



# GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

## SECTION 1: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Georgia Southwestern State University is a comprehensive university serving a diverse population of students, offering a range of strong undergraduate and graduate programs in a vibrant learning environment. The University is a collegial community that values collaboration and community engagement with an emphasis on faculty, staff, and student interactions. An active student body and state-of-the-art amenities enhance the learning experience on a visually appealing campus located in historic Americus, Georgia.

Georgia Southwestern State University's (GSW) total enrollment in fall 2020 was 3162. At that time, the gender distribution of the student population was 66.4% women and 33.6% men. The ethnicity of the fall 2020 student population was 59.0% White, 25.2% African American, 7.1% Asian and Pacific Islander, 5.5% Hispanic, 2.8% Multiracial and less than 1.0% were Native American or Unknown. Approximately 38% of GSW undergraduates receive Pell Grants; 47% are First-Generation college students (no parent/guardian with bachelor degree or higher); 15% began college for the first-time as adults (25 years old or older); and 20% are age 25 or older. The majority of our undergraduates (64%) are classified as full-time (taking 12 or more hours); 27% live on campus; 69% are enrolled in one or more online classes; and 32% 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 FY21, 54% had received the Pell grant while enrolled at GSW, 51% were first-generation students, and 21% were 29 or older at the time of graduation.

## SECTION 2: IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES – UNDERSTANDING CHANGE MANAGEMENT

GSW has identified several structural and motivational obstacles facing students and has begun working on improving practices that will lead to student success. Many of these stem from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The changing of admissions standards and not requiring SAT or ACT scores for admission and the lack of having a "normal" high school classroom experience have brought many students who are not prepared for the academic rigors of college-level coursework. In addition to academic preparedness, students' mental health and overall well-being are of great concern.

The Office of First-Year Experience (FYE) continues to meet with all first-year students during their first three weeks of the fall semester. These meetings are meant to establish personal connections with students, identify academic and social transition issues, and assess the student's overall well-being. All first-year students were assigned an FYE Advisor in Banner. Each FYE Advisor is responsible for following up with their assigned students on early alert notifications in Beacon and conducting a check-in meeting with the students shortly after the third week of classes. The goal of these meetings is to connect students early to the resources they need to be successful academically such as tutoring and the Writing Center as well as being engaged on campus through co-curricular activities.

Our first-year experience course, UNIV 1000: The GSW Experience, has been revised using the lens of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) process. We outlined on the course syllabus what will be covered each week by listing the topic and content, the assignments due for that week, and which course objective aligns with each topic. Following the tasks, we provided a section explaining how assignments would be graded and how individual assignment grades would be factored into the course grade. Part of the required assignments included three mandatory tutoring sessions on the subject/course of the student's choice, a mandatory session with the Writing Center, meetings with their FYE and Academic Advisors, and completion of the Focus 2 Career Assessment. The Focus 2 assessment results will assist with connecting students to their desired major quickly and with advising students through the major selection process and selecting correct courses needed to complete their degree. Through the TILT process, we created a Criteria/Self-Assessment section on the syllabus so students would have a clear understanding that by completing the checklist of activities outlined, they would be successful in the course.

All first-year students are required to complete the Clifton Strengths assessment prior to the start of the fall semester. During our 4-day New Student Orientation program in August, the students were presented with their top 5 strengths and attended a session on Clifton Strengths where they were taught how to capitalize on those strengths and use them to be successful in the classroom and in co-

curricular activities. The students were put into small groups where they were able to meet other students who shared their same strengths and were able to have open dialogue. Understanding how to apply their top strengths in their academic success supports the growth mindset concept. The Clifton Strengths assessment was also used as a guiding tool for the first-year students in the President Jimmy Carter Leadership Program during their cohort retreat prior to the fall semester beginning.

