



# GORDON STATE COLLEGE

## SECTION 1: INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Gordon State College's mission is to be a catalyst for exceptional and accessible education through innovative teaching, engaged learning, and transformative experiences for the benefit of our students, the communities we serve, and the world we live in. As an access institution, we provide engaged faculty-student interaction through intimate classroom experiences; innovative and effective teaching strategies; excellent advising and mentorship programs; and effective student support services. GSC offers baccalaureate and associate degree programs. The institution has focused more in recent years on meeting the needs of underrepresented populations and dual-enrollment students.

Final Fall 2020 enrollment was 3,229. We saw some dramatic changes in the make-up of our Fall 2020 first-time, full-time freshman cohort:

- 55.9% had learning support requirements, **up** from 49.5% in Fall 2019.
  - 19.1% of entering FTFT freshmen had only a Math requirement, **up** dramatically from 11% in Fall 2019, but down from 34% in Fall 2018.
  - 35.9% had both Math and English requirements (N=195), **up** significantly from Fall 2019's 11.9%.
  - 1 % had only an English requirement (N=5), **down significantly** from 26.67% in FALL 2019, and about the same as 2% in Fall 2018
- 38.6% were African-American, **down** from 51.2% in Fall 2019
- 5.1% self-identified as first-generation college students, **down significantly** from Fall 2019's 19.2%; however, **another 76.9%** chose not to answer the question, and we suspect our first-generation population is actually much larger

To better serve our student population, Gordon State College was one of the first institutions in the USG to take remediation transformation to scale, and we continue to see improved success rates in gateway courses like ENGL 1101 and MATH 1111. Also, we have targeted traditionally underserved populations such as African-American males for increases in access and completion. At the same time, our institution continues to see high numbers of dual-enrollment students each year (294 new dual-enrollment students in Fall 2020).

## SECTION 2: IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES

When GSC administration reviewed the outcomes for the Fall 2017 freshman cohort, we faced some ugly realities. Retention had dropped to 48.3%, and barely half of that cohort ended their first year in good academic standing. Even more disturbing were some clear equity gaps—African-American male retention, for example, lagged 6 points behind the overall cohort rate, at a dismal 42.2%. We immediately committed to making improvements. We rebuilt our New Student Orientation for the Fall 2018 cohort; implemented a new freshman seminar, FIRE 1000, that was approved as part of the core curriculum; procured an African-American Male Initiative grant and invested other campus resources into that program; and started our own branding of the Momentum Year, The Highlander EDGE. With the new NSO, FIRE, a reinvigorated AAMI program, and the Highlander EDGE, we hoped to connect students to the campus, identify the expectations they would face as college students, help them make a purposeful choice, and instill a growth mindset and sense of belonging. Initial results were encouraging in that first year, as retention improved by 10 points, to 58.4% (not including students in our FVSU-GAP initiative). Even more encouraging was the improved retention rates for student subpopulations that we have struggled to support in the past, particularly African-American males, where we saw an improvement of almost 13 points, from 42.2% to 55.1%. Similarly, retention for self-identified first-generation students rose 12 points, from 44.4% to 56.5%.

For Fall 2019, we added FORGE, a series of pre-orientation modules; made some adjustments to our FIRE class; confirmed our commitment to the AAMI program, and continued to flesh out our Highlander EDGE initiative. We also added a Probation By Appeal program, targeting new freshmen who had performed so poorly in their first (Fall) semester that they ended up on academic suspension. We offered them a chance to return for the Spring 2020 semester provided that they agree to a set of conditions: biweekly meetings with assigned faculty mentors; mandatory success workshops on topics like time management; and regular meetings with

faculty members. We saw a 3.3 point jump in retention for the Fall 2019 cohort, to 61.7%. We are pleased with our progress over the past two years, but we know we still have much work to do, particularly with equity gaps. For example, African-American male retention dropped for the Fall 2019 cohort to 50.4%. While that is still an improvement over the 42.2% we saw in Fall 2017, we are concerned by this move in the wrong direction. In fact, overall male retention dropped from 59.1% in Fall 2018 to 54.2% in Fall 2019.

