



Georgia Southwestern State University

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY

Georgia Southwestern State University's (GSW) mission is to "cultivate excellence in learning and teaching that encourages intellectual, personal, and social growth for students, faculty, staff, and the community." The primary service region of Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW) consists of Sumter County and the seven counties contiguous with it: Crisp, Dooly, Lee, Macon, Marion, Schley, Terrell, and Webster counties. The majority of these counties are among the poorest counties in the state of Georgia. Therefore, majority of GSW's student body are Pell eligible or First-Generation college students. Our focus is on cultivating growth in these high-risk student groups specifically, while improving retention, progression, and graduation rates for all GSW students. The strategies GSW pursued during the first five years of Complete College Georgia were chosen to cultivate excellence and persistence in all GSW students.

GSW's total enrollment in fall 2016 was 2974. At that time, the gender distribution of the student POPULATION was 64.9% women and 35.1% men. The ethnicity of the fall 2016 student population was 64.5% White, 26.2% Black, 2.8% Asian and Pacific Islander, 4.3% Hispanic, 1.7% Multiracial, 0.2% Native American and 0.3% Unknown. Approximately 42% of GSW undergraduates receive Pell Grants; 52% are First-Generation college students (no parent/guardian with bachelor degree or higher); 20% began college for the first time as adults (25 years old or older); and 26% are age 25 or older. The majority of our undergraduates (69.2%) are classified as full-time (taking 12 or more hours); 32.4% live on campus; 50% are enrolled in one or more online classes; and 23% are enrolled exclusively in online classes. These populations are also representative of our recent graduates. Out of the undergraduates who were awarded bachelor's degrees in FY17, 57% had received the Pell grant while enrolled at GSW, 54% were first-generation students, and 26% were 29 or older at the time of graduation.

This past year, GSW has concentrated upon five high-impact strategies targeted at improving growth, retention, progression, and graduation in our most vulnerable students, many of which will also positively impact all GSW students. We have re-established our summer bridge program, now called the Hurricane Jumpstart Academy, as a more comprehensive experience for the students in the program. As part of our participation in Gateway to Completion, we have begun a comprehensive redesign of our MATH 1111 College Algebra course to improve pass rates and thereby improve retention and progression rates, as well. A personal finance education program, established as a pilot in 2014-15 by GSW's Career Services Office, continued to expand in 2016-17. This program is important because although all student are vulnerable to financial issues to some degree, Pell-Eligible and First-Generation students are especially. We began getting encouraging assessment results for GSW's Windows to the World Program that suggest our students are experiencing gains in their intercultural knowledge and communication skills. Lastly, GSW continues to use and improve our use of the Beacon Early Warning System to monitor student academic success and intervene to support at-risk students, and the Canes Connect Student Engagement System to encourage engagement in campus and community activities.

INSTITUTIONAL COMPLETION GOALS, HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES & ACTIVITIES

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY #1: HURRICANE JUMPSTART ACADEMY

The Hurricane Jumpstart Academy is a summer bridge program designed to help presidential exceptions transition from high school to GSW as smoothly as possible.

COMPLETION GOAL

The institutional goal for this program is to make access a meaningful opportunity for students who might not otherwise start at a four-year university by not only giving them access, but also giving them the additional support they need to thrive.

DEMONSTRATION OF PRIORITY OR IMPACT

GSW staged its first summer bridge program just prior to orientation in fall 2014, and our retention rate for the fall 2014 cohort was higher than it has been for any cohort since 2007. While we are not asserting that this program was the sole cause of the 2014 retention rate, we believe it was a contributing factor, responsible in part for the less impressive numbers for the 2015 and 2016 cohorts.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

The 2014 summer bridge program was presented as a one-week academic skills and engagement “boot camp.” Although this program was apparently successful in improving retention, it was funded through a grant and it was decided that this was not a sustainable model. In 2017 GSW developed and implemented a more traditional summer bridge program similar to those used by several USG institutions. For this program students admitted as presidential exceptions were invited to participate. All students enrolled in two courses (ENGL 1101 and SOSC 1101) during a five-week summer semester. Students were encouraged to live on campus and all residential students were housed on the same floor. Students were also presented with a variety of academic skills classes and were required to attend tutoring for both courses. There were also a variety of activities on and off campus to help encourage engagement with the campus community. Each week of the program students also participated in a service learning activity in the Americus area.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS AND PROGRESS

It is far too early to assess any effects on retention or graduation from this program. However, all of the students who participated in the Hurricane Jumpstart Academy successfully completed both of the courses and all have enrolled for the fall semester. Feedback from the students was universally highly positive. The faculty members who taught the two courses reported a remarkable level of engagement among the students and found it a highly positive experience. We will track the progression of these students for comparison with presidential exceptions in the same cohort who did not participate.