The Advising Task Force was formed and the committee reviewed all aspects of advising at GSW. The committee created an Advising Handbook and an Advising Syllabus outlining the outcomes of advising and expectations of the advisor and student. The Advising Task Force also recommended that all students, regardless of status, be required to meet with their academic advisor each semester prior to registration and enrollment for the following term. Currently, GSW only requires students to meet with their academic advisor during their first year and after they complete 90 credit hours. GSW will begin requiring all students to consult with their academic advisors each time they register for classes with early registration for fall 2022 that begins in March 2022. In addition, the committee recommended increasing the number of Friday classes to encourage more 50-minute courses running three days a week (Monday/Wednesday/Friday). The addition of Friday courses allows for flexibility in scheduling for commuter students, working students, and student athletes. Having students on campus five days a week would support retention efforts by encouraging more student engagement and connection to campus as well as promote on-campus housing. For some students and disciplines, having class three days a week could improve retention content and overall student achievement and learning.

Degree Pathways called Storm Tracks were created for all academic programs to provide students with a clearer roadmap to program completion. The Storm Tracks are introduced to students in UNIV 1000 and are used by the Academic and FYE advisors when assisting students with course section for the following semester. The Storm Tracks have been embedded in Degree Works through the Student Educational Planner as students and advisors create academic plans.

Care@GSW was created to make sure students have the resources they need in regards to their overall well-being. These resources include student health and counseling, recreating and wellness, academic resources, and safety. The Office of Disability Services was changed to the Office of Accommodations and Access. The Office of Experiential Learning was created to assist students with internship and study abroad opportunities. We have expanded our counseling services to include Talkspace, an online therapy service that allows students to send text, voice, or video message to a therapist and Protocol, an after-hours emergency service for access to crisis assessment, intervention, and stabilization.

For planning and decision-making on improving the practices outlined, many different faculty and staff on campus have been involved, including the Office of First-Year Experience, the Advising Task Force, the Dean's Council, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, the Enrollment Management Council, The Momentum Approach Steering Committee, the Retention Task Force, the Student Engagement and Success Leadership Team, and the Storm Spotter (peer mentor) Team. These groups routinely review data relating to enrollment and retention, midterm and final grades, and course withdrawals. Due to GSW's size, many individuals serve on more than one of these bodies.

### **SECTION 3: OUR BIG IDEA – TILT**

GSW's big idea for 2021-22 to inform our overall approach during the academic year is Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT), not just in the narrow academic sense but rather in the larger sense of infusing transparency and equity into all campus interactions between students, faculty, and staff. TILT was chosen as our Big Idea because of its strong and productive connection with the purpose and value aspects of a productive academic mindset. Using TILT principles in a wider context is complementary to our ongoing commitment to using a wise feedback approach to building a productive academic mindset in our students.

TILT in the academic sense has been an important part of redesigning ENGL 1101 Composition I, POLS 1101 American Government, and SOCI 1101 Introduction to Sociology during cohort two of Gateways to Completion (G2C), so we extended the use of TILT principles to more Core general education courses and selected upper-level major courses that were crucial to student success in the major and in graduating. Prior to implementing our Big Idea, participants in G2C shared the results of TILT principles with a small group of interested faculty.

In spring 2021 we began our efforts to provide more faculty and staff development opportunities that infused TILT principles into course and into co-curricular activities. In April 2021 we held a campus-wide workshop on TILT conducted by Mary-Ann Winklemes, Founder and Lead Investigator for TILT Higher Ed. This workshop was used to foster campus-wide awareness and knowledge of TILT and to recruit a number of faculty to work over the summer to apply TILT to their syllabi and assignments. This event served as a kick-off event for our TILT Faculty Learning Community (FLC) Summer Series. In May 2021 we held a second campus-wide workshop led by Denise Domizi, USG Director of Faculty Development, and Jesse Bishop, Director of Faculty Academy at Georgia Highlands College, aimed at providing an overview of TILT practices to faculty interested in participating in the TILT Summer Series. We successfully recruited six faculty facilitators to lead 28 faculty, who taught both lower- and upper-level classes, through a summer-long faculty learning community (FLC) series. Through the FLC series, we challenged faculty participants to apply TILT

principles to at least one aspect of one course they teach and write a brief reflection about the process at the end of the series. Each of the six TILT FLCs met three times over summer 2021. At the end of the series, a panel of faculty participants hosted a faculty development session during our faculty planning period, Southwestern Week, to share their work and insights regarding TILT. Since we began implementing TILT practices on a wider scale across the institution, we have developed a TILT webpage dedicated to housing TILT resources, including past workshop recordings and helpful links to TILT materials. To continue the TILT momentum, we have created a TILT Brown Bag Series, which began in September 2021, where faculty gather together in informal, yet structured, settings to discuss topics surrounding TILT. Our first session, titled “How to Study,” focused on promoting positive study habits among students. The second session, titled “TILT and SOTL,” covered the process of researching TILT implementation and effectiveness in the classroom. For our third Brown Bag session, we have planned a session geared toward our Division of Student Engagement and Success staff to help encourage the use of productive academic mindset and TILT in the planning of co-curricular activities.