For the fall 2020 cohort, Gordon State College saw its highest IPEDS-reported first time, full time retention rate at 58.9%, up 3 points from 55.9% for the Fall 2019 cohort (and the highest since the 2014 cohort). Impressively, we found that those freshmen who “attempted” more than 30 hours during the academic year had a retention rate of 81.1%, compared to a rate of 59.1% for those students attempting 20-24 credit hours during the academic year, and less than a 20% rate for those attempting fewer than 20 hours during the year. This high retention rate holds regardless of race, gender and learning support status. Another very positive outcome we found is that for those students who made an A, B, or C in the FIRE course, the retention rate was 73.8%, compared to 28.7% for those students who made a D, F, or W.

However, we also saw some disturbing data. For example, overall, African American students in the Fall 2020 had a retention rate of 43.8%, down from 49.2% for the Fall 2021 cohort. This compares to a rate of 70.4% for white students. We also saw a decline in our retention rate for students living in the residence halls compared to commuters. For the Fall 2020 cohort, Residents had a rate of 53.5%, compared to 58.9% for the Fall 2019 cohort. [This is especially disappointing, given that we had made tremendous progress over the past few years in raising the retention of our residents.] On the positive side, for commuters in the Fall 2020 cohort, the retention rate was 62.6%, 10 points higher than for the 2019 cohort.

Moving forward, the Academic Affairs leadership team—Dr. Knighton, the Provost; Dr. Ric Calhoun, the AVP-Innovative Education and Strategic Initiatives; Mr. Jerry Oliver, the Director of Student Success, Advising and Testing; Drs. Barry Kicklighter, Victor Vilchiz, and Joseph Jones, the Deans of our three schools; and Mr. Britt Lifsey, our Director of Institutional Research—will continue to look for ways to improve our student success rates and close equity gaps. We launched a Highlander EDGE Task Force, to discuss ways that we can promote the four identities of the Highlander EDGE—Engaged Innovator, Dedicated Scholar, Gifted Communicator, and Ethical Leader—to our students from the time they first set foot on our campus to when they graduate, through participation in high-impact practices (HIPS) like undergraduate research, for example. The work of the EDGE Task Force led to the implementation of the EDGE-ucation Manual which lays our 5 HIPs that all students at Gordon State receive, regardless of major. In their first year, students take a special FIRE course. In the second year, students take a Colloquium course (common intellectual experience). In the third year, students receive a service learning experience. In the fourth year, students receive either a work-based learning experience, or complete an undergraduate research project. Overlapping all four years is a portfolio documenting their experiences.

An important element of helping students have the EDGE is advising. Therefore, we are currently in the process of revising our Advising model. [This will be described in detail in the Big Idea section.]

### SECTION 3: BIG IDEA

Gordon State College has 2 Big Ideas for Academic Year 2021-2022: Fully-implement the *Highlander EDGE*, and complete an Advising Reimaging/Redesign.

#### The Highlander EDGE

In 2018, GSC implemented the *Highlander EDGE* initiative as the umbrella initiative for all of our Momentum work. The EDGE concept recognizes that a college education is about so much more than just career preparation. It’s about helping our students enjoy productive, meaningful lives.

The *Highlander EDGE* is the motivational philosophy of the faculty and staff at Gordon State College, directing their focus every day. It’s also the collection of activities, events, and learning experiences that students experience at GSC. But perhaps most importantly, it’s the advantage that graduates of Gordon State College will have over graduates from all other schools when they start applying for jobs. It’s the EDGE that they will have over your competition. It’s what will make them stand out to future employers. But more than that, **the Highlander Edge is the advantage that students will have for life-long career success, enlightened living, and community leadership.**

The EDGE...E – D – G – E...stands for

- Engaged Innovators
- Dedicated Scholars
- Gifted Communicators
- Ethical Leaders

During the Academic Year 2020-2021, we developed a Task Force to fully-operationalize and scale the Highlander EDGE initiative. Now, every student pursuing a baccalaureate degree will be exposed to a minimum a five High Impact Practices (HIPs):

- Freshman Year – **FIRE Course** (freshman experience); Momentum Year
- Sophomore Year – **Colloquium Course** (common intellectual experience)
- Junior Year – **Service Learning** through curricular and co-curricular experiences (service learning)
- Senior Year – **Internship or Undergraduate Research** (work-based learning or research)
- All Years – **“Highlander Life”** to document all experiences (e-portfolio)

In addition, literally dozens of experiences that might be classified as “mini-HIPs” are available for those students who desire a sharper edge. All aspects of the Highlander EDGE are made available to students through orientations, convocation, Welcome Week, and the newly-developed “EDGE-ucation Manual.” This printed and electronic publication was given to all new freshmen in August 2021 during “EDGE-ucation Day” of Welcome Week. The foci of the Task Force this year is to structure and translate the EDGE to each individual major (through the degree maps) and to restructure all program assessments to reflect the Highlander EDGE.

