SDSU GEORGIA

OPEN DOOR
INDUSTRY MEETINGS

02/15 - 03/15

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE LEADING GEORGIAN
COMPANIES TO INTRODUCE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS
AND ACTIVITIES TO SDSU GEORGIA STUDENTS.

Seniors Present at Capstone Showcase

The Capstone Showcase took place on May 17, 2021. The Capstone Showcase gives senior students the opportunity to present the Capstone Projects that they have been working on throughout their final year. The Capstone Project is a requirement for graduating seniors at SDSU and gives students hands-on experience working on industry projects.

Teams of students work with an industry mentor and instructor, putting their skills to the test solving real challenges facing their industry partners. The Capstone Project takes students through the full sequence of activities involved in bringing a product from conception to the market. They are required to perform detailed analyses of their industry partner's challenges before planning, designing, and testing their prototypes. In addition to giving the students valuable work experience, it also allows them to build connections and network with potential employers, who often use the Capstone Project to develop future employees.

This year, there were 11 projects presented at the Showcase. Six teams of Computer and Electrical Engineering students and five teams presenting the first Capstone Projects in Civil and Construction Engineering



Temur Malakmadze discussing his team's Capstone Project



Tinatin Vacheishvili introducing her team's Capstone Project with Doms TM



Avtandil Takvelidze presenting on the Gofache Group Capstone Project



The Domson Engineering team's video presentation

2021 Electrical and Computer Engineering Capstone Projects

- Hike App
- Intelligent Automatization System
- Private Emergency Help System
- Productivity Gadget
- Smart and Secure Home
- Smart Tracking Solar System

2021 Civil and Construction Engineering Capstone Projects

- Vocational College Design in Lanchkhuti
- Design of kindergarten for 180 children in Akhaltsikhe
- New School Design for Kvemo Machkhaani
- McDonald's Bakery
- Basalt Solutions

The successful completion of this year's Capstone Projects and Showcase was the result of over 100 people's active participation, from the students and instructors to the industry mentors and Advisory Board members, as well as partner university rectors.

As the Class of 2020 seniors did not have a chance to present their projects live to SDSU Georgia's public and private partners, the Capstone Projects of the last two cohorts will be exhibited at the Palace of State Ceremonies, during the Commencement 2021 Ceremony.

STORIES

SDSU Georgia Students Take First Place at ISU Educational Games Hackathon

On November 12-13, 2020, Ilia State University hosted the online Education Games Hackathon in collaboration with the international project DigiEduHack, an initiative of the European Institute for Innovation and Technology.

The event was open to participants worldwide and occurred virtually over two days. Participants were invited to create prototypes for educational games and “demonstrate how digital tools...can enhance community involvement in the field [of education].”

SDSU Georgia IT Director Giga Gotsiridze acted as one of the judges for the competition. Giga believes that hackathons are an essential part of educating students in a real-world environment, stating, “Hackathons are the backbone for developing and preparing younger generations to solve real-life problems in the future so that they can become entrepreneurs one day. By becoming successful entrepreneurs, not only will they achieve financial success, but they will strive to make the world a better place by creating more eco-friendly technologies, gadgets, and the innovations that will shape our future.”

Of the 22 teams who competed, one team was selected as the overall winner, which will go on to present their idea on the official DigiEduHack website and be evaluated by international experts. The winning team has the opportunity to become the global DigiEduHack winner. In addition, the winning team was awarded 2000 GEL from Sector 3, and Prodemos. Also, each member of the winning team received a 1000-GEL voucher from TBC for Youth, and branded ThinkPad X1 ANC headphones from Alta.

