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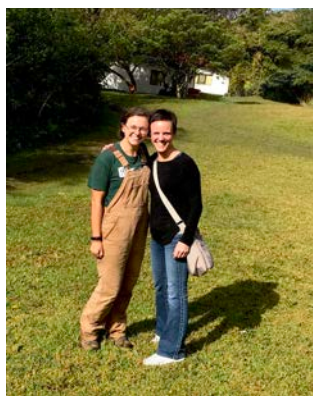
### DEPARTMENT INFO

The Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication promotes food, environmental and social sustainability through experiential education. We are committed to changing lives through Georgia’s land-grant mission.

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*Abigail Pierce with fresh ginger at the UGArden in Athens, Georgia.*



*Abigail with her advisor and friend, Dr. Borron, in Costa Rica.*



*Abigail harvesting bananas in Costa Rica.*

### The Pursuit of Purpose

By: Chandler Mulvaney, ALEC Graduate Student

“Life’s a garden. Dig it.”

I’m sure we have all heard or mentioned this memorable and yet comical, Joe Dirt quote a time or two in our lives. But for Abigail Pierce, this mantra has a much deeper connection to her purpose in agriculture.

A current senior majoring in agricultural communication, Abigail hasn’t always known her purpose within agriculture as confidently as she does today. She first found agriculture when she began volunteering at the West Broad Street Farmers Market here in Athens during her time as a University of North Georgia student in 2014. Abigail said the following about her start with agriculture:

“I have no background in agriculture whatsoever. I just drove by the garden one day and I stopped in and I started going pretty regularly, and I really fell in love with agriculture and I would help out in the farmers markets on the weekends.”

Abigail continued to volunteer with the local farmers markets and the Athens Land Trust as an undergraduate student. She furthered her passion for agriculture after being admitted in the ALEC program at UGA, working under the direction of Dr. Abigail Borron.

After her arrival as a student at UGA and within the ALEC program, Abigail dug deep into her newfound love for agriculture and became involved with...

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# News

## The Pursuit of Purpose (cont. from p. 1)

campus-wide organizations such as Campus Kitchens and Lunchbox Gardens; all the while, she continued to volunteer for Athens Land Trust and assist the weekly farmers' market in Athens. Abigail said her desire to get involved beyond the walls of Four Towers and the ALEC program was founded in her belief that it is "important to start conversations with people who aren't directly in your line of contact." Furthermore, Abigail has found her purpose with "bridging relationships beyond the classroom."

Abigail's desire to create new connections and conversations has taken her around the world as she pursues her passion in agriculture. From her first international experience in Romania on the ALEC Maymester trip led by Dr. Borron, Abigail has been fueled with a desire to see more and do more internationally in agriculture.

With her first international experience under her belt, Abigail applied for a six-month exchange program in Spain, where she studied at the Universidad Publica de Navarra (UNPA). She was fully funded through an Erasmus grant from an existing UGA and UNPA partnership. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity allowed Abigail to study a variety of agricultural topics, while she immersed herself in the vibrant culture of Pamplona.

Abigail continued her passion in international agriculture and applied for the International Agriculture Certificate offered by the Office of Global Programs. She decided to take advantage of the IAC program and dig into her purpose even deeper. As a result of digging into agriculture, Abigail is currently completing her capstone internship with the [UGA Costa Rica](#) campus and will graduate in May 2019.

Abigail's time in Costa Rica this spring semester has provided her with an unparalleled opportunity to grow by exploring the boundaries of her comfort zone. Abigail mentioned how much she has changed from her unique experiences while traveling abroad and since she first began volunteering with the Athens Farmers' Market in 2014. These agricultural experiences have allowed her to become much more confident and open and continuously develop her personality as she feels much more capable of



*Abigail digging into her experience as she spent a morning milking cows with Dr. Borron in Costa Rica.*

doing great things in the agriculture community after graduation.