### Advising Re-imagining

Gordon State College’s (GSC) Strategic Plan developed in 2019 identified a strategic imperative to promote student excellence throughout the academic journey which includes enrollment, retention and graduation. GSC Division of Academic Affairs has outlined and defined goals related to retention for FY23 and workload equity that will be partially addressed by development and implementation of a new Shared Academic Advising Model. The background and context are included here along with the key elements of the advising model.

Development of the Shared Academic Advising Model began in the spring of 2021, in collaboration with the USG Study Group. A campus-wide task force was established in the summer of 2021 to create the new model, and that model will be presented to the Faculty Senate sub-committee of Admissions, Advisement, Registration, Retention, and Financial Aid (AARRFA) in November of 2021. This model will remove the instructor element from the Student Success Center (SSC) Advisor/Lecturer position and reclassify the SSC position as a staff position. Implementation of the Shared Advising Model is planned to begin with fall 2022 enrollments. Training for this new model is slated for February 2022.

#### Background:

GSC’s student retention and graduation rates have room for improvement, and will require multiple strategies for progress to occur. The retention rates for GSC are as followed:

- Fall 2017: 44.6%
- Fall 2018: 53.5%
- Fall 2019: 55.9%
- Fall 2020: 58.9%
- Fall 2023 GOAL: 70%

Increasing retention rates for new freshman and transfer students will be a critical factor to ensure we can meet our overall enrollment goals over the next few years, and will help GSC to manage our fiscal reality of declining state resources. Faculty and staff commitment to improving student retention and graduation rates will be necessary, and this academic advising model is one strategy that is expected to improve results by having more deliberate and planned points of contact and strategies for follow-up between advisors and students throughout the year.

GSC leadership and leadership from the USG identified academic advising as an area for improvement in their 2021 Study Group Report. Gordon State College’s Strategic Plan Theme II: PROMOTE STUDENT EXCELLENCE THROUGHOUT THEIR ACADEMIC JOURNEY WITH A FOCUS ON ENROLLMENT, ENGAGEMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESS, includes the following objectives related to advising and retention:

- Objective 2.3: Design an educational experience that supports the USG’s Momentum Approach and national success measures.
- Objective 2.4: Identify, define and align the elements of the Highlander EDGE
- Objective 2.5: Design and connect Co-curricular experiences to increase student engagement and development

#### Key Elements of the Shared Academic Advising Model:

This model has been developed as a strategy to improve student retention and four-year graduation rates by improving consistent, high quality academic advising services across the institution. The plan fosters an essential collaboration between faculty advisors (mentors) and professional advisors that will meet the needs of students and free up time of faculty. It addresses workload equity in

relation to advising by establishing more of a mentoring relationship between faculty and their advisees. It reduces faculty advising demands during summer and between terms as this advising will be handled primarily by professional advising staff, and will result in fewer advising appointments for faculty during the semester early advising period.

- All new freshmen students with a declared major will be assigned two advisors: one professional advisor and one faculty advisor. The model also includes the potential to add peer educators, financial aid advisors and student affairs professionals to the student’s success team to support co-curricular options. Peer educators will be able to assist.
- Advising Touchpoints based on risk model (3 to 12 touchpoints per semester)

