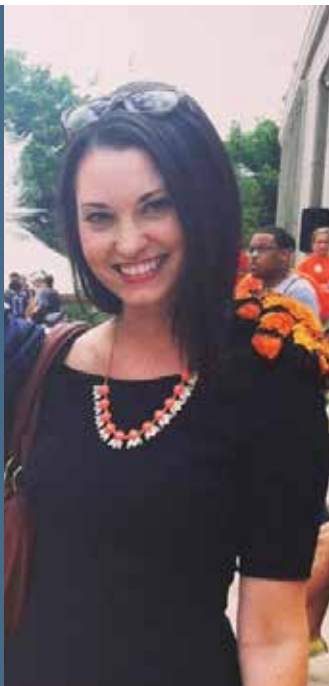


CINDY HOLLAND TORBERT



LAUREN HAYES SMITH



JACQUELINE KECK



LEADERS IN LIBERAL ARTS

FEATURING FORMER AND CURRENT AUBURN WOMEN SGA PRESIDENTS

In 1892, three women secured their unique role in Auburn history by becoming the first coeds to attend the university, thus creating a bond between them forever. They were the pioneers who broke down barriers and opened the door for others to follow after them. Similar to our earliest coeds, three of our own Liberal Arts students, two past and one current, share a bond by being the only three women in Auburn's history to be elected president of the Student Government Association.

Cindy Holland Torbert became the first woman elected as Student Government Association president in 1988. She graduated in 1989 from the College of Liberal Arts with a degree in public relations/journalism. She went on to earn a law degree from the University of Alabama and is an attorney in Montgomery, AL.

It would take two decades for the next woman to win SGA president, **Lauren Hayes Smith**, in 2008. She graduated with her degree in public relations and German from the College of Liberal Arts in 2009. Upon graduation, Smith moved to Washington, DC, to work for a government consulting firm. After spending a year in DC, she moved to the United Kingdom to attain her master's degree at the University of Cambridge. Today, she lives in Nashville, TN, and serves as the founding chief of staff at a charter school network called Valor Collegiate Academies.

On February 9, 2017, College of Liberal Arts senior **Jacqueline Keck** made history by becoming the third woman elected as Student Government Association president. Keck is majoring in economics and will graduate in May 2018. She hopes to pursue a career in economic development in order to provide for communities and to create places that allow others to thrive.



BY | JAYLIN GOODWIN

I had the opportunity to ask each of the three female Student Government Association presidents a few questions to learn more about who they are, and their time serving Auburn as SGA president.

JG: What inspired you to run for SGA President?

CHT: In short, I thought I could help. Before deciding to run, I had been a member of the SGA cabinet, and I also served as a senator from the College of Liberal Arts. As a cabinet member, I was heavily involved in the student referendum to change from the quarter to the semester system. In that role, I saw what student initiatives could accomplish, and I was energized. Ultimately, I decided to run for SGA president because I thought my experience would allow me to do a good job for the SGA and Auburn.

LHT: I never planned to run for SGA president, but as I approached my junior year, a few people began approaching me with the idea. After first dismissing it, I took time to think and pray about the opportunity and slowly an excitement and confidence grew about pursuing it. In the end, I ran for SGA president because I believed both that I understood our student body's priorities and that I had built strong relationships with administrators to help make some really exciting student-centric projects happen.

JK: I have always had a deep desire to leave each place and position I serve in better than I found it, and as I thought about my last year of Auburn I asked myself what avenue is it that would provide me the opportunity to create positive change and leave Auburn a little bit better than I found it. That question was answered through creating an avenue to serve as SGA president.

JG: What is your favorite memory from your term in office?

CHT: My favorite memory is also my most embarrassing moment. I overslept and missed a meeting with then university president, Jim Martin, and SGA members. I think I had even requested the meeting. I was mortified, and I went to Dr. Martin to apologize. I will never forget how he smiled, laughed, and made me understand that my error was nothing more than a small mistake by a young college student.

LHS: My favorite memory is actually the evening of "callouts" for the next year's SGA president and executive team. That night, our team learned that our student referendum to build a new

recreation and wellness center passed by 74% and essentially gave the Board of Trustees the green light to move forward with construction. It was a really exciting moment after spending nearly a full year on the initiative, and it was rewarding to go out of office knowing that we were helping to lay the foundation for something that would long outlast our tenure.