LESSONS LEARNED

Planning for the 2017 Jumpstart Academy began fairly late in the 2016/2017 academic year. This limited our ability to advertise the program to potential student participants. The main lesson has been that we need to initiate communication with the students much earlier in the year and take additional steps to ensure solid commitment to the program. We also found that a brief overall orientation session would be helpful.

POINT OF CONTACT

J. Kelly McCoy, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY #2: GATEWAY TO COMPLETION REDESIGN OF MATH 1111

MATH 1111 College Algebra is among the gateway courses at GSW with the highest DFWI rates historically, so it was a natural choice for our participation in the USG’s first cohort of Gateway to Completion institutions.

COMPLETION GOAL

The redesigned MATH 1111 is part of a two-pronged strategy to increase persistence and progression by restricting the delivery of MATH 1111 primarily to STEM majors, and to get non-STEM majors in the right Core Area A2 course by adding MATH 1001 Quantitative Reasoning as a Core curriculum option.

DEMONSTRATION OF PRIORITY OR IMPACT

MATH 1111 College Algebra is a gateway course for many STEM majors, especially the more unprepared students, so this redesign may affect the timely progression of significant numbers of our STEM major candidates and therefore increase degree productivity in some of GSW’s lower producing programs.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

2016-17 was GSW’s first year of the three-year Gateway to Completion course redesign cycle in which the activities encourage a comprehensive consideration of the current state of the course slated for redesign and of ways to improve the delivery and outcomes of the course. GSW’s MATH 1111 course-level committee worked through six sets of Principles and Key Performance Indicators during spring 2017 and the G2C steering committee facilitated three synthesis meetings that lead to a comprehensive report on the current state of MATH 1111 and a set of recommendations for improvement. The final version of this report is currently in progress. In addition, GSW undertook two parallel and complementary course design efforts. Discussions during the first year of the G2C process also led the Department of Mathematics to propose the inclusion of MATH 1001 as an Area A2 option in GSW’s Core curriculum. MATH 1001 was approved by the USG General Education Council for inclusion in Area A2 of GSW’s Core curriculum at the council’s July 2017 meeting, and is being taught for the first time in fall 2017. This move complements the G2C redesign of MATH 1111 by implementing the Regent’s Advisory Committee on Mathematical Subjects recommendation for MATH Pathways. Finally, GSW’s Mathematics department is also undertaking a redesign of the co-requisite support class MATH 0999 and developing the co-requisite support class MATH 0997 to complement its comprehensive redesign of GSW’ Area A2 curriculum that promises to improve success rates in that area of the Core for all GSW students.

MEASURE OF PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

GSW's primary measures of success for this strategy are the overall DFWI rate for MATH 1111, as well as the success rate of first year students in the course, defined as percentage of student receiving an A, B, or C in the course during fall term. The DFWI rate in MATH 1111 during 2014-15 was 34.9%, while the success rate for the 2015 cohort of incoming freshmen was 71.8%. GSW monitors these measures on a year-to-year basis. GSW's long-term goals are to decrease DFWI rates to below 25% and increase first-term freshmen success rates to above 80%.

LESSONS LEARNED

The primary lesson learned is that GSW needs to devote more resources to faculty development to bring greater awareness to all its faculty of high-impact pedagogical strategies with emphasis on developing its MATH faculty. We will be initiating series of symposia on engaged-learning strategies during the 2017-18 academic year. In addition, we hope to be able to undertake G2C redesign on two other courses, ENGL 1102 Composition II and BIOL 1107 Essentials of Biology during 2017-18.

POINT OF CONTACT

Lynda Lee Purvis, Interim Vice President of Academic Affairs

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY #3: FINANCIAL LITERACY COURSE

The GSW Office of Career Services provided a financial literacy course for the third year that was a non-credit and voluntary course. Participating students learn the importance of managing their financial resources well and completing college while hearing about saving for emergencies and school expenses, budgeting, avoiding credit card debt, "wants," "needs," and more. They learn how to make effective financial planning decisions in the future.

