

Annual Report on *Our Path to Preeminence:*
The 2016 – 2021 Georgia College Strategic Plan

Report of Accomplishments FY2018

Activities and Progress of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee

In 2015 and 2016, Georgia College & State University faculty, staff, and students joined together to create a strategic plan designed to move our university to preeminence among other public liberal arts institutions. The strategic plan that was developed resulted from the work of nearly 150 faculty, staff, and students who were involved in the planning effort. The strategic plan was reviewed by University Senate at its meeting on September 16, 2016 with Senate voting to endorse the vision, value, and mission statements and the six goals identified in the plan. Executive Cabinet subsequently approved the Strategic Plan at its meeting on October 18, 2016. The revised mission statement was approved by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia at its meeting in October, 2017.

Toward the end of 2017, Champions were identified by the Steering Committee and formally assigned responsibility for specific action items by President Dorman. The Steering Committee elected to utilize Compliance Assist (and later, Watermark) to document accomplishment of action items. Steering Committee members subsequently met with the Champions to discuss the next steps and time lines, and to review what the Champions will report through Watermark.

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee remained quite busy during 2018, meeting on a monthly basis through the academic year. Given that its initial task of developing a strategic plan had been completed, the committee felt the need to chart its role and path going forward. The committee developed:

- A description of its key activities (e.g., review/analyze data related to accomplishment of strategic plan action items);
- A list of campus units that should be represented on the Steering Committee;
- A process for committee member rotation;
- A regular schedule for reviewing reports related to action items;
- A process for recommending to Executive Cabinet proposed changes in action items;
- A format for reporting to Executive Cabinet.

The result of this work was the creation of a set of Steering Committee procedures which President Dorman approved in June 2018. These procedures identified the AVP for Strategic Initiatives as the permanent Steering Committee chair, and the AVP assumed this role in July, 2018.

With the development of its new procedures, the work of the committee evolved, morphing from its earlier role of strategic plan development to its new role of implementing the plan, measuring action item accomplishment, and recommending revisions or additions to action items. The transition from Compliance Assist to Watermark delayed Champions in submitting their first reports until fall of 2018. However, while the transition slowed the reporting process, the process is in place and most Champions submitted their reports prior to the established deadline. The Steering Committee subsequently met with all of the Champions to discuss progress toward accomplishing action items, gather recommendations or concerns related to action items, and seek input into improving the strategic planning process.

In the Steering Committee's spring 2019 conversations with Champions, the Committee discussed a number of national and state-wide issues that are or will impact the environment for execution of the strategic plan. The Committee discussed issues such as: challenges in maintaining the size and quality of the entering freshmen class, the impact of growth in dual enrollment on the GC core and lower-level

credit hour production, and the reduction in the number of transfer students due to mission creep within the USG state college sector.

On the pages that follow, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee details noteworthy strategic plan progress and accomplishment during FY2018 and outlines areas of concern. Recommendations for changes to existing action items and for creation of new action items can be found on the attached spreadsheet.

Noteworthy Strategic Plan Progress and Accomplishment

Our Path to Preeminence differs from all prior Georgia College strategic plans in that it is actually being implemented by Champions, documented through Watermark, and monitored by an active steering committee that reports annually to Executive Cabinet. The process was inclusive on the front end, and there is continuity, consistency, and follow-through throughout the implementation phase. It is also a living document in that the committee recommends changes in action items or the addition of new action items as needed. By design, the plan is constantly evolving.

Anecdotally, the strategic plan appears to be having a “trickle-down effect” as colleges and other units align their strategic plans and processes to the university’s plan. For example, the College of Arts & Sciences references the strategic plan often. Changes in the promotion and tenure documents for all A&S departments have been successfully implemented due, in large part, to related strategic plan action items. Because the strategic planning process was so inclusive and involved such a large number of faculty and staff, it has been easier to gain acceptance of such changes.

On a more specific level:

Recruitment: As outlined in Goal 1, Initiative 1, Action Item 2, there were gains in recruitment of high-ability students. During 2018, the Office of Admissions partnered with the Office of Financial Aid, New Student Programs, and the Honors Program to recruit high-ability students.