## Adapting Population Health Management to Higher Education

### Student Risk Stratification



### Differentiated Care Strategy

**Coordinate Efficient High-Touch Care**  
 Work closely with students and manage their interaction with support offices

**Proactively Monitor and Intervene**  
 Create an analytics “safety net” to catch common problems before they escalate

**Enable Effective Self-Direction**  
 Use nudges and scalable e-advising to allow staff to direct attention elsewhere

| WEEK           |  High Level of Support Needed<br>5% of cohort |  Moderate Level of Support Needed<br>25% of cohort |  Low Level of Support Needed<br>70% of cohort |
|----------------|--|---|--|
| 2              | Check-in/initial coaching session  | Check-in/initial coaching session   | Check-in/initial coaching session  |
| 3              | Complete success plan with student   |   |  |
| 4              | Assess/adjust plan   | Create semester plan  |  |
| 5              | Assign resources or tutoring   |   |  |
| 6              | Check-in prior to midterms   | Check-in before midterms/adjust plan  | Check-in before midterms   |
| 7              | Reflect on first half of term  |   |  |
| 9              | Plan from midterms   | Check-in about registration   |  |
| 10             | Reality check/adjust plan  |   |  |
| 11             | Check-in about registration  |   |  |
| 12             | Register for classes   |   |  |
| 13             | Follow-up after registration   | Follow-up after registration  | Follow-up after registration   |
| 14             | Reflect/set goals for next term  |   |  |
| TOTAL CONTACTS | 12   | 5   | 3  |

- Faculty engage with their students as freshman in a mentoring role, rather than focusing significantly on class registration
- Training professional advisors on the department and program practices and requirements is a critical element to the plan.
- The advising model will become effective with the Fall 2022 enrollments and will affect only incoming freshman, readmitted, and new transfer students.
- Current students will not be impacted as the model begins with new students.
- Communication between faculty and professional advisors, as well as communication between academic departments and the Student Success Center, are also crucial to the success of this new shared model.
- Quarterly meetings with SSC and Academic Departments
- Academic departments pressure test programs and update program maps regularly.
- The model addresses how orientation will change.
- Advisors assigned prior to orientation
- Session in NSO to go over Navigate, program maps, Degreeworks, etc.
- Faculty advisors and new advisors (professional and faculty) will receive professional development and ongoing trainings through a collaboration with CETL.

## SECTION 4: MOMENTUM PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

### Resilience Plan STRATEGY/AREA

| Activity                                     | Process/Steps   | Person responsible                     | Completion date  |
|--|---|--|--|
| Advising Re-imaging                          | Establish Task Force; Work with USG Study Group; Student Focus Groups; Faculty Senate   | Jerry Oliver                           | 2 stages: 1 <sup>st</sup> stage completed by December 2021 |
| Highlander EDGE                              | Fully implement EDGE roadmap (FIRE, Colloquia, Service Learning, Internship/Research, Presence Portfolio); Establish Leadership Team; plan presentations            | Dave Janssen                           | June 2021  |
| 65% of Freshmen taking 15+ hours/semester    | NSO; Courseleaf; Advising model; Create schedules in advance of NSO (best practice); create new scheduling survey and work flow plan; identify all schedule makers. | Jerry Oliver; Coordination among Deans | Fall 2022  |
| Retention Rate (ftftf) of 70%                | Navigate; Advising; Clubs; Presence; PERTS; Establish Retention Fellows;  | Jerry Oliver; Coordination among Deans | 2023   |
| Retention Rate (2 <sup>nd</sup> year) of 50% |   |  |  |

## GLOBAL MOMENTUM SUPPORT

Success in implementing a Momentum Approach to student achievement depends on coordination and integration across campus and throughout the student lifecycle. By creating a shared, collaborative approach to supporting students, institutions can better ensure consistent and coherent responses to student needs, changing conditions, and unforeseen challenges.

### Communication planning

| Activity                           | Process/Steps   | Person responsible   | Completion date     |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| NSO                                | Momentum Approach; Highlander EDGE – in meetings, emails, newsletters, public speeches. | Jerry Oliver, Director of Student Success; Matthew Robison, Dean of Students | Throughout the year |
| Academic Day (during Welcome Week) | Same  | Matthew Robison, Dean of Students and volunteers                             | Fall 2021           |
| Public Speeches                    | Same  | President, Provost, Deans  | Throughout the year |
| FIRE                               | same  | Steve Raynie; FIRE instructors   | Fall 2021           |
| Student Success Summit             | Same  | Provost; Jerry Oliver, Director of Student Success                           | August 2021         |

| Activity                        | Process/Steps | Person responsible                                 | Completion date           |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--|---------------------------|
| Momentum Report and EDGE Report | Same          | Provost; Jerry Oliver, Director of Student Success | Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 |