COMPLETION GOALS

Increased financial literacy among all students will result in increased persistence and progression towards degrees since financial difficulties are a major cause of students stopping out of college. Financial literacy also aligns with GSW strategic plan goal of "expanding high-impact teaching and learning experiences" in and out of the classroom.

DEMONSTRATION OF PRIORITY OR IMPACT

Forty-two percent of GSW's fall 2016 students were Pell Grant recipients, fifty-one percent were First-Generation students, and twenty-six percent were non-traditional students who likely have more financial responsibilities than traditional college students. Moreover, all students, not just those students identified by both CCG and GSW as critical to the success of our efforts, should benefit from a higher level of financial literacy. Importantly, offering the course to the entire student body in a broad-based manner will remove the stigmas that may prevent students from seeking help as recommended in the CCG-BFA resource, and has the potential to have a significant impact on all students.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

In 2016-17, GSW's Career Services Office purchased annual site license for the second year for the *Foundations in Personal Finance* materials, and incorporated financial literacy into the Hurricane Force Program, which guides students in career planning throughout their years at GSW. Career Services also introduced the topic of financial literacy in classes and group presentations, and at each Preview Day, as well as at Storm Day orientations for fall term 2017. Career Services offered the program in the evenings, as well as by appointment.

MEASURES OF PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

Tracking student attendance and administering a pre- and post-test at each presentation are interim measures of success. Tracking progression and graduation of students who attended presentations for comparison with those who did not are long-term measures of success.

During 2016-17, 33 students attended more than one session of the financial literacy program: 9 students attended 2-4 sessions, 4 attended 5-8, and 6 attended 10-12, which qualified each of them to receive a certificate of completion. In addition, one UNIV 1000 orientation instructor used a session from the program in class to help students concerned with their finances. Other partial sessions were used by one instructor in a Business class of approximately 35 students and another was used as a part of "Money Talks" presentation for Pines Residence Hall. All students in each session showed improvement from Pre-Tests to Post-Tests. Students from the 2014 freshmen cohort, the first to be exposed to the program, will begin graduating in spring 2018, giving us the first long term results for this program.

LESSONS LEARNED

The primary lesson learned is that Career Services must find more effective ways to promote the program. One strategy that is being pursued is to add a Financial Literacy component to UNIV 1000, GSW's freshmen orientation course, which will promote the program to all new students. Since students who took the course reported that they participated in the series because they received an email invitation or because their parents recommended it after seeing postings on Facebook and hearing about the program on Storm Day, Career Services will continue its efforts in these areas. Based on feedback from a presentation at University of North Georgia's "Investing in a Culture of Financial Literacy" Conference, the GSW Career Services Director is

considering renaming the program to make it more appealing or understandable to college students. Another possible promotion strategy may be to use information regarding the negative effects of poor financial management on careers to promote the importance of developing personal finance skills to faculty and students.

POINT OF CONTACT

Sandra Fowler, Director of Career Services

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY #4: BEACON EARLY WARNING SYSTEM AND CANES CONNECT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT SYSTEM

GSW uses Beacon and Canes Connect, two software solutions from Campus Labs, to monitor student performance in classes, to provide timely interventions for at risk students, and to improve student engagement in campus social and co-curricular activities. Instructors use Beacon to raise alerts on student who are performing poorly in classes, and advisor and other members of student success networks use the alerts to intervene with students who need additional support to succeed in classes. Canes Connect, GSW's branded version of the Engage student engagement platform, is used by a variety of campus and community groups, such as student organizations and the local chamber of commerce to advertise and track participation in both on- and off campus events. Data on student involvement in such activities is also available to advisors in the individual student profiles of their advisees in Beacon.

COMPLETION GOALS

Beacon provides one tool to increase persistence and progression through engaged, hands-on advising of students. Canes Connect gives GSW a way to encourage students to become involved in campus and community events, and to track that involvement. Campus and community engagement are essential parts of GSW's strategic plan because they are essential to producing well-rounded graduates and because campus and community involvement increases student persistence and progression.

DEMONSTRATION OF PRIORITY OR IMPACT

Since all members of the GSW campus community, including all students, faculty and staff have access to both Beacon and Canes Connect, these systems have the potential to impact the persistence and progression of all GSW students significantly.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

This past academic year was GSW's third year using both Beacon and Canes Connect. During the period from August 1, 2016 to May 31, 2017, GSW faculty members raised 1024 alerts in Beacon, the majority of which alerted advisors and other members of students' success networks to academic performance or attendance issues. Some member of a student success network or the system administrator lowered every alert, but the average time to lower the alert was more than 30 days. The system administrator only lowered alerts after the term was complete when an intervention was no longer possible.