When asked why she wanted to "dig in" to agriculture, Abigail mentioned the following:

"The reason that I continue to pursue agriculture and communications is that I think agriculture is the ultimate equalizer. Everyone, everywhere, every age needs it. And it can be such a conversation starter. It can be such a source of a culture and social interaction. I think the opportunity that agriculture offers to reach across all cultures, all barriers and be present in everyone's lives, because everyone needs it and everyone relies on it. I think that's an understanding that everyone needs to have."

As for where Abigail will continue digging into agriculture after graduation? Well, she has an opportunity to work for the [Gwynn Valley Camp](#) located in Brevard, North Carolina, where she will be assisting with the camp-wide, farm-to-table program. This employment opportunity will enable Abigail to further her passion for agriculture by working with youth over the summer months to learn more about planting, harvesting and taking care of the land.

For anyone looking to find or rekindle their passion in life, Abigail mentioned you should "just go all in. This is your life and you just got to dive in and you don't know what's going to be there, but all you can do is to just dig it."

For more information on Abigail Pierce, the International Agriculture Certificate, or any additional ALEC departmental programming, please visit <http://alec.caes.uga.edu/>



# Alumni Spotlight

## Anna Hartley

### *When did you graduate from UGA?*

I graduated in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education and most recently, I finished the Master of Agricultural and Environmental Education program this past December.

### *Now that you've finished two degrees, where are you?*

After graduation, I took a position as the Cotton and Peanut Sustainability Educator for the University of Georgia located at the Tifton campus.

### *What are your responsibilities within the Cotton and Peanut Sustainability Educator role?*

I travel throughout Georgia as well as to some of the top-producing peanut and cotton states in the nation. I then set up meetings with the farmers, ask them questions about their farming practices and use a set of eight metrics to examine where the farmers are producing along the lines of carbon and greenhouse emissions, water quality, irrigation, water use and biodiversity. Once I finish the set of questions and acquire the information from the farmers, I come back to campus and input all this data into a calculator and it allows me to see where the farmers are outperforming based on the margins and their efficiency of operations. As per the educational side, I am able to create baseline comparisons for sustainability every time I interact with growers and can inform farmers and the public about their practices.

### *Why is this role important to farmers and the public?*

We know that consumers drive the market. And there has been a lot of pushback from consumers who say peanuts and cotton are not sustainable. Whether that's you making a choice at the grocery store or at a clothing store to move away from those unsustainable products, being able to provide traceability is important to large retailers and consumers, alike.

### *Why is this role important to farmers and the public?*

... So, we can have a fleet of farmers that select to participate in the interviews and I am then able to



Anna Hartley  
'17 & '19

Cotton & Peanut  
Sustainability Educator,  
University of Georgia.

help provide feedback and communicate or educate the public about what it is that our farmers' are doing on a regular basis. Farmers don't always have time to explain their job, but I have that time and my hope is to be able to tell their story through this data and have something to back up what we're saying.

### *How has your experience been adjusting to life outside of Athens?*

I guess I miss Athens, but I am glad to be back home. A lot of the people that I am working with know my family, so it's still kind of like being back in the department and working with a family. Since my dad is in the peanut industry, people see my last name and know who I am related to, so it makes it easy to make relationships back in south Georgia. So, it hasn't been too difficult, but there are some hard days.



*Two-time graduate of the ALEC department, Anna Hartley ('17 & '19) is proud of her new start working with cotton and peanut producers across the Southeast.*





# Alumni Spotlight

## Anna Hartley (cont. from p. 3)

*How do you feel like your time in the MAEE program prepared you for a career?*

I think a lot of the research classes are something that I use on a regular basis. I came into this position and started talking with a lot of the professors in Tifton that I work with and automatically learned that majority of the work we do is based on diffusion of innovations. It's really trying to get professors to accept new innovations within the department here and most of the professors that I work with are very content focusing in agriculture engineering and agriculture economics, so they don't quite have that understanding of why social sciences are important. But, I've been able to talk to them more about the social science and explain why it is important and how to tell a story using both qualitative and quantitative analysis with the interactions and numbers from our visits with farmers.

