

# Thought Leaders

HOW ATLANTA'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS CONTRIBUTE TO THE CITY'S BUSINESS SAVVY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. **BY SELENA FRAGASSI**

► With business thriving in many public and private sectors, including creative industries such as film and television and service

industries such as health care and nursing, many have credited Atlanta's array of award-winning higher education institutions for the capital city's ongoing milestones. This year, *U.S. News & World Report* designated three Atlanta schools as being among the most innovative.

"Our higher education system is focused on responding to needs in the local economy and creating innovative programs that will prepare students for success in those areas," says Elizabeth Kiss, board chair of the Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education, citing the \$9.5 billion Georgia film industry as one example. Atlanta is also considered to be a public health capital, so naturally, universities excel in this field. Emory University leads the way with the Rollins School of Public Health while Morehouse School of Medicine produces many

**CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Georgia State University; Georgia Institute of Technology; Kennesaw State University; Mercer University.**

doctors serving in urban and rural areas.

And as Tamala Fortson, interim executive director of the Atlanta University Center Consortium (which encompasses four historically black colleges and universities), explains, close and candid relationships with the city's high-profile corporate citizens are what makes this economic-educational synergy tick.

"We try and make sure that we have open, honest communication to ensure we know exactly what [companies] are looking for and the type of student they are looking for," she says. "We train students appropriately in their undergrad studies so the employer sees they are shaped in a way that's beneficial for them—and good for the student's career aspirations after they leave one of our schools."

Here are some of the institutions setting Atlanta's educational bar higher.

## Clark Atlanta University

**THE BASICS:** The largest of the United Negro College Fund institutions, Clark Atlanta University was founded when Atlanta University and Clark College consolidated in 1988. The university offers 38 major areas of study through four schools.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** CAU's Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurial Development has received a \$940,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce to develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem in Southwest Atlanta around urban agriculture food distribution.

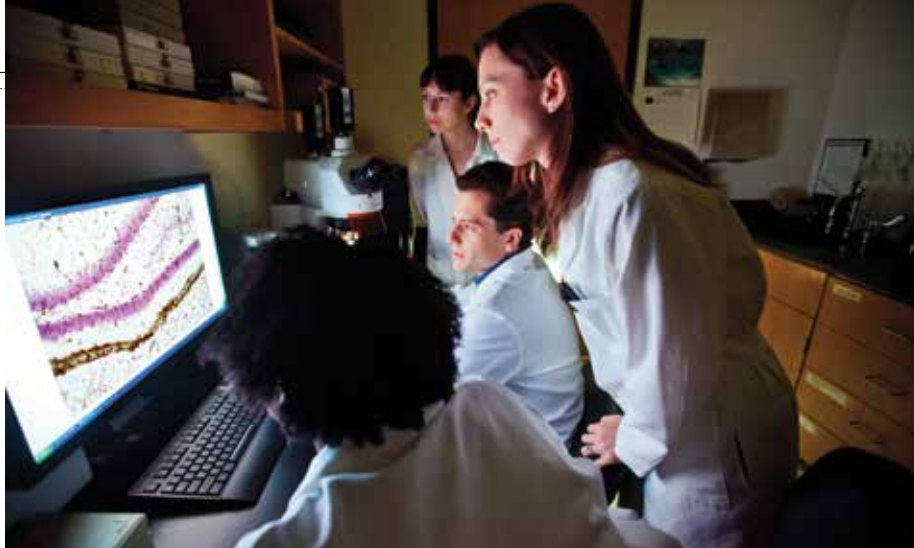
**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** Over the past three years, CAU has partnered with Metro Atlanta Urban Farm to welcome 1,000 young leaders from Sub-Saharan Africa to hone their skills at the university while performing community service at the farm. CAU's Center for Cancer Research and Therapeutic Development is home to the world-renowned Prostate Cancer Research Center, the only one of its kind in the nation focused on preventing and curing prostate cancer in black men.

## Columbia Theological Seminary

**THE BASICS:** Columbia Theological Seminary helps students connect their passions for service and justice with their exploration of faith. It was founded in 1828; today its community includes 300 students in degree programs and 700 participants in lifelong learning courses designed for all levels of the church.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** CTS faculty have received numerous awards, including a Manfred Lautenschlaeger Award for Theological Promise and five Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** The seminary is 1 of 10 to be



**FROM TOP LEFT:**  
Morehouse College;  
Emory University.

part of the Science for Seminaries pilot program through the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Association of Theological Schools.