### Faculty and Staff Outreach and Support

| Activity                        | Process/Steps                 | Person responsible                        | Completion date |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| Student Success Summit          | Regular meetings and outreach | Jerry Oliver, Director of Student Success | ongoing         |
| Highlander EDGE Task Force      | Regular meetings and outreach | Dave Janssen                              | ongoing         |
| Momentum Leadership Team        | Regular meetings and outreach | Jeff Knighton                             | ongoing         |
| Data Day                        | Held in November each year    | Britt Lifsey                              | November 2021   |
| Chancellor's Learning Scholars  | Regular meetings and outreach | Anna Higgins-Harrell, CETL Director       | ongoing         |
| Gold Series (staff development) | Plan special sessions         | Creche Navarro                            | ongoing         |
| New Faculty Orientation         | Include in schedule           | Anna Higgins-Harrell                      | August 2021     |
| Advisor Training                | Train all faculty             | Jerry Oliver, Director of Student Success | Fall 2021       |

Small number of faculty and staff members who are already overworked; most wear multiple hats, with the same people being involved in all projects. Budget reductions. Turn-over of key employees

### Data Plan

Briefly describe your plan for how you will use data to inform your Momentum work. How will you analyze, communicate, and use data to improve your activities? What data elements and qualitative markers align with your priorities? How will you help others on campus to understand the story behind the data? How will you develop and/or establish systems and practices around data collection and integrity to support your work?

| Activity                           | Process/Steps                      | Person responsible                       | Completion date |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| Data Day                           | Campus-wide - Momentum Year; PERTS | Britt Lifsey                             | November 2021   |
| Academic Council                   | Discuss data at meeting each month | Britt Lifsey                             | ongoing         |
| Enrollment Report                  | Comes out daily to campus          | Britt Lifsey                             | ongoing         |
| President's Administrative Council | Monthly meeting, include data      | Britt Lifsey                             | ongoing         |
| Departmental Profiles              | Full report of each degree program | Britt Lifsey; Deans and Department Heads | April 2022      |