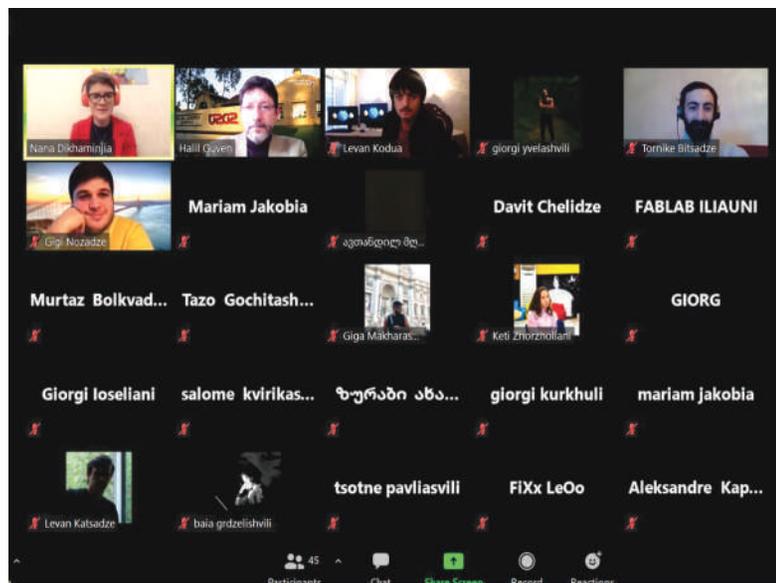
We are thrilled to announce that the winning team, Ender, was composed of SDSU Georgia students Nikoloz Meladze-Jaiani and Nikoloz Tbileli. They created “a platform for interactive adaptive learning, aiming at gamifying the educational sector. It allows the teachers/instructors to customize or create quizzes and lessons in a game format using pre-built templates or by using the platform’s marketplace or Unity-like engine to create their own custom experience.”

After the Hackathon, Nikoloz Tbileli said, “It was a great event that made our team think of the current world situation and how digital learning is done, and how it's affecting K12 students and the whole educational field. It made us realize that the 'Zoom university' style of learning is lacking and affecting K12 students in a harmful way because of their lack of interactions....We heard a lot of great ideas and saw



some impressive demos during the hackathon and are glad we had the opportunity to interact and hear such great ideas.”

ISU and SDSU Georgia also selected their respective favorites, awarding each 1500 GEL as a prize. The SDSU Georgia favorite award, selected by Gotsiridze, went to the team Quick Game, made up of SDSU Georgia student Giorgi Sharmiashvili, BTU student Giorgi Nadiradze, and European School faculty Davit Nozadze. Their project was a quest-based game in which students must answer quizzes to solve quests and receive rewards.



Participants attended the Education Games Hackathon via Zoom

ACS Hosts Inter-Collegiate Olympiad

The American Chemical Society (ACS) Georgian Student Chapter hosted its first Inter-University Chemistry Olympiad (IUChO) on December 6th, 2020. The event was open to all Georgian students studying at the undergraduate level within Georgia. 25 students participated from SDSU Georgia, Tbilisi State University, and the Agrarian University of Georgia.

The event was funded through a Programming Grant provided by ACS to support community building through events that comply with local pandemic guidelines. The Georgian Student Chapter applied for and received \$650 dollars to conduct the Inter-University Chemistry Olympiad.

The Olympiad was designed to test students on their chemistry knowledge through a written theoretical examination, using questions composed by professional chemists in Georgia. The goal was to increase student interest in chemistry through independent and creative solving of chemical problems.

The winners were announced on Saturday, December 12th. First prize, along with 900 GEL, was awarded to Giorgi Petriashvili of SDSU Georgia. Nika Kutalia, also from SDSU Georgia, took the second-place prize of 600 GEL and 400 GEL was awarded to the third-place finisher, Lasha Khutsishvili of the Agricultural University of Georgia.

As ACS Georgian Student Chapter Secretary Nana Mirotadzesaid, "This kind of project is highly important in the Georgian community since it helps the popularization of chemistry."

In addition to the success of the IUChO event, SDSU Georgia's ACS Student Chapter was recently selected by the Society Committee on Education to receive an honorable mention for their programs and activities in the 2019-2020 academic year.