#### **Emory University**

**THE BASICS:** With an international reputation as one of the world's leading academic medical centers, Emory University prides itself on innovation that makes waves in society. As a liberal arts institution, there are also 50 departments and programs that attracted Emory's largest pool of applicants ever in 2017.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** In 2017, the university received a record \$628 million in external research funding, which will allow continued advancements in the fields of neuroscience, cancer, organ transplantation, genetics and infectious diseases.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** Since 2014, Emory College of Arts and Sciences has offered a quantitative sciences major, the first of its kind in the country, to help students gain a mastery of data and apply it to another area of study.

#### **Emory University Goizueta Business School**

**THE BASICS:** Named for the late Roberto C. Goizueta, former chairman and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company. In addition to undergraduate and MBA programs, GBS offers a master's of business analytics and a doctoral degree as well as nondegree executive education courses.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** The school's full-time MBA program has earned a top 25 ranking in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Economist*, *Financial Times* and *Forbes*. In 2017 the nondegree executive education program was ranked seventh in the United States by *Financial Times*. The school also has established experiential learning opportunities with the American Cancer Society, The Home Depot and Turner Broadcasting.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** This year, dean Erika James started Goizueta Beyond, a program that

leverages business practices for the common good. "Students quickly understand the value of community and how, working together, we can accomplish great things previously thought impossible," says James.

#### **Georgia Institute of Technology**

**THE BASICS:** Georgia Tech is one of the nation's leading research universities with 26,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** Georgia Tech is ranked No. 7 among public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*. Its industrial engineering program has been ranked No. 1 for more than 20 years.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** In 2014, Georgia Tech offered the first professional online master of science degree in computer science that can be earned completely through the "massive online" format.

#### **Georgia State University**

**THE BASICS:** Georgia State has grown to be the largest university in Georgia with more than 51,000 students. Students are involved in 100 fields of study with 250-plus undergraduate and graduate degrees.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** *U.S. News & World Report* awarded the university with two distinctions in its 2018 forecast: the fourth-most-innovative school in the country and the eighth best for undergraduate teaching.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** The Creative Media Industries Institute is a direct response to Georgia's growing film and digital media industries. CMII's state-of-the-art facility features advanced studios and production suites for students. "Our model for proactively supporting students in innovative ways is leveling the playing field so students from all backgrounds succeed," says Mark Becker, president.

#### **The Interdenominational Theological Center**

**THE BASICS:** Founded in 1958 as the first home of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonvio-

## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Atlanta University Center Consortium schools don't just educate students. They bring resources and education to the community.

**A**s the world's oldest and largest association of historically black colleges and universities (comprising Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, Morehouse School of Medicine and Spelman College), the Atlanta University Center Consortium provides many benefits to students: cross-registration between institutions, dual degree engineering programs, career planning and more. The 88-year-old nonprofit organization believes education doesn't stop in the classroom. AUCC has a long track record of providing service to and civic engagement with its community. "We believe we have a duty to be good citizens and good stewards with all the gifts and resources we have in our institutions . . . to not only enrich students but give back to those in our community and help [effect] change," says Tamala Fortson, executive director of AUCC. In addition to working closely with the University Community Development Corpora-



tion to acquire and facilitate housing for families in low-wealth neighborhoods adjacent to the consortium, AUCC also founded a lifelong learning program called CommUniversity in 2012 to provide community-focused learning opportunities and financial forums for local residents. Regular programming includes assessments of business plans, accounting plan assistance and scholarship seed money. There are also debt and credit consultations and one-on-one legal advice workshops. "Our goal is really to enhance the quality of life in our neighboring communities and maximize opportunities" says Fortson. — S. F.

lent Social Change, it became ground zero for the Atlanta civil rights movement. Today, this professional graduate school of theology brings together a consortium of five African-American Christian seminaries and one fellowship.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** ITC is the largest freestanding African-American theological school in the United States.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** ITC offers a unique approach to the study of the gospel that marries social justice with its message. It's also home to the Black Women in Church Society, which facilitates the inclusion and full participation of women in church and society. ITC is "where students enter and leaders depart," says Dr. Edward L. Wheeler, president.