To assist our assessment of progress on this goal, we added questions related to transparency and purpose to our regular course evaluations that are based on questions used in the Student Learning Gains survey for G2C and in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These questions were used for the first time during spring 2021 and will provide a baseline against which to measure future progress on this goal. We also invited all faculty who participated in the TILT Summer Series to participate in the TILT Higher Ed student survey. The purpose of the survey is to capture the effectiveness of the TILT intervention within specific courses. Faculty participating in this survey and other forms of class-based assessments regarding TILT have been invited to contribute their findings to a special topics issue of the scholarship of teaching and learning journal *Perspectives of Learning*, which two TILT leaders at GSW will be co-editing in 2022. The special topics issue was a direct result of the ongoing TILT work across campus.

In addition to faculty and staff development in TILT principles, we have also promoted a productive academic mindset in faculty and staff through further faculty development opportunities. These have included a mindset session hosted by Mark Grimes and Judy Orton Grissett during our faculty planning week at the start of fall 2021. Kenn Barron from Motivate Lab also provided an hour-long workshop during our faculty planning week about integrating mindset principles in the classroom. Materials from both sessions are available on the GSW TILT webpage.

Through the implementation of TILT across campus, we have learned that there is a real interest among faculty to integrate TILT into their curriculum and pedagogical practices. The transparent nature and focus on purpose resonate with many faculty who wish to engage their students with course material. One area of improvement is the adoption of TILT with co-curricular activities. The faculty development sessions have historically focused on faculty; however, we aim to bring members of our Division of Student Engagement and Success to learn more about integrating TILT principles into student activities.

The main challenge to implementing our Big Idea is GSW’s size and resources. Most faculty, staff, and administrators have multiple responsibilities making it difficult to implement multiple strategies for student success at one time. We have tried to be judicious in our choice of strategies and our use of resources to implement them, but that does not necessarily make it seem less onerous to answer all the challenges that the Pandemic and resource uncertainty have presented.

## **SECTION 4.1: MOMENTUM WORK RESILIENCE UPDATE**

Providing faculty and professional academic advisors with tools to improve the success of their advisees, sharing data among decision makers, and providing experiential learning and high impact education practice opportunities to all students are the three key components of GSW’s strategies for extending and maintaining our Momentum work. While the Pandemic has been a challenge, GSW’s decision to return to campus fall 2020 and conduct as many in-person experiences with students as possible using physical distancing and hybrid delivery strategies paid off in minimizing disruptions and reacquainting our students with face-to-face classroom interactions. Therefore, many of our Momentum plans have been able to move forward even as the Pandemic continues.

An important part of our 2020-21 Momentum Plan was to create an Advising Handbook to provide faculty and professional advisors with a one-stop resource to consolidate the more important aspects of the far flung policies and procedures affecting effective advising for student success. Recently, the Deans’ Council reviewed this resource to insure its continuing relevance and accuracy. During that review process the idea was advanced to provide advisors with a short checklist to be used during every advising appointment as we move back to requiring students to see their advisors at least once every term. We have also developed a short checklist for advisors who are having their initial contact with transfer students. Both checklists include cross references to the Advising Handbook and the Undergraduate bulletin. These checklists will be made available to all faculty and professional advisors as a handy resource for all advising contacts. In addition, we have piloted the Student Educational Planner (SEP) with advisors from the College of Education and the Office of First Year Experience during the early registration period for spring and summer 2022 that took place the week of October 25, 2021. Lessons learned from training these advisors, such as discussing when to use a template versus when to use an individualized plan will be applied subsequent training the rest of our faculty and professional advisors for full implementation of SEP

during preregistration for fall 2022 classes in March 2022. The templates for major programs in SEP were created using our most recent revised iterations of Storm Track degree pathways. While these tools will help advisors and their crucial student success work immensely, there is no denying that implementing the Advising Task Force recommendation that students be required to meet with their advisors more often will come at the price of this taking time away from the other work of faculty and staff advisors.