- Through strategic name purchase through the College Board, ACT, and Certificate of Merit, Admissions developed a high-ability recruitment communication plan for prospective students.
- The Presidential Scholarship Competition saw an increase in applicants from 208 to 371, and 101 high-ability students attended the competition.
- Admissions and the Honors Program successfully implemented a special visit program entitled Honors Preview Days, and 387 high-ability applicants, 40 PSC attendees, and 55 students admitted to the Honors Program (not including auto-admits) attended a campus tour.
- The university received 935 applications from high-ability students, and 113 students who confirmed their participation in the Honors Program enrolled.
- The average high school GPA for FTF admits was 3.55, while the average high school GPA for high-ability FTF admits was 3.80. The average test scores for FTF admits was 1182 (old) SAT, 1210 new SAT, and 26 ACT. High ability FTF admits had an average (old) SAT of 1295, 1328 new SAT, and 28 ACT.

Career Center: The aim of Goal 1, Initiative 5, Action Item 4 is to deepen participation in the Career Center by GC undergraduate students while enrolled by encouraging faculty to include milestone activities in courses, including the Career Center in Week of Welcome and orientation, and linking milestones to LEAP and leadership initiatives. The Career Center has made good progress in this regard.

- For AY2017, 24 out of 35 (68%) departments/programs involved the Career Center and/or the Milestones into their courses beyond activities in FYAS. Strong inroads were made with plans/discussions for at least 5 additional programs to include the Career Center in more of their courses (Nursing, Mass Communication, History, English, and Music Therapy--through required Music course offered in Music Department) starting AY2018.
- In an annual survey of students who used the Career Center, of the 91 respondents, 79% said they were likely to recommend the services to a peer. 69.23% of the 91 respondents said they had heard of the Career Planning Milestones program.

Transformative Undergraduate Curricular and Co-curricular Experiences: The purpose of Goal 2, Initiative 1 was to establish an institutional-level requirement for student participation in transformative experiences. GC Journeys has instituted an institutional-level expectation for student participation in those transformative experiences that broadly support student development and individual growth. (The GC Journeys Web page can be found at <https://www.gcsu.edu/gcjourneys>.)

- Students will complete three experiences as part of their program of study: The First-Year Experience, Career Planning Milestones, and a Capstone Course in the major.
- In addition, each student will select two other experiences to personalize their journey.
- Checkpoints have been determined to help ensure that students receive support and direction in choosing experiences across their time at GC.

The aim of Goal 2, Initiative 2, was to design, implement, measure, and communicate student, faculty, and staff participation in transformative experiences. To date:

- A viable and sustainable electronic portfolio system was launched to all first-year students in early spring 2019. The freshmen have begun to build their Journeys portfolios with their first artifacts from their first Transformative Learning Experience, *First Year Academic Seminar*.
- Each transformative experience has developed outcomes which are currently being translated into rubrics to assess learning outcomes for all transformative experiences.
- The Registrar worked with GC Journeys to create a system to code transformative experiences in banner beginning in spring 2019. Additional coding has also been designed for internal use beginning fall 2019.

Goal 2, Initiative 3 is focused on developing a distinctive liberal arts curriculum. An early goal of the GC Journeys program was to map the entire curriculum to the AAC&U essential learning outcomes (ELOs). Another aspect of distinction is ensuring that the program becomes well known statewide and nationwide.

- Significant work was undertaken to map each course in the core curriculum to one or more of the outcomes, and corresponding assessment tools were built to dually assess the core outcome and the ELO.
- Assessment data were collected fall 2018 and spring 2019 using the new core assessment tools. Data will be analyzed summer of 2019.
- Aspects of GC Journeys were highlighted at 10 state and national workshops and conferences.
- In November, 2018, Georgia College planned and hosted the inaugural LEAP Georgia Conference with 65 individuals from across the state in attendance and three AAC&U featured speakers.
- Preparing faculty and staff to design and implement transformative experiences and teach essential skills has been paramount. Over the past year a “train the trainer” program has prepared 30 faculty and staff with another 22 registered for the summer. This rigorous 32-hour

program has prepared a large number of faculty and staff to work with their peers in order to bring the initiative to scale.

Graduate Enrollment: The focus of Goal 3, Initiative 1 is to increase enrollment in graduate programs to viable levels. There has been significant progress related to this initiative, as there were overall increases in graduate enrollment, and especially in College of Education graduate programs which currently have the 3rd highest enrollment in the history of the university.

- Due to the overall increase in the number of graduate students, only two graduate programs (Music, within the College of Arts & Sciences, and Music Therapy, within the College of Health Sciences), are considered low producing, and there are plans to promote and advertise these programs to increase enrollment.