Students from SDSU Georgia, Tbilisi State University, and the Agrarian University of Georgia participating in the virtual Chemistry Olympiad

STORIES

Associated Student Board

The 2020-2021 Associated Students Board of Directors was hard at work this year planning activities, ensuring outreach and advocacy, and bolstering the spirit of the student body throughout lockdown. We want to thank each of the outgoing board members for their diligence and contributions to the student body during their tenure.



Thanks to the 2020-2021 Associated Students Board of Directors!

President - Giorgi Machavariani

Executive Vice-President - **Giorgi Gugeshashvili**

Chemistry/Biochemistry Program Representative - **Nino Makasarashvili**

Civil Engineering Program Representative - **Nino Kacharava**

Computer Engineering Program Representative - **Ana Toria**

Computer Science Program Representative - **Aleksandre Begiashvili**

Construction Engineering Program Representative - **Nanuka Gomareli**

Electrical Engineering Program Representative - **Giorgi Mzhavanadze**

Secretary - **Giorgi Meladze**

Dean's Office Representative - **Anastasia Lejava**

Elections for the new AS Board of Directors took place on April 13, 2021 after a period of virtual campaigning by the candidates. SDSU Georgia congratulates all candidates for their strong efforts and welcomes its incoming board members. We look forward to forging an ever-closer relationship between the students, faculty, and staff.

Your incoming 2021-2022 Associated Student Board of Directors is:

President - Ana Toria

Executive Vice-President - **Nino Kacharava**

Chemistry/Biochemistry Program Representative - **Ana Geladze**

Civil Engineering Program Representative - **Mariam Vashakidze**

Computer Engineering Program Representative - **Dimitri Tabagari**

Computer Science Program Representative - **Lizi Bodzashvili**

Construction Engineering Program Representative - **Shota Abuladze**

Electrical Engineering Program Representative - **David Gogia**

Congratulations to the 2021 Outstanding Graduates!

Every year SDSU selects the students with the highest GPA in their respective programs as Outstanding Graduates. We would like to congratulate the following individuals:



Sergi Betkhoshvili
Chemistry/Biochemistry



Giorgi Solomnishvili
Electrical Engineering



Irakli Ambokadze
Civil Engineering



Anastasia Akhvlediani
Computer Engineering



Natia Inadze
Chemistry/Biochemistry



Nineli Lashkarashvili
Computer Science



Mariam Chikhradze
Construction Engineering



Guga Kupradze
Electrical Engineering

Student Club Activities

Board Game and Chess Club Hosts Chess Tournament



Board Game and Chess Club hosted their second Chess Tournament, with its final match taking place on February 17th. They hosted the tournament using an online platform that allowed the participants to compete in real-time, with spectators watching from their homes.

Programming Club Launches New Activities

The SDSU Georgia Programming Club also picked up its activities this semester. They began by hosting an introductory get-together via Zoom. The event was designed to reach out to students who may be interested in joining the Programming Club and discussing the benefits it could have for students' future careers and the club's plans for upcoming activities. On April 25th, they hosted their first official event. The Warmup Contest allowed students to flex their programming skills and offered a preview for more events to come in the upcoming semesters.

Empower Women Club Teams Up with Staff for Female Student Empowerment Initiative

The Female Student Empowerment initiative was created in collaboration with the Empower Women Club to address the wage disparity between male and female students. In spite of the fact that our female students tend to outperform their male counterparts, our research indicates that they continue to earn approximately 35% less on average after graduation.

Empower Women Club President Nino Makasarashvili said that, "All of us have overcome obstacles to choose the path that we wanted to based on the fact that in our society there still remain traces of associating STEM to be areas most suitable for men. Sharing each other's experiences, highlighting the precedents, and planning certain activities are tools through which we aim to achieve our purpose."

One of the first events under this new initiative was an essay contest called Women in STEM. Students were invited to submit their written work in three different categories relating to women's empowerment: personal experience, role model, and movie review. The winning essays were published in the club's Facebook group and the authors were awarded 200 gel each.



