When can one say that a new college is no longer new? Is it when a major highway interchange must be rebuilt to accommodate the college’s traffic? Or when officials from another college travel halfway across the nation to study its successes? Perhaps it is when the students and faculty begin routinely defeating counterparts from more established institutions in academic competitions. Could it be when it is showcased in a major national network TV movie? Is it when the college is selected to receive a grant through the high-profile Complete College America program? (see story, page 5) Or is it when students are woven into the fabric of the community? The last few months have seen these and many other milestones as Georgia Gwinnett College has settled into a new phase of its growth and development as an institution. The college surpassed 8,000 students in January, again repeating its unusual pattern of increasing enrollment from fall to spring semesters. The growth has generated a new energy, fed not only by numbers but by more active student organizations, special events and other facets of a more established, yet still expanding, campus life.

GGC is still celebrating many firsts, but now looks to the future with different goals in mind. In fact, its leadership has completed the implementation of the college’s first strategic plan, which focused on creating the college, and