University Advancement: Significant progress was made with goals related to increasing the number of merit and need-based institutional scholarships for incoming students (G1, I1, AI6), establishing or extending funding partnerships with foundations (G4, I3, AI2), engaging students upon their arrival at GC (G4, I4, AI1), engaging alumni early and often (G4, I4, AI 2), and increasing the university's endowment (G4, I4, AI5).

- The number of merit and need-based institutional scholarships available to incoming students was increased by more than 25% from FY17. The original target date for meeting this action item was 2021, but the target was met and exceeded during FY18. The baseline data for FY17 was 26 scholarships for \$243,323. For FY18, 36 merit/need-based scholarships were awarded for a total of \$254,294.
- Funding partnerships with foundations were increased from FY17 (10 applications to foundation partnerships, with three grants awarded) to FY18 (17 applications to foundation partnerships, with 10 grants awarded).
- Increasing numbers of students are being engaged upon their arrival at GC through class giving campaigns and student alumni clubs to increase student giving. The goal of 20.5% of Class of 2018 graduating students being donors was exceeded by 5.5% (26%).
- Alumni are increasingly being engaged early and often. Alumni engagement activities increased from 23 alumni events with 1,068 attendees in FY17 to 30 alumni events with 1,229 attendees in FY18.
- The university's endowment continues to grow. The endowment goal for FY18 of \$41,250,000 was exceeded by the actual ending balance for FY18 of \$43,929,555. The FY18 campaign goal of \$20,408,192 was exceeded by the actual ending balance for FY18 of \$23,044,010. The FY18 annual fundraising goal of \$5,510,820 was exceeded by the actual ending total for FY18 of \$6,055,618.

Grant Development Assistance: Goal 6, Initiative 1, Action Item 3 focuses on the impact related to grant-development assistance provided by the university to community agencies. During the year, there was a significant increase in applications and awards that either benefit community partners directly or include them as co-applicants. There were 44 such grants in FY18 with \$3,146,233 awarded compared with 25 grants and \$1,714,362 awarded in FY17. This was an increase of 76% in the number of applications and 84% in the total dollar amount of awards. The primary partner in these applications was the Baldwin County School District, followed by health and community services. Continued increases in such partnerships will help move the university toward preeminence while also improving educational levels and the quality of life in the surrounding community.

Areas of Concern

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee also noted the following areas of concern:

Staff Turnover Slowed Action Item Progress: Turnover of key staff, including the departure of two Champions (Chief Human Resources Officer and Assistant Vice President for International Education), slowed progress toward action item accomplishment. The lack of a permanent leader for CTL limited progress on a number of Goal 2 action items. In addition, the extended leave of another Champion greatly limited progress toward that Champion's goals—which are related to the critical areas of retention and student success. For example, little progress was made in 2018 on action items 1, 2, or 3 under Goal 1, Initiative 5.

It is clear that the success of specific action items within the strategic plan is directly tied to the presence, focus, and motivation of Champions, and when there is turnover or Champions are absent, progress is slowed or halted. The Steering Committee recommends that, whenever possible, Champions should involve colleagues or form teams that can continue progress toward accomplishing action items in their absence.

Incremental Action Items: Some of the action items seem incremental rather than transformative. If the university is to achieve preeminence within a reasonable time period, then more ambitious metrics need to be set, and the action items should be addressed more aggressively. ***It would be helpful for Executive Cabinet to identify those key measures that will move the university toward preeminence, and suggest more ambitious metrics for corresponding action items.***

Limited Progress toward Retention and Graduation Targets: G1, I2, AI2 promises the development of targeted strategies and pilot programs to enhance retention, progression, and graduation, with the stated goal of increasing the second-year retention rate from 65% to 75%, and improving the four-year graduation rate to 55% and the six-year graduation rate to 70%, all by 2021. However, overall student retention and four-year graduation rates have held steady over the past three years. The second-year retention rate of 68.60% in 2018 actually dropped slightly from 2016 when it was 70.06%. The four-year graduation rate was 48% in 2018, exactly the same as it was in 2016. ***With only two years from the 2021 target date, are the targeted numbers realistic based on progress to date?***

The Lack of a Permanent, High-Level Leader for Goal 2: Goal 2 is arguably the most important goal within the strategic plan as it will lead to the development and implementation of distinctive undergraduate experiences that will enhance the student experience and set Georgia College apart from most peer institutions. While the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and the GC Journeys Director have devoted considerable time to Goal 2 action items, until now the university has cobbled together leadership and resources to implement the vitally important goal. While progress has been made, much more should be anticipated under the leadership of the new Associate Provost for Transformative