JK: My favorite memory thus far has been a retreat planning session with my executive team. It was in this work session I saw cohesion amongst student leaders whose desire was to serve Auburn and equip others to do the same. As ideas were thrown out and ran with, they were all done selflessly and with others in mind. In this moment I was proud and got to see the Auburn spirit in action under the idea of service.



Current SGA President Jacqueline Keck



JG: What is the toughest lesson you learned from your time as SGA president?

CHT: It is difficult to get people to agree upon anything.

LHS: The toughest lesson I learned is that you can't always make everyone happy. As a self-proclaimed people-pleaser, this was really tough for me. However, accepting this fact pushed me to listen to all sides with an open heart and mind as well as to think deeply about Auburn's and my own values and priorities before making decisions. It made the job challenging at times but was an invaluable lesson to learn for my future career.

JK: That life goes on and people are the best investment. As I focus so intently on what's in front of me—whatever goal, project, problem, or victory—it is all fleeting. I believe in my work and the impact we make as SGA, but it will not be a completed project that will be remembered years from now, but rather the people you took time to cherish and celebrate with.

JG: What was your administration's biggest focus or what was your biggest goal to implement throughout your term?

CHT: As a public relations/journalism major, I was keen on communication. It was my goal to open communication between the students, faculty, and administration. So, I wrote a column for *The Plainsman*, appeared on radio station WEGL, attended Faculty-Senate meetings, and held Student-Forum meetings to discuss issues affecting Auburn at that time.

LHS: My most exciting and ambitious goal for the year was to align our administration and Board of Trustees around building a new student recreation and wellness center. At the time, we had the worst "student act" in the SEC, and it was very clear that the student body wanted this to be a top priority moving forward. Throughout our year in office, our SGA Executive Team worked closely with the Board and the President's Cabinet to select an architecture firm, help design the building, and ultimately lead the campaign to raise student fees to cover the cost of the facility.

JK: Empowering all students within SGA to be knowledgeable and equipped to create change themselves, evaluating and expanding the Auburn Intern Housing Initiative, and Student Activity Center renovations.



Fun Fact: In 1987, women made up 42.9% of Auburn's student body. Now, thirty years later, women are almost half of the enrollment with 49.5%.

JG: Do you believe your liberal arts background helped prepare you to serve as SGA president?

CHT: Yes, without a doubt!

LHS: I loved my well-rounded experience as a CLA student at Auburn and believe it prepared me well for this role. My faculty and peers were extremely supportive before and during my term in office, and it was especially interesting to be able to take courses in government, nonprofit management, and policy-related classes that felt so relevant for my position. Due to missing quite a few classes during a busy season, however, I am embarrassed to admit that I received my first B at Auburn during my year as SGA president...ironically in a class called The American Presidency!

JK: Absolutely! Through economics I've learned a thought process that taught me to look at all the data and ask questions people normally wouldn't think of. It has been really cool to see econ play a role in my day-to-day decisions as a student leader.

JG: Throughout 2017, Auburn University is celebrating the 125th anniversary of Auburn women. Why do you think it is important to celebrate our history and remember the pioneers who paved the way for our success?

CHT: As a society, we all learn from each other's successes and failures. Auburn women, like Auburn men, have shaped our current Auburn. We are wise to celebrate and remember both the historical positive and negative, so that we can all better guide Auburn into the future.

LHS: It's so easy to take the opportunities that we have today for granted. I'm so glad that Auburn is taking the time to reflect on both the challenges and the incredible progress we have made, as well as to appreciate the women and men who helped make that progress possible for all of us.


JK: I think it is important to recognize and honor the path that was paved for us and those who paved it. Without them I wouldn't be able to stand confidently as SGA president today. It was the sacrifice they made that has allowed women to play key roles in Auburn.



JG: If you could give one piece of advice to future generations of Auburn women who desire to run for leadership positions on campus, what would you say?

CHT: I can't just give one piece of advice, so I will give several. First, embrace your education—get to know your professors, read, study, work hard, and learn. Second, get involved in any of Auburn's extra-curricular areas that interest you—meet people, exchange ideas, and work hard. Third, make yourself knowledgeable about Auburn—read *The Plainsman* and other student and university publications, attend meetings, and discuss with others issues relevant to Auburn. Then, if you think you have something to offer Auburn, run for a leadership position.

LHS: Go for it! Don't let others choose your path. Decide what you are passionate about and what your unique skill sets are, and find the role that best allows you to use them.

JK: To listen to the encouragement of others—often times they see something in you that you don't see in yourself. Listen to that and allow that to propel you to be brave. 

What's Your Auburn Story? Go to alumni.auburn.edu/women to submit your story.