

Never say Never

By Allison Harper

The phrase “never say never” is more true in my life than I would like to admit. In fact, this simple childhood adage *never* seems to fail me. I said I would never go to Georgia Southern University, I would never work during college, and I would never work in foodservice – good thing I was wrong. Before you get the wrong impression though, let me tell my story. It’s a story of past, present, and future. It’s a story of learning and growing, and realizing that the influences which shape our lives may not always appear as we first expected.

Past

Never did I want to go to Georgia Southern because it didn’t have snow or mountains or places to backpack. You see, I wanted to escape to the land of snow and mountains in good ole’ Colorado. However, a friend of mine encouraged me to, “just go look at the Georgia Southern campus,” and so I did. Driving through the two rows of trees which proudly proclaimed our entry to the campus and being greeted by the finely manicured landscape (including GSU spelled out in bushes) which surrounded the beloved Sweetheart Circle, a more sudden interest in this quaint University began to arise within me. My dad accompanied me on this quest to visit Georgia’s universities, and after friendly greetings in historic buildings, our tour (and my life) at Georgia Southern began. Not long after we began walking the brick sidewalks and listening to our energetic tour guide (a student herself), I had made up my mind. I even remember looking at my dad during the tour and saying, “ok, this is where I want to go” – he was more than happy to keep me on a familiar Georgia campus rather than part ways to the West. As we ended the tour, our personal exploration of the other areas on campus began. It all started with a lunch, contributed by Dining Services, at what was then called, “The Educated Palate.” As our exploration continued, we visited academic buildings, residence halls, and the recreational activity center (and they even had backpacking trips available to students). Our exploration showed me that Georgia Southern would provide me not only with a great place to build a foundation, but also the academic support and intelligence needed to succeed. Needless to say, I applied and accepted the invitation to become an Eagle at Georgia Southern University where I am now about to graduate in just a few short months. But, I had to get a job first.

So, we come to my second “never” statement - “I will never work during my college career.” I thought it would be too hard to work and be dedicated to my studies; however, with the end of my freshman year came a restlessness to be more productive with my time and the desire to start providing for myself – this meant I needed to apply for a job, but where? With a full class load, it was important to find an area of work which respected my desire to pursue education, be flexible with my schedule, and possess a higher level of understanding and concern for the life of a student. I knew holding a job off campus would limit my ability to find a job which met all these qualifications. On-campus jobs, however, fit the description perfectly. And so my second quest began, but this time it was a quest to find out where to apply for a job. I had heard rumors that Dining Services was bringing a Starbucks to campus that fall, and since I had always loved coffee, I decided to take the chance and apply as a barista. Not only did I learn customer service skills and more coffee knowledge than I ever knew existed, but I also had the opportunity to see the introduction of a new dining facility on campus. Our staff trained for many hours the week before school started to prepare for opening this new addition to campus – even today, Dining Services is bringing new ideas and concepts to students. The Starbucks on campus matched the job criteria I was hoping for perfectly, and it was so convenient to hop on the university bus system after work and arrive at class in ten minutes or less. And thus my third “never” statement, “I will

never work in foodservice” was yet again proven wrong. My job at Starbucks was definitely a favorite as I learned how to make great coffee and build friendships with students and customers – not to mention this began my first look into the range of opportunities Auxiliary Services brought to campus.

Present

Three years have passed since that initial interview in Landrum Dining Center, Georgia Southern’s longest-standing dining facility. And after those three years I still go to Georgia Southern, I am still working during my college career, I am still working in foodservice, and I am glad to be where I am today because of Auxiliary Services. From brewing coffee at Starbucks, I went to the humble job of waitressing, then to supervising our university’s own coffee shop, and finally to assisting the director of Eagle Dining Services with administrative and marketing responsibilities. Presently, I focus on tapping into marketable opportunities in the dining aspect of Auxiliary Services, but soon will be launching into a project which will include other divisions, such as Parking and Transportation and University Stores and Shops. This project stems from the Auxiliary Services informational presentations at the university’s orientation program. Last year, I worked to create an informational video about Dining Services for students attending orientation. We wanted this video to be fun and exciting for students and parents. This year, I will work on the project which will also include Parking and Transportation and University Stores and Shops, so that Auxiliary Services can provide students with a memorable college orientation – and still answer questions along the way. This is one way the departments of Auxiliary Services work together in order to provide students with the services that essentially help the university function. In line with this, I have monthly communications with our campus print shop, and weekly communications with many other areas of Auxiliary Services, both as a student and employee.

Future

I write this article just one week after my last fall semester as an undergraduate student and just five months away from graduating with a B.B.A. in Marketing and a minor in Writing/Linguistics. The ever hanging question is where will I go and what will I do from here? My hope is to offer Georgia Southern’s dining program and overall Auxiliary Services department the skills I have learned during my time as a student and employee at this university. From there I’d like to attend graduate school in order to pursue marketing at an even higher level, and finish up with my Ph.D. in order to teach in the university system. When that time comes, I will have the experience from working with Auxiliary Services to draw upon as I face new challenges. Auxiliary Services has taught me that food (and the service and atmosphere which surrounds food) is very marketable, be it through meal plans, dining facilities, vending, concessions, catering, special events, or so much more. I will most definitely look to my past Auxiliary Services experiences in order to succeed in the future.

My time at Georgia Southern has taught me more about Auxiliary Services than I ever knew it could on that first day driving through those trees lined up so tall. Since that time, I can look back and see how essential Auxiliary Services, and all those who work on campus, has been to my past, present, and future. Though they are not a division of Auxiliary, we do work with Physical Plant on a daily basis as they are also an essential element of the university. But it was the Physical Plant department who trimmed those bushes to spell “GSU” at the entrance, and who also manicured the landscape so nicely for my dad and me to see on that first visit. Dining services provided my dad and me with our very first meal on campus, and later provided me with a job and possibly a career. As a freshman attending that same orientation which I am now working with Auxiliary Services to continue to improve, the Eagle Card Center took my picture and gave me my identity as a student via my Student I.D. card. Housing gave me

a roof over my head that first year and worked to ease my transition from high school to college in the best way they knew how. As an employee, Parking and Transportation offered me a convenient ride from work at Starbucks to studies at class. This list and these descriptions could go on forever. When you stop to think through a single day on campus, the amount of contact a student, employee, or visitor has with Auxiliary Services is overwhelming. There is no spot on campus not affected by Auxiliary Services.

Entering college, I did not expect to be shaped by Auxiliary Services – in fact I could not have told you what Auxiliary Service was or that it even existed. But now I see that these services have shaped me. They have influenced my past, present, and future. They helped me grow, taught me to be a good employee, and formed my work experience. And most importantly, Auxiliary Services has taught me “to never say never.”