Student organizations and other campus units used Canes Connect to schedule, advertise, and track campus events. For instance, the Windows to the World Program scheduled and advertised all Windows to the World seminars during 2016-17 using Canes Connect. The Director of International Programs also used Canes Connect to track attendance at the seminars and to send follow-up surveys to attendees. However, only about 20% of student organizations are using Canes Connect in 2016-17, but that was up by 10% over 2014-15.

MEASURE OF PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

GSW will ultimately measure the use of Beacon and Canes Connect by increases in student persistence and progression, but since each system is only part of larger strategies to improve advising and to increase student involvement, GSW tracks usage and other measures of activity in the systems as proxy measures of success. For Beacon, the most relevant proxy measure is time necessary to lower an alert, which indicates that an intervention has occurred in a timely manner. Overall usage of the notifications is also relevant. During the first year of usage, the average time to lower an alert was 52 days, and while the average time to lower an alert has decreased substantially to 30 days, the average length of time is still much too high. For Canes Connect, the percentage of student organizations using the platform and the overall number of organizations registered are the most relevant metrics.

LESSONS LEARNED

In looking deeper into the data about the length of time associated with lowering alerts, it has become clear that in general interventions for our first-year students happen much more quickly than interventions for students in the second-, third-, fourth-year who are advised primarily by faculty members. Discussion with faculty members who are high volume users of the system suggests that they are often unsure how to respond or intervene, especially when the cause of academic performance issues is non-academic. In addition, discussion with all system users suggested that when a student has a large success network it is sometimes unclear to network members who the primary point of contact for the student should be. To address these issues, a task force met over the summer to establish protocols for who the primary points of contact are in student success networks, and for responding to alerts. These strategies will be implemented in 2017-18. It is apparent that the motivation for student organizations to establish themselves in Canes Connect is low; therefore, the task force recommended that the eligibility of student organizations to use university facilities for events should be tied to the use of Canes Connect to

schedule and advertise events; this recommendation will also be implemented in 2017-18. In addition, all campus support services and academic programs are being encouraged to join Canes Connect as organizations, so that the event calendar in the system can become a central point for organizing and advertising events aimed at engaging and supporting students.

POINT OF CONTACT

Bryan P. Davis, Interim Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs

HIGH IMPACT STRATEGY #5: WINDOWS TO THE WORLD PROGRAM

The Windows to the World Program is intended to improve the global knowledge and intercultural communication skills of GSW students. The primary vehicles for achieving these goals are the Windows to the World Seminars that are co-curricular presentations, discussion, and other interactive events on a number of global and intercultural topics. Each first-time fulltime student who has entered GSW since fall 2014 has been required to attend six Windows to the World Seminars before graduation.

COMPLETION GOALS

The Windows to the World Program helps increase campus involvement and therefore should have a positive effect on retention and progression. The program also aligns with GSW's current strategic plan goal to "increase opportunities for students to engage in . . . co-curricular learning experiences, and encourage and enable all students to participate," and the goal to "reinforce a global perspective for teaching and learning and prepare students for global viewpoints through integration with the curriculum and engagement activities."

DEMONSTRATION OF PRIORITY OR IMPACT

The Windows to the World Program began as GSW's Quality Enhancement Plan during our SACSCOC Reaffirmation in 2013-14, and, therefore, is of the highest priority to the institution. Since all first-time incoming students are required to participate in the program, it has the potential to impact a large segment of GSW's student population. In addition, all students are invited to attend even those who do not have the Windows to the World requirement or who have completed the requirement.

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

During the 2016-17 academic year, the Windows of the World Program provided sixteen seminars including two presentations by GSW students who had studied abroad on their experiences, an open discussion on Race, a presentation on globalism and nationalism, and a game night featuring globally themed games. We also collected and assessed written student reflections from two groups: freshmen who had their first contact with the program and completers who had attended the required six seminars, sometimes more.

MEASURES OF PROGRESS AND SUCCESS

The Windows to the World Program is assessed long term by a pre-program/post-program model. Incoming students in UNIV 1000, GSW's orientation course, take the Global Perspectives Inventory survey instrument and write a reflection on their first contact with Windows to the World. Students who have completed six Windows to the World seminars take the Global Perspectives Inventory again and write another on how their perspectives have changed since they entered GSW. As interim measures of the success of individual seminars, participants fill out surveys the results of which are used to guide the scheduling of future seminars.