Using our Storm Tracks as templates for degree progression in SEP will over time act as a pressure test for the viability of these advising tools. Nonetheless, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness is also piloting pressure testing of Storm Tracks as part of the Comprehensive Program Review (CPR) Process with our Chemistry and History programs that are undergoing CPR this academic year. The test covers two aspects that are necessary to make Storm Tracks successful. For the 2019 and 2020 cohorts of students currently majoring in Chemistry and History, reports have been prepared on individual students to determine how closely they are following the pathways. Another report is in preparation to show what courses for each pathway were available during the semester specified on the pathway, how many seats were available in each course, and how many seats were used in each course. These two reports will be provided to the programs as part of their CPR data for review and analysis. If these results and analyses yield action plans for improvement of the Storm Tracks or the patterns of course offerings in the pilot, the reports will become a regular part of the data provided to programs undergoing CPR. Preliminary analysis of pressure testing results suggests that more coordination of scheduling with the requirements of Storm Tracks, especially for Core classes, may need to occur to make the most of available faculty for success of all students.

The Director of Institutional Effectiveness has also been working to increase awareness and use of the QLIK dashboards created by The Carl Vinson Institute for the USG and Post-Secondary Data Partnership (PDP) dashboards at Georgia Southwestern. During spring 2021, the QLIK dashboards were demoed for the Retention Task Force and the chair of the task force was granted a license to access the dashboards. During fall 2021, the programs undergoing CPR have been provided with program specific completion and fall enrollment data derived from the QLIK Dashboards, and disaggregated by selected demographic categories, such as gender, race/ethnicity, and Pell eligibility. Also during fall 2021, the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Subcommittee of GSW's Institutional Effectiveness Committee has been reviewing both QLIK and PDP dashboard derived data in the initial stages of identifying a QEP topic for our SASCOC Reaffirmation as part of the class of 2024. The data are currently being used to identify potential groups of students who might need targeted interventions to improve their success. This work might also be applicable to directing future Momentum efforts targeted at specific groups needing targeted interventions. Our SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison plans to share the data considered by the QEP subcommittee with our SACSCOC Reaffirmation Leadership team after the orientation for the reaffirmation class of 2024 at the SACSCOC Annual meeting in December 2021. Completion data on Core Area A courses for the 2019 and 2020 cohorts will be shared with the Enrollment Management Council and the Dean's Council later in fall 2021.

The Director of Institutional Effectiveness is also in discussion with Motivate Lab to have them disaggregate our Mindset Survey results from 2017-2020. The current discussion calls for Motivate Lab to provide spreadsheets with individual sheets for demographic categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, age, major, income, and first language. A series of pivot tables will allow the combining of categories for more granular analysis. The Director of Institutional Effectiveness has also requested from the System Office a list of GSW IDs for student who completed one or both of the surveys for each year. These lists and the spreadsheets from Motivate Lab will allow us to make comparisons between the survey data and our own data. We could make effective comparisons between the data on English expectation from the Mindset Survey with our own data on ENGL 1101 completion during the first year, because we can filter our completion data to show only the students who took the survey both times, for instance. We are excited about the possibilities for this approach to our data sharing plans.

Since the Director of Experiential Learning at GSW became a full-time position during summer, 2021, the pace of providing Experiential Learning/High Impact Educational Practice (HIP) experiences for more GSW students has increased. For instance, the Director of Experiential Learning has developed a one-stop webpage for Experiential Learning that connects students with opportunities in Service Learning, Study Abroad, Undergraduate Research, and Internships. The Director of Experiential Learning is also reaching out to regional businesses and organizations that have internship needs. In the HIP area, cross-disciplinary project opportunities remain an unfulfilled need. Our NSSE data from 2017, 2019, and 2020 suggests that our seniors have been doing slightly less writing over time and thus, may not be doing enough writing to develop their essential written communication skills. Therefore, expanding opportunities for taking writing intensive courses may also be an area for future HIP development.