## EXISTING MOMENTUM WORK – MOMENTUM PLAN PROGRESS UPDATE

### Purposeful Choice

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Strategy or activity  | Continued to improve our New Student Orientation experience for incoming students.  |
| Summary of Activities | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We implemented FORGE, our online pre-orientation program that students were expected to complete before their on-campus orientation experience. We added videos highlighting the different academic focus areas and included information about possible majors within the focus area.</li> </ol> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Worked to standardize the 75-minute presentation given on NSO day at each of the academic focus areas.</li> <li>3. Reinstated face-to-face NSOs in Summer 2021</li> <li>4. Included a career services module in FORGE, our pre-orientation experience for new students.</li> <li>5. Included a question in the scheduling survey asking students if they would like some early career counseling before they arrive on campus.</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b>            | Retention for the Fall 2019 cohort rose 3.3 points over the previous year, to an all-time high of 61.7% (this is excluding our FVSU-GAP students, who, if successful, moved on to Fort Valley State after their freshman year). For the fall 2020 cohort, the IPEDS-reported retention rate was an all-time high of 58.9%, 3% higher than the previous year, and 14.3% higher than when we rebuilt the NSO experience (Fall 2017 cohort).   |
| <b>Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future</b> | <p>Our biggest lesson learned is that investing campus resources into building an outstanding NSO experience is a wise investment, even—or perhaps especially—in a challenging budget environment where resources are limited. We need to continue to work on standardizing the advising piece of the NSO day across all focus areas, as a sense of territorialism among entrenched administrators made that effort difficult. With new deans on board for each of our three schools, we have made tremendous progress in that area.</p> <p>A significant number of incoming freshmen requested early career counseling on their scheduling surveys. Given the virtual nature of our NSOs and our campus in general this past summer, it was a challenge coordinating with Career Services and providing this intervention.</p> |
| <b>Changes because of COVID-19</b>              | For Fall 2020, COVID forced us to hold our NSOs in a virtual format, blunting some of the momentum we had built. FORGE became even more important in this new environment. For Summer and Fall of 2021, we resumed face-to-face NSOs, but our online FORGE unit has continued to play an important role.  |
| <b>Strategy or activity</b>                     | <b>For Fall 2020, we continued to refine and improve our still-new freshman seminar, FIRE 1000.</b>   |
| <b>Summary of Activities</b>                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We “themed” FIRE 1000 by academic focus area, and attempted to get all the students with majors in a specific focus area into an appropriately themed FIRE class (Nursing and Health Sciences; Business; Social Sciences, etc.).</li> <li>2. Advising and other activities in the “themed” class are then focused on majors/programs within that specific focus area.</li> <li>3. We instituted a speaker series, with individuals from the community (and our faculty) giving presentations to students in the themed FIRE courses on careers and opportunities in those fields.</li> </ol>  |
| <b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b>            | ABC rates for FIRE fell about 13 points, to 62%, compared to Fall 2019’s 75%. However, as noted above, our retention rate for the Fall 2020 cohort rose 3 points to 58.9%, even in the midst of the pandemic and the abrupt move to remote instruction in March 2019.   |
| <b>Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future</b> | Getting students into a FIRE class themed for their academic focus area during the schedule-making process was our biggest challenge, as all the expected obstacles (class time conflicts, students’ work schedules, and so on) popped up. Similar scheduling issues were a challenge with our speaker series. For example, we needed to get students from two or three similarly themed FIRE sections that met on different days and at different times to an auditorium to hear the scheduled speaker. More courses offered virtually also created challenges.  |
| <b>Changes because of COVID-19</b>              | In some ways, COVID made the schedule-making process easier in Fall 2020, as we had more online FIRE sections than in Fall 2018 and thus fewer time conflicts. However, COVID has wreaked havoc with the speaker series. Another challenge we saw is that the online NSO, a one-hour Zoom event with an abbreviated advising session, resulted in students being less sure of their majors; thus, we seem to have more students in the “wrong” themed FIRE class.   |
| <b>Strategy or activity</b>                     | <b>Helping students make or confirm a purposeful choice about an academic focus area and program of study, by meeting them where they are.</b>  |



|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Summary of Activities</b>                    | Assign faculty advisors to hold regular advising hours in the residence halls.   |
| <b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b>            | We had a faculty advisor/Academic Coach keep 3-5 “office hours” per week in our residence halls in 2019-2020 and are continued that practice here in Fall 2020/Spring 2021. While in 2019-20 the advisor set up shop in one specific residence halls, in Fall 2020, she is rotating among the five residence halls on our campus.  |
| <b>Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future</b> | The practice of “meeting students where they are” is an effective one. We believe that offering advising and academic coaching in the residence hall contributed to the improved retention numbers for residential students. The COVID restrictions (social distancing in particular) and having fewer students on campus complicated things over the past year. Traffic was definitely down, but Fall 2021 looks much better. |

Transparent Pathways

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Strategy or activity</b>                     | <b>Continued work on accuracy and availability of program maps.</b>  |
| <b>Summary of Activities</b>                    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reviewed all program maps for accuracy.</li> <li>2. To make them more accessible to students in the first year, posted program maps in a central online location (the Student Success Center website).</li> <li>3. Also posted all program maps in the GSC Academic Catalog.</li> <li>4. Encouraged all FIRE instructors, who double as academic advisors for the first-year students in their FIRE sections, to highlight program maps during advising and make students aware of them.</li> <li>5. Current efforts are directed toward combining program maps with “co-curricular” maps, specifically focused on the Highlander EDGE.</li> </ol> |
| <b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b>            | We are hoping that our continued work on program maps will pay off in improved graduation rates and lower average hours to graduation metrics, but those outcomes will not be clear for another year or so. Again, we did see a higher retention rate for the Fall 2019 and Fall 2020 cohorts.   |
| <b>Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future</b> | Program maps are very helpful but come with the struggle to balance the need to provide a clear direction but not overwhelm the student with excessive details/options. Maintaining standard formatting has also been an ongoing challenge.  |
| <b>Changes because of COVID-19</b>              | With more students off campus and most advising taking place remotely, it has been more important than ever to have clear program maps. We will continue to work on our program maps.  |