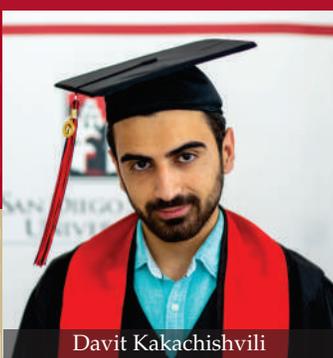
Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



David E nukidze



Davit Kakachishvili



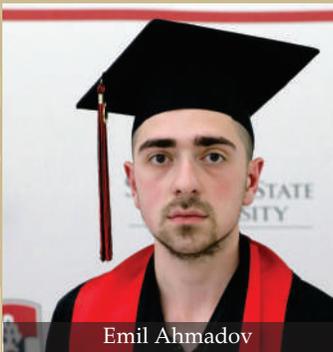
Davit Khutsisvili



Daviti Beriashvili



Daviti Garuchava



Emil Ahmadov



Erekle Dateshidze



George Pkhakadze



Giorgi Chankseliani



Giorgi Gelashvili



Giorgi Khvadadze



Giorgi Machavariani



Giorgi Meladze



Giorgi Natroshvili



Giorgi Sharmiashvili



Giorgi Solomnishvili



Giorgi Turdziladze



Givi Gordeziani



Gocha Gunashvili

Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



Luka Simsive



Mariam Chikhradze



Mariam Khukhunashvili



Marita Merabishvili



Mikheil Nozadze



Nata Tchitchinadze



Natia Inadze



Nika Kurdadze



Nika Kutalia



Nikoloz Gabunia



Nikoloz Shalikiani



Nineli Lashkarashvili



Nino Giorgadze



Nino Nonikashvili



Nino Tabagari



Omari Mamalashvili



Phuvad Karaevi

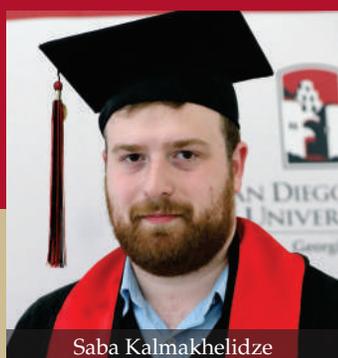


Ramaz Tskhadadze



Reziko Tsirgvava

Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



Saba Kalmakhelidze



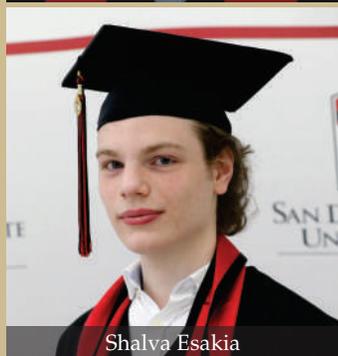
Salome Chiladze



Salome Pirozmanishvili



Sergi Betkhoshvili



Shalva Esakia



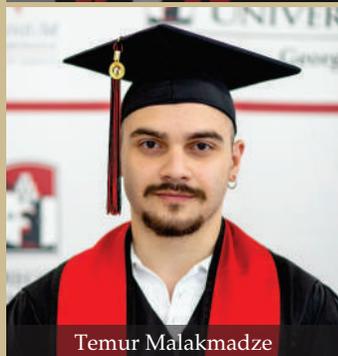
Sofiko Maglakelidze



Tamar Jalaghonia



Tea Gamrekelashvili



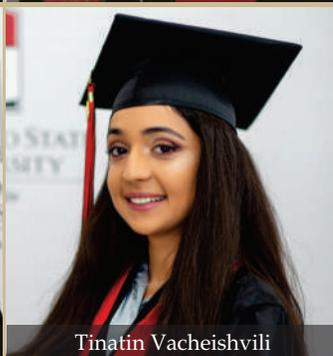
Temur Malakmadze



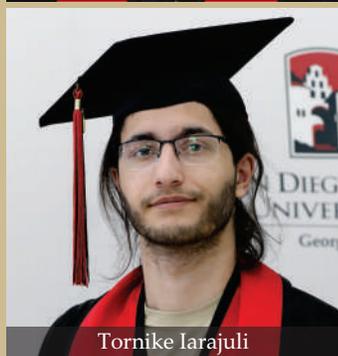
Timur Ozdemir



Tinatin Kotolashvili



Tinatin Vacheishvili



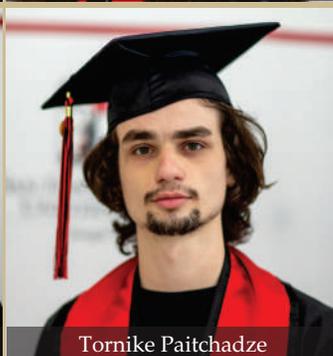
Tornike Iarajuli



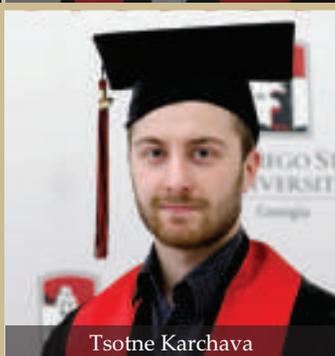
Tornike Jajanidze



Tornike Medulashvili



Tornike Paitchadze

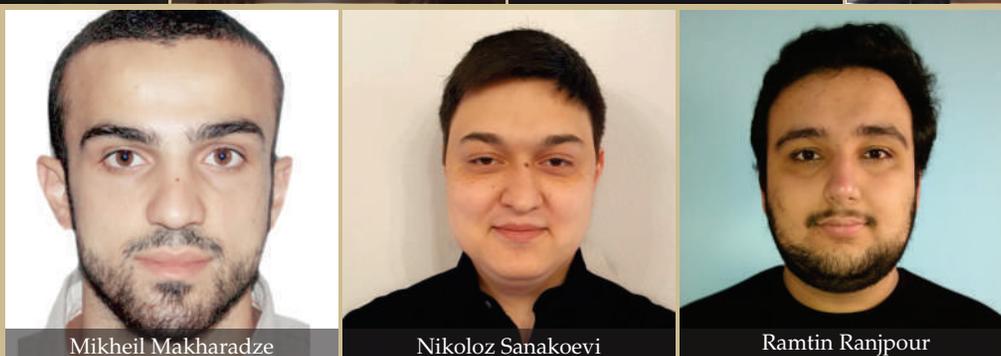
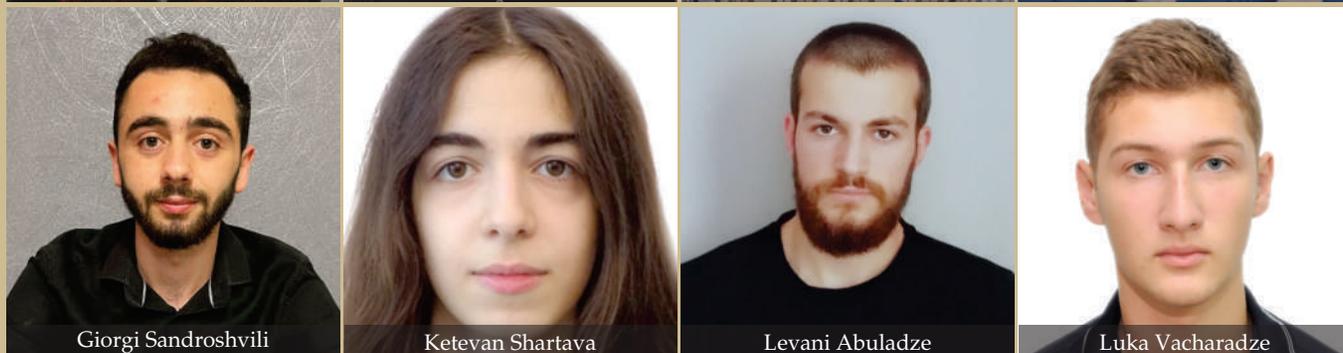


Tsothe Karchava



Tsothe Tsirekidze

Congratulations to the SDSU Georgia Class of 2021!



Due to the pandemic situation, not all of our students were able to attend the socially distanced graduation photoshoot. The students who were unable to join us have sent in their own photos.