### Kennesaw State University

**THE BASICS:** More than 35,000 students from 140 countries call Kennesaw State University home. The university offers 150-plus undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** As one of the 50 largest public institutions in the country, KSU is among the top 10 percent of institutions nationally recognized for collaborations with its community, evidenced by an economic impact that exceeds \$1.3 billion.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** KSU was one of the first schools to offer a doctorate in data analytics. It also has a thriving program in computer game design and development.

### Mercer University

**THE BASICS:** Founded in 1833, Mercer is made up of more than 8,700 students enrolled in 12 schools

and colleges across three campuses.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** Considered one of the top 50 private research universities in the country conducting groundbreaking cancer and drug delivery research. The university consistently ranks among the nation's leading universities in community service.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** The Mercer On Mission initiative has sent more than 1,300 students and 200 faculty members to 30 countries around the globe to help solve real-world problems. "We like to say that, at Mercer, everyone majors in changing the world," says William D. Underwood, president.

### Morehouse College

**THE BASICS:** Morehouse College is a modern snapshot of American history, as the country's only historically black college for men that bears roots as a school where former slaves were given an opportunity to participate in higher education. Founded in 1867 at the site of a former Civil War battlefield, today it touts an enrollment of 2,200-plus students.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** Its lineage of famous "Morehouse Men," includes alumni Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., filmmaker Spike Lee, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher and civil rights leader Howard Thurman. As Morehouse celebrates its 150th anniversary this year, it also welcomes distinctions such as the fifth-most-entrepreneurial college (according to *Forbes*).

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** Recently, Morehouse received a \$1 million donation from Newell Brands Inc. to support the expansion of the school's STEM pro-



“Oglethorpe has a startup mentality and spirit of innovation. That allows us to rethink and reinvent curriculum and business practices to respond to a rapidly changing economic climate,” says Lawrence M. Schall, president.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** In September, Oglethorpe announced a \$50 million gift to establish a school of business, a record for the largest gift given to create a business school at a liberal arts university.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** The Atlanta Laboratory for Learning is an incubator for experiential learning opportunities.

### Savannah College of Art and Design

**THE BASICS:** Creativity and career preparation are at the heart of SCAD, which was founded in 1978 and has since expanded to Atlanta, Hong Kong and Lacoste, France. SCAD is the largest non-profit art and design institution in the U.S.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** SCAD has opened three museums and has received accolades from DesignIntelligence and the National Council of Architectural review board; it has been accredited by the Council for Interior Design.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** SCAD offers the first-ever user experience design degree created in collaboration with Google and is the only higher ed institution that hosts a professional casting office.

### Spelman College

**THE BASICS:** Dating back to 1881, Spelman is a highly selective and historically black liberal arts college for women with a mission to empower its students to change the world. It graduates the highest number of black women who go on to earn doctorates in science and engineering.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked Spelman the No. 1 historically black college for 11 consecutive years. Spelman is also a top Fulbright Scholar-producing institution; its graduation rate is 30 points higher than the national average for African Americans.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** The curatorial studies program aims to address a diversity gap in the museum industry, while the Levi Watkins Jr. Scholars Program explores race, gender and sexuality.

### University of Georgia

**THE BASICS:** Considered the birthplace of public higher education in America, UGA was originally chartered by the state in 1785. Its 17 colleges and schools have been ranked among top public options in *Forbes* and *U.S. News & World Report*.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** *The New York Times* placed UGA at No. 28 in its 2017 College Access Index among public universities “doing the most for the American Dream.”

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** Its undergrad experiential learning initiatives are unparalleled in the higher education sector. ▽



**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Oglethorpe University; Savannah College of Art and Design; Clark Atlanta University.

grams. A unique diplomats-in-residence program exposes students to foreign service work and international career opportunities.

### Morehouse School of Medicine

**THE BASICS:** Founded to address the shortage of doctors in Georgia, with a mission to serve the underserved. In 39 years, the school has grown from an initial class of 22 to more than 100 future physicians enrolled in 2017, the largest class in its history.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** In addition to training the next generation of health practitioners, MSM focuses on innovative research for issues that disproportionately affect communities of color. “We are realizing that one size doesn’t fit all, and with that realization comes the ability to provide better quality of care,” says MSM president and dean Valerie Montgomery Rice, M.D.

**UNIQUE PROGRAMS:** MSM runs a “living laboratory” devoted to studying strokes and stroke prevention.

### Oglethorpe University

**THE BASICS:** This liberal arts university has become one of the fastest-growing private universities in the state with a majority of its 1,250 students seeking out majors in STEM fields and business.