Academic Mindset

|                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Strategy or activity</b>          | <b>Continue to make growth mindset the focus of our mandatory freshman seminar, FIRE 1000.</b>   |
| <b>Summary of Activities</b>         | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Regular FIRE team meetings to discuss the success and effectiveness of the academic growth mindset assignments and activities in FIRE 1000, eliminate ineffective assignments, and add new, more effective assignments.</li> </ol>   |
| <b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b> | <p>According to the results of the 2020 USG Mindset Survey results, GSC outperformed the state college sector for the following categories, which suggest the focus on growth mindset in FIRE 1000 is paying dividends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Math Growth Mindset Composite: GSC responses showed an improvement of .37 (+9.5%) between the early and late Fall administrations, compared to .08 (+2.1%) improvement for the state college sector as a whole.</li> <li>• English Growth Mindset Composite: GSC responses showed an improvement of .31 (+7.5%) between early and late Fall administrations, compared to a .01 (+.02%) improvement for state colleges as a whole.</li> </ul> <p>While it appears likely that the FIRE course countered a negative impact of the pandemic on pass rates, we need to examine what factors may have contributed to the drop such as the change in learning</p> |

support placement guidelines or the dramatic shift to online learning. We are eager to drill down in the data to see where we might be able to intervene.

- For the 2020 freshman cohort, ABC rates in MATH 1111 dropped 3 points, to 65%, compared to Fall 2019 cohort at 69%. [The Fall 2017 cohort ABC rate was at a grisly 37% for the before we implemented FIRE 1000.]
- For the 2020 freshman cohort, ABC rates in ENGL 1101 fell 12 points, to 61%, compared to the Fall 2019 cohort at 73%. [The ABC rate was at 65% for the Fall 2017 cohort, before we implemented FIRE 1000.]

| 2020 USG Mindset Survey Data     | Gordon Early Fall | Gordon Late Fall | State College Early Fall | State College Late Fall | USG Early Fall | USG Late Fall |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Math Growth Mindset Composite    | 3.89              | 4.26             | 3.81                     | 3.89                    | 3.89           | 3.92          |
| English Growth Mindset Composite | 4.12              | 4.43             | 4.15                     | 4.16                    | 4.23           | 4.25          |

**Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future**

We believe the FIRE 1000 emphasis on mindset has had a huge positive impact on our success and retention rates. We will continue to tweak and improve FIRE 1000 as the course matures. One challenge for us—and this is probably a challenge for all freshman seminars on all campuses—is to maintain a clear vision of FIRE 1000’s purpose and to fight off attempts to squeeze other, extraneous, unrelated content into the course. Staffing is also a challenge—we have five full-time Academic Success Lecturer/Advisors who teach the majority of the FIRE sections, but we regularly need to recruit faculty from academic focus areas and even staff to fully staff the sections. And of course, coherence and consistency is a challenge whenever new faculty who are not part of the FIRE Team are called upon to teach each Fall semester. [We are currently working on revising our Advising model, which will convert our Lecturer/Advisors to Professional Advisors, so we are determining how to effectively staff our FIRE courses.]

**Changes because of COVID-19**

Because we see FIRE 1000 as a crucial part of GSC’s First Year Experience program, the increased number of online sections due to COVID concerned us. We feel that growth mindset is a topic better addressed in face-to-face classes, and a secondary focus of FIRE—developing a sense of belonging—is more difficult to address online. Also, we learned in Spring 2020 that too many of our students lack access to computers and reliable internet connections when they are in online classes. For fall of 2021, most of our FIRE sections are face-to-face.

**Strategy or activity Summary of Activities**

**Continue to promote a sense of belonging for all of our students.**

1. Continue to encourage all students to complete Stanford University’s PERTS social belonging intervention as part of FORGE (our online pre-orientation modules).
2. Continue to promote a campus-wide discussion on diversity and inclusion, through our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, our African-American Male Initiative program, and other campus organizations.
3. Organized and implemented Sophomore Induction Ceremony, to make new freshmen feel part of their academic units as they transition from their first-year FIRE 1000 advisors to faculty advisors in their chosen majors. Continue.
4. Student Life and Residence Life developed a “Welcome Week” for the Fall 2019 freshman cohort that included an academic session designed to help students get to know their