LESSONS LEARNED

Since many students have not progressed satisfactorily in completing their required six seminars, it is clear that more needs to be done to make students aware of the Windows to the World program and its benefits. Students need to be more aware of the benefit of intercultural communication skills as essential skills and the value of having the seminars they attended as part of the program listed on their transcripts. Highly motivated students have progressed rapidly, often attending more than six seminars, and have shown significant gains on the Global Perspectives Inventory and on the capstone reflection assessments. The less motivated students are the ones in whom we need to increase awareness of the benefits of the program.

POINT OF CONTACT

Bryan P. Davis, Interim Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs

REFLECTIONS, OBSERVATIONS & PLANS FOR NEXT YEAR

During the first five years of CCG, GSW has institutionalized a number of our CCG initiatives as part of our ongoing practices and procedures. The redefinition of Academic Standing, undertaken by the Office of Academic Affairs, has helped create higher expectations for incoming students that have some part in increased retention rates. The Division of Student Affairs is now in regular contact with GSW parents involving them in student success through communication of relevant information and solicitation of feedback on student issues. The implementation of *Fifteen to Finish*, or *Thirty to Thrive* at GSW, led to an increase in the number of credit hours placed in the block schedules of first-time fulltime freshmen from 12-14 credit hours to

14-16 credit hours. This change has resulted in both higher numbers of new students achieving good standing after their first semester, and increase in both the percentage of students completing fifteen hours after their first semester and of students completing thirty hours after their first year. The Storm Spotters program continues to provide incoming students with trained peer advisors to help them through their first year of college.

As you may have noticed in the foregoing summary of procedure and practice changes from GSW's CCG participation, we have focused much of our energy on improving the experience and the numbers related to first-time fulltime freshmen. This focus, although arguably necessary in the short term, seems to us to have been the less effective in the long term than a broader view might have been. We have improved retention and other numbers associated with getting and keeping new students, but we have not yet seen appreciable increases in our progression and graduation numbers. The realization that we need to attend to the full life cycle of students led to the formation of GSW's Enrollment Management Council, which brings together representatives of Academic Affairs, Admissions, Financial Aid, Institutional Research, Information and Instructional Technology, the Registrar's Office, and Student Accounts weekly to discuss common solutions to common issues and problems. As a first deliverable, the Enrollment Management Council drafted a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan that proposes to address issues, problems, and solutions related to the full life cycle of a GSW student from being an admissions prospect to becoming a successful student, from graduating to giving back to the institution as an Alumni donor. Of particular relevance to CCG is the goals under Dimension 3 of GSW's Strategic Enrollment Plan on Student Support and Success:

To increase student retention and progression to graduation, Georgia Southwestern State University will:

- Goal 1: Further the institution-wide culture of student success until student success becomes the highest priority for the institution.
- Goal 2: Identify the required conditions for success based upon student population and ensure these conditions exist across campus
- Goal 3: Develop an integrated retention plan which includes measures for identifying the causes of individual student attrition and use those results to define and enact intervention strategies
- Goal 4: Develop a student advising plan that provides support throughout the continuum, with a focus on retention, student success and graduation
- Goal 5: Develop a more robust faculty-staff development plan to improve teaching and student support, as well as campus communication and collaboration

Going forward then, GSW will begin to emphasize progression and persistence over retention in its strategic planning of its CCG activities. In the next year, all of GSW's academic units will compose four-year degree plans for all degrees based on two-year course rotation plans completed in the last year. We will also update our advising plans to place greater emphasis on the transitions from first to second year and from taking mostly Core curriculum classes to taking mostly upper division major classes. As a parallel to the renewed advising plan, we will work to create greater awareness of the Hurricane Force career readiness plan designed by Career Services to allow students to begin career planning long before they apply for graduation. Since faculty development is a key to an engaged learning environment, GSW will begin in fall 2017 to implement a five-year plan to have a robust Center for Teaching and Learning with a full-time director by fall 2022. As one of the first steps taken this year, the Office of President and the Office of Academic Affairs in association with the Center for Teaching and Learning will offer a yearlong series of Engaged Teaching Symposia. Going forward, GSW proposes to contribute to the overall goal of Complete College Georgia to produce more Georgians with college credentials not by only recruiting more students, but also by increasing the persistence and progression of the students we recruit.