Progress in this area has certainly been slowed by the Pandemic and faculty buy in will certainly be slowed by the Pandemic induced perception that faculty have been overburdened by increasing and varied demands.

Since the Mindset Mini-Course was not available to us during summer 2021, we were not able to complete our plan to have all instructors teaching UNIV 1000, GSW's First Year Experience Course, take the course, and share their experiences and plans after taking the course. We look forward to the possibility of carrying this plan forward in 2022. Our plans for developing a structured process for facilitating Focus Area students in making a choice of major within their first year at GSW has been slowed somewhat by

turnover in the Office of First Year Experience where the advisor for these students works. A plan should be in place by the end of the current academic year.

Our approach to GSW's current Momentum Plan has not changed significantly although some parts of the plan are moving forward more quickly than others. Now that some aspects of our Momentum planning are ongoing and on the way to becoming institutionalized, we can begin to examine how these plans affect specific groups of students. For instance, we have instituted a student living and learning community called the Brotherhood that aims to increase the success and empowerment of African American men at GSW. As noted above, our QEP process for SACSCOC Reaffirmation in 2024 is considering how to use this process to meet the academic needs and environment for specific groups of students within the GSW Community.

GSW is making progress in the work of student success, but we have been will be challenged by the interruption of their secondary education that was experienced by our 2020 and 2021 cohorts of first- time full-time students brought about by the Pandemic. We will also be challenged by the cohorts to come for years to come. We are prepared to keep working to find the right mix of student success practices to increase the success of GSW's current and future students.

### **SECTION 4.3: GLOBAL MOMENTUM SUPPORT**

Meeting the needs of our students as related to our Momentum Plan was a focus of attention this year despite the challenges presented by the pandemic. Our primary means of communication with students is via email and social media such as Instagram and Facebook. While we use texts as well, that is reserved for communications such as registration, payment deadlines, and other important date-driven pieces of information. Another way that we communicate with students is through our advisors, and this has been a special focus on campus for the last year, and continues to be this year. We had an Advising Task Force which provided recommendations we have been working to implement the last two semesters. This included the development of an Advising Handbook which is being used as a primary source of information for faculty and staff advisors, and we are in the process of implementing the Student Educational Planner software in Banner that will allow people that meet with a student to have a shared reference of materials discussed with a student, and everyone involved to better advise and track student progress. Even though we enroll our freshmen in 30 credit hours their first year, including Math and English, we have not been able to easily track progress after the end of the first semester. SEP will help with that process as well. Implementing the SEP has also required a review of all Storm Tracks which has helped us ensure they are up to date. We are now working on a system to pressure test them to further ensure their accuracy.

We have also developed the Office of Experiential Learning which has helped with streamlining the process for internships across campus, as well as broadening the opportunities we have available to students. A new partnership with the Georgia Small Business Development Center, with an emphasis on Multi-Media design needs, is an example of new opportunities we have developed through that office. A focus on study away, study abroad, and cultural experiences has also been a focus of this office. It has also allowed Academic Affairs and Student Engagement and Success to work more closely together on granting Windows to the World credit, providing Study Away opportunities, and building a better network of co-curricular activities. The primary challenge is staffing shortages which means fewer people are doing more with less, creating a situation where we are not able to maximize our partnership.

We also had an opportunity for the chair of one of our course-level committees in Gateways to Completion projects to adapt the process to GSW's context, and then work with another department on campus to redesign instruction in their area. This faculty member will next work with faculty in an area that has high DFW rates to help them explore their current practices to see if perhaps we can make some changes that will lead to more positive student outcomes. This semester long process is less daunting for programs, still requires them to explore and think critically about their course objectives and outcomes, and I am excited to see the data at the end of this semester regarding the potential impact of changes that were made as a result of this work.

Finally, our campus has focused its work on TILT, including a summer long workshop for faculty led by peer mentors. TILT is a perfect complement to our Momentum work as it helps students understand the reasoning behind assignments and activities, and helps them see how the work relates to their lives. We are collecting pre and post data via student evaluations to determine possible impacts.