SENIOR SUPERLATIVES

Senior Superlatives are an American tradition. The senior class was invited to nominate one another for titles and voted amongst themselves. Congratulations to the winners!

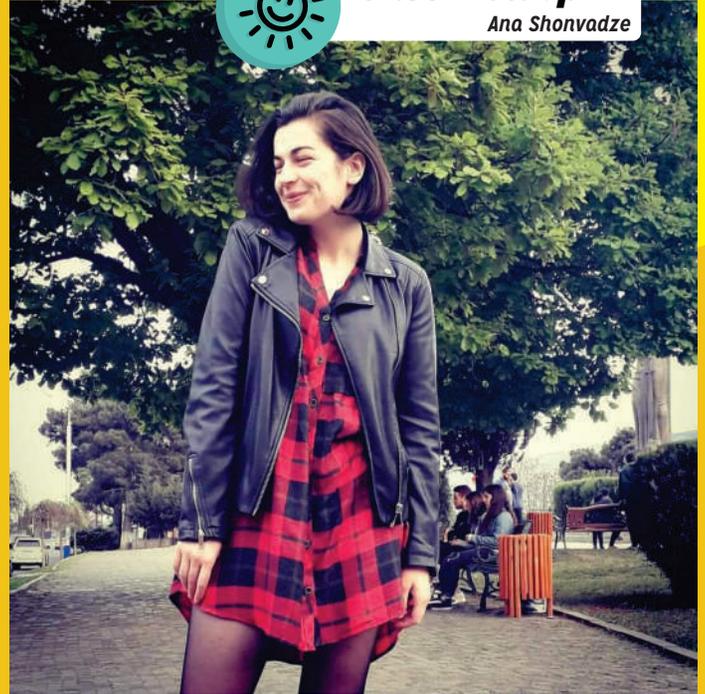
Most Likely to be President

Giorgi Machavariani



Most Likely to Cheer You Up

Ana Shonvadze

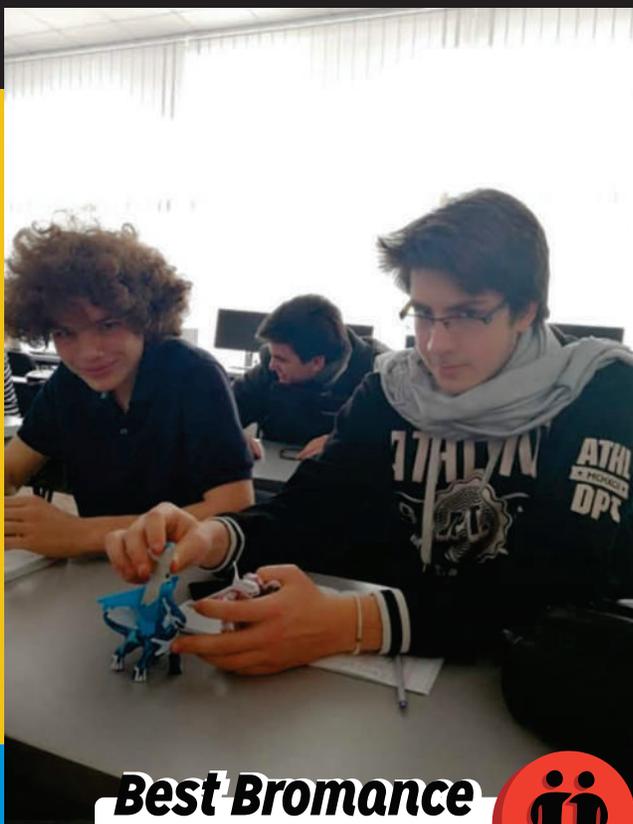


Food Monster

Mariam Chikhradze



SENIOR SUPERLATIVES



Best Bromance

Shalva Esakia and Mikheil Nozadze



Best Laugh

Gvantsa Lomidze



Best Laugh

Anano Papinashvili



Best Smile

Natia Inadze





COMMENCEMENT 2021

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Georgia



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