Learning Experiences, Dr. Jordan Cofer, who will arrive on campus in July, 2019. ***The Strategic Planning Steering Committee will request that the new Associate Provost work with appropriate parties (CTL Director, Journeys Director, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, etc.) to update existing Goal 2 action items and craft new action items to speed the development and implementation of transformative experiences.***

This institution will be most transformative, and thus most preeminent, when that transformation occurs in the life of each of our students. GC Journeys, when fully implemented, and the Career Planning Milestones (as those professional development activities become more deeply embedded in the GC culture) are two initiatives that, with continued attention to execution, bring the potential of being significant strategic differentiators for GC, thus sources of preeminence for the institution. Initiatives from the Center for Student Success are a third opportunity for dramatic impact on GC, particularly in regard to retention and graduation rates.

Programs with Secondary Admissions Processes: Students who gain entry into the university’s high-demand and high-quality programs with secondary admissions requirements (Nursing BSN and BS in Education) demonstrate very high retention and graduation rates. However, the university’s retention and graduation rates are also impacted by those students whose hearts are set on one of these popular programs, but who are not accepted into the cohorts. While some of these students may select other majors and remain at Georgia College, others elect to transfer to institutions where they can gain admission into the desired programs. This issue—which is not unique to Georgia College—has been studied in the past, and various solutions attempted. However, a renewed focus on this issue may be warranted given the strong interest in increasing retention and graduation rates. At the very least, the university needs an accurate picture of how many students select other majors and remain at Georgia College until graduation, and how many transfer to other institutions when not accepted into programs with secondary admissions. ***The Steering Committee recommends that Executive Cabinet discuss cohort programs with secondary admissions requirements and determine if further study and steps are needed.***

Delay in the Completion of the 90-day Hiring Survey: The 90-day hiring survey of May 2018 graduates referenced in Goal 1, Initiative 5, Action Item 5 was slowed by staff turnover, and the new survey was not utilized. To improve the university’s knowledge rate of recent graduates, the new survey needs to be completed in a timely manner. At the time this report was being created, the survey of recent graduates was in progress, as the Career Center and Alumni Relations have partnered to distribute the

First Destination Survey to graduating seniors and graduate students. This survey will go out every two weeks until October, 2019.

Insufficient Staff Support for Strategic Planning: The current chair of the Steering Committee is a .49 retiree who feels that he struggles to do an effective job leading and providing support for the strategic planning process while also handling a number of other responsibilities including high-level searches. In July, 2020, Dean Dale Young, the only remaining initial co-chair—and a very active leader on the Steering Committee—will retire. Given that will also be the time when the Steering Committee will begin conducting a comprehensive review of the strategic plan including mission, vision, and value statements, and goals, initiatives, and action items, this may be a good time for the President to consider a formal handoff to new leadership.

The Steering Committee recommends that Executive Cabinet consider transitioning the management, facilitation, and oversight of the university's strategic plan to the Senior Associate Provost of Academic Affairs and Director of The Graduate School who will co-chair with a faculty member. The Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) will provide key support to the co-chairs including assisting with assessment, data management, reporting, analysis, and sustainability. Additionally, the strategic plan's management system, Watermark, is managed in this office, and much of the labor of sustaining the strategic plan lies in the successful management of the collection and reporting system. Positions in that office who would support the co-chairs include two administrators (IR and IE), an assessment practitioner, a data warehouse and senior business intelligence specialist, a research analyst, and a database administrator and reporting specialist.

Departure of Provost Brown: At the time this report was being created, Provost Brown was named Chancellor of Western Carolina University. As the Provost is directly or indirectly responsible for many of the action items within the strategic plan, any loss of continuity could delay action item accomplishment. However, President Dorman has developed a search timeline which will have a new permanent Provost named by mid to late fall 2019, and that should mitigate any potential negative impact on the strategic plan.

While the support and involvement of the Provost in strategic planning is vitally important, the associate provost level is where much of the work toward accomplishing action items actually occurs. For example, the Associate Provost for Student Success is directly responsible for the retention and graduation action items in Goal 1; the new Associate Provost for Transformative Learning Experiences will be responsible for creating and accomplishing all Goal 2 action items (transformative experiences); and the Senior Associate Provost and Director of the Graduate School is responsible for all Goal 3 action items (graduate programs) and two Goal 4 action items. ***The Strategic Planning Steering Committee will consult with the Associate Provosts on an as-needed basis when meeting topics require their presence.***

Emerging Strategic Issues: During the year, the following strategic issues emerged that must be addressed by the Strategic Plan:

- Approval by the USG of planning funds for a new science building on the GC campus. This item will be added to Goal 4.
- Possible USG funding of an additional nursing cohort. While a new cohort was not funded in the FY 2020 budget, if it eventually is funded, then it will be appropriate to add this item as an action item under Goal 1.