*What was your favorite class in the MAEE program?*

For my undergraduate experience, it was teaching with animals, for sure. It provided me an opportunity to get pushed outside of my comfort zone and helped me to grow as an individual. In my master's program, I would have to say that my favorite class was the Scotland study abroad trip, which was also where I collected my thesis data.

*If you have advice for any current MAEE students or prospective students looking to apply for the MAEE program, what would that be?*

It's important to recognize the difference between your undergraduate experience and your time in the master's program. In your master's program, you are provided an opportunity to be viewed more as a colleague rather than a student. Use this opportunity to develop relationships with the professors, while also using time in graduate school to learn and do the best in the program that you can. If you are able to do these things, you

are in a position to have mentors that you can talk to when times are stressful and need someone to help. Even now, I still talk with my thesis committee members and those from within the department regularly.

*What was your thesis research focused on?*

My thesis was focused on conducting a case study that centered on international experiences with preparing pre-service teachers with multicultural experiences through education. Being able to see pre-service teachers interact in other, dominant cultures causes you to be more empathetic to your students and your skillset as a teacher. This is necessary to help understand the difficulties within multiple cultures and the ways in which we can broaden global perspectives with teachers who will come back to educate and inform the next generation of agricultural teachers.

*Alumni Highlight written by Chandler Mulvaney.*



*Anna representing UGA and the ALEC department in Scotland where she collected her thesis data.*



# The Swiss Army Knife of Graduate Assistants

By: Chandler Mulvaney,  
ALEC Graduate Student

Originally from Toccoa, Georgia, and only 45 minutes from the University of Georgia, Ben Byrd finished his undergraduate degree in horticulture with an emphasis in sustainable food programs in 2017. After graduating from UGA with his Bachelor of Science, Ben decided it was time to join the greenhouse industry and put his degree to work.

After working in the horticulture industry for a year, Ben was reminded of how much he enjoyed teaching, educating and informing students, rather than working with plants. Ben's desire to teach, led him to Dr. Peake and the MAEE program where he enrolled in 2018 and studied from a distance while still fully employed for the fall 2018 semester.

When asked why he decided to enroll in the MAEE program, Ben responded by saying:

"It really sparked my interest again for working in a classroom with students, rather than in a greenhouse."

In just his second semester, Ben's interest in connecting the real-world with applied agriculture education settings was rewarded with a teaching assistantship within the ALEC department. Moving from an online setting to working inside the day-to-day activities of the ALEC department was an adjustment that Ben was ready to embrace. With his new responsibilities as a teaching assistant, Ben was responsible for two classes and working a 20-hour assistantship appointment each week. As for his thoughts on his new responsibilities this past semester, Ben said the following:

semester, Ben said the following: "It's a cool layout as far as what I get to do. I am teaching two classes, one of which is a service-learning class called the project FOCUS. FOCUS is an acronym for "Fostering Our Community's Understanding of Science." We have students go out into the community and teach an elementary school science-based concepts. The students are not education majors there, instead they are traditional science majors.



*Ben is ready to continue in the MAEE program and use his skills as a future Ag Teacher.*

So it's basically creating an opportunity for them to foster the ability to be effective science communicator. In addition to the FOCUS course, I also help Dr. Peake with a First Year Odyssey seminar class called Environmental Education in the Wild. It is a hands-on experiential learning class, combining equal parts of environmental education with the pedagogy 'how-to' in order to effectively teach environmental education. Both classes are hands-on, and both get students involved in a more nontraditional classroom set up, which I really enjoy. I cover grades, checking student journals, focusing on the students' needs and I'm grateful to have gotten the chance to be able to teach a

few classes on my own as well."

As Ben continues to settle into his job as a graduate teaching assistant, he believes that he should be like a Swiss Army knife when helping Dr. Peake, his students and the department. Being able to assist where needed, adapt to the situation at hand and be flexible with students has allowed Ben to feel confident about his future in the MAEE program and beyond.