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|  | <p>professors. In Fall of 2020, this week was greatly truncated. However, we re-established Welcome Week in Fall of 2021, and we relabeled the academic day the “EDGE-ucation Day.”</p>  |
| <p><b>Outcomes/Measures of progress</b></p>            | <p>We have already mentioned the overall rise in retention, from 44.6% for the Fall 2017 cohort, before we implemented PERTS and FIRE 1000, to 53.5% for the Fall 2018 cohort, 55.9% for the Fall 2019 cohort, to 58.9% for the Fall 2020 cohort, which is a clear sign of overall progress [all IPDES-reported rates.]. But digging deeper into that retention data, we see encouraging progress for minority and historically underrepresented groups that suggest our emphasis on social belonging is working:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African-American retention rose from 54.3% for the Fall 2018 cohort to 58.4% for the Fall 2019 cohort (it had been well below 50%, at 41.9%, for the Fall 2017 cohort).</li> <li>• Hispanic retention rose from 61.1% for the Fall 2018 cohort to 65.1% for the Fall 2019 cohort (it had barely been above 50% for the Fall 2017 cohort).</li> <li>• Retention rates for self-identified first-generation students rose from 56.5% for the Fall 2018 cohort to 67.4% for the Fall 2019 cohort—which is actually almost a full point higher than the Fall 2019 retention rate for continuing generation students (66.5%).</li> </ul> <p>[these numbers exclude students in our FVSU-GAP program)</p> <p>However, for the Fall 2020 cohort, we took a step back, as we saw drops in retention rates for those groups, perhaps as a result of the pandemic, the move to online classes, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African-American retention dropped to 43.8%, 5.4 points lower than the Fall 2019 cohort rate of 49.2%.</li> <li>• Hispanic retention fell about 2.5 points, to 63.3% compared to 65.8% in Fall 2019.</li> <li>• Retention rates for self-identified first-generation students fell to 50%, a drop of 16.4 points compared to Fall 2019’s retention rate of 66.4%. [However, we should note that the sample size is very small, as only 5.1% of the Fall 2020 cohort (only 28 students) identified as first-generation, compared to 19.2% (141 students) in the Fall 2019 cohort.]</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Lessons Learned and Plans for the Future</b></p> | <p>We believe we have made great progress in understanding that our students must feel a sense of belonging—both socially and academically—before they can be successful, and that we need to intentionally create interventions—for both students AND faculty—to foster that sense of belonging. It is perhaps especially challenging on our campus: an access institution in a small town in semi-rural mid-Georgia with a significant percentage of our student population coming from the South Metro Atlanta area; and, of course, recent developments in our country have sparked intense debate on race and the concept of inclusion and belonging. These are often difficult conversations to have, but we will continue to have them on our campus. Here in Fall 2020, for example, our senior administration set up a Presidential Commission on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, which sponsored a series of campus-wide dialogues on those topics, and presented a final report to the President. In Fall 2021, Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI) Council was established to continue the important work of the Presidential Commission and to dig deeper into equity gaps.</p>  |
| <p><b>Changes because of COVID-19</b></p>              | <p>With fewer face-to-face classes and fewer students on campus, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion was especially challenging in Academic Year 2020-2021, for reasons mentioned in previous sections above. We will continue to encourage students to complete the PERTS social belonging intervention, and we will continue to seize every opportunity to engage the entire campus in discussions regarding inclusion and belonging, even if they are virtual and not face-to-face.</p>  |

**General Overview and Observations**

As noted above, our rebuilt NSOs and our still-evolving FIRE 1000 class contributed most to our improved Momentum Year metrics for the 2020-2021 academic year, particularly our improved ABC rates in English and Math classes, and overall gains in retention. We still have work to do developing consistent, clearer program maps and ensuring students have access to those maps. Also, although we have come a long way towards recognizing how important a sense of belonging is for our students, culture change is not complete, and we still have work to do on that front. One big concern for the Fall 2021 cohort is that, because of COVID, they had a very different high school experience than any previous generation. We have already seen evidence of significant lack of engagement. In addition,

many more of these students are coming into college with increased emotional health concerns. We will need to work even harder to keep our retention momentum going.

## SECTION 5: STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMPLETION TEAM

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