- Over the next year, Georgia College will work to develop departmental Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) which outline how the university will continue providing services to the campus community in the event of emergency situations and more routine disruptions that affect operations. This continuity planning process likely will need to be incorporated into the strategic plan.

Recommendations for Changes to Existing Action Items and for Creation of New Action Items

The attached color-coded spreadsheet includes the final version of the 2016-2021 strategic plan with four new columns: Findings, Met/Not Met, Interpretation/Next Steps, and Recommendations to Cabinet. The latter column details a number of recommended changes to existing action items and the addition of three new action items for review and consideration by President Dorman and Executive Cabinet.

Next Steps

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee has identified several next steps including:

- Working with the Associate Vice President of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to create a Strategic Planning dashboard viewable by the campus community.
- Requesting that the new Associate Provost for Transformative Learning Experiences work with Champions and other appropriate parties to update existing Goal 2 action items and craft new action items to speed the development and implementation of transformative experiences.
- Producing, in early 2020, an annual report similar in format and scope to this report.
- Conducting a comprehensive review of the strategic plan during AY 21 including mission, vision, and value statements, and goals, initiatives, and action items.
- Writing a comprehensive final report in AY21 near the conclusion of the five-year strategic plan cycle. This report will include comprehensive recommendations to the President and Cabinet.

Summary

At the earliest stages of the development of the university's strategic plan, President Dorman and Provost Brown provided guidance on what they wanted the process and plan to be. The process was to be inclusive and encompassing of all aspects of the campus, including existing plans such as the facilities plan and the Diversity Action Plan. The strategic plan was to be actionable and doable, not "pie in the sky" or ethereal. At the same time, there was an expectation that challenging goals would be developed to move Georgia College in the right direction. As President Dorman noted, he wanted "a little bit of bodaciousness without being unrealistic." The plan was to be measurable, with a dashboard of data developed at the beginning and subsequently compared to new data obtained at the end of the five-year plan. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee would not be a limited-term task force, but would stay on throughout the duration of the plan and monitor plan accomplishment on an annual basis. The goal, of course, was to not only make our plan measurable, but to have data and people in place so that goal attainment will be measured on an on-going basis, and action items modified, deleted, or added as needed.

Like turning a large ship, changing the course of a university can be a slow and challenging process. The development of the strategic plan was time consuming, as was the process of gaining the various internal and external approvals, appointing and orienting Champions, developing the reporting mechanism, etc. Though ***Our Path to Preeminence*** was to be a plan for 2016-2021, Champions weren't appointed until near the end of 2017, at which time the work of the plan was officially begun. Champions submitted their first reports in late 2018, making this the first year that action item progress can be reported. Now that the strategic planning reporting process has been implemented and operationalized, however, the pace of progress should increase significantly.

As a result of the hard work of the Steering Committee and numerous faculty, staff, and students, for the first time in its 130-year history, Georgia College has a strategic plan that is fully implemented, regularly assessed, and modified as needed.

The strategic plan that was developed is not a perfect plan, but it does satisfy most of the goals set at the beginning of the planning process:

- The plan's development was inclusive and encompassing of all aspects of the university;
- The action items are actionable, doable, challenging, and—for the most part—measurable;
- The Strategic Planning Steering Committee is an on-going committee that meets on a regular basis and has developed processes and a timeline to guide its annual activities;
- Progress toward action item accomplishment is being measured on annual basis, and changes and additions to action items are annually recommended to Executive Cabinet.

As a result of the hard work of the Steering Committee and numerous faculty, staff, and students, for the first time in its 130-year history, Georgia College has a strategic plan that is fully implemented, regularly assessed, and modified as needed.

Current Members of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee:

Susan Allen
Linda Bradley
James Carlisle
Chris Ferland
Sandy Gangstead
David Johnson (University Senate)
Chavonda Mills
Omar Odeh
Mark Pelton, Committee Chair
Meghan Pittman (SGA)
Suzanne Pittman
Cara Smith
Michael Watson
Veronica Womack
Dale Young