Ben mentioned his role as a graduate teaching assistant and Swiss Army knife to Dr. Peake has provided him a platform to grow outside of his comfort zone and hone his ability to communicate with diverse audiences, learn how to be a more effective teacher and work in an academic setting. However, had he been provided the opportunity to have a do-over this past semester, Ben said he would have liked to be more involved with departmental activities and be fearless in asking questions, seeking help and guidance from those who have the expertise.

Moving forward in his time with the MAEE program, Ben is excited to continue working in the classroom and embracing his newfound perspective about graduate school. When asked about what he is looking forward to the most with his time left in the MAEE program, Ben said:

"In previous lines of professional work, it's like, oh man, I've got to do this, I've got to do that. Now, in graduate school, it's more like I get to do this."

With an opportunistic mindset, Ben is looking to embrace this opportunity as a graduate teaching assistant as he 'gets' to work alongside students in the classroom and help them identify their professional goals after graduating from UGA.



# The Perspectives of an International Graduate Student

## ***As an international graduate student, what motivated you to come to UGA and pursue the MAEE program?***

I've got a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Engineering (University of Sao Paulo) and I am passionate about agriculture. After I graduated I felt that I did not have enough knowledge about the social compound of agriculture as my undergrad courses were more focused towards the "hard" sciences. I looked for graduate programs that allowed me to learn more about agricultural extension, communication and education. Unfortunately, I could not find any in Brazil so I started looking for programs abroad. UGA was always my first option as I had come here in 2015 for a 10 month-internship and really like the university. I found the MAEE program online and what I liked about it was that it is focused on developing professionals to lead, teach and communicate about food, environmental and social systems – exactly what I was looking for! I contacted Dr. Nick Fuhrman, the graduate coordinator at the time, and he was super friendly. He invited me to talk over Skype and he explained me all the application process. I felt I had his support. To be honest, he was one of the main reasons why I chose to come to UGA. The way Dr. Fuhrman treated me made a huge difference. He helped me find an advisor, Dr. Kay Kelsey, who I feel blessed to have the opportunity to work with.

## ***How would you describe your journey of growth within the MAEE program?***

When I started the program I was pretty lost and I had a lot a help from my friends Anna Hartley and Chandler Mulvaney, who were in the program with me. It took me some time to get familiarized with the American school system but everyone – my peers, professors and adviser - was really supportive. The thing I like the most about ALEC is how people are friendly and willing to help when you need.

## ***What have been the biggest challenges as an international graduate student?***

Adapting is a difficult process. The language, the food, the traditions... It has been over a year and I still feel homesick sometimes. I would say that is the biggest challenge: being away from your family/friends and being inserted in a culture that is not yours.

## ***Describe a moment of success in your graduate studies?***

I was invited to present my thesis research in two conferences last year: Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Conference (Madison, Wisconsin) and Organic Agriculture Research Forum (Portland, Oregon). The Graduate School and the ALEC department funded my travels. I consider these successful moments because I felt that my work was being recognized and valued. I also got a lot of positive feedback from the audiences and this increased my motivation in continuing my research work.

## ***What has been the most impactful experience or person during your***

## ***time at UGA and in the MAEE program? How did that person/experience factor into your success?***

Many people helped me a lot during the MAEE program but I would say that Dr. Kay Kelsey was the most impactful person. As my advisor she guided me through the program and through my thesis research. She pushed me real hard, what allowed me to graduate in one-and-a-half-years. She is an amazing mentor and I learned so much from her – about school stuff and also about life. I love working with her and I dedicated a big part of my success to her.

## ***What would you recommend to other international graduate students looking to pursue their master's at UGA?***

Talk to professors ahead of applying (preferably by Skype, Zoom), read the student handbook and be aware of all the requirements of the program. Basically just make sure that this program is really what you want. I would also recommend to check the student fees and work on a budget so you do not struggle over money once you get here.

## ***In your opinion, what characteristics make a successful graduate student?***

A successful graduate student is eager to learn, passionate about his/her research topic, organized, committed, able to read lots of stuff about research.



***Thesis defense complete! Amanda after she had just finished her defense process several weeks ago. She is starting her Ph.D. in Horticulture at UGA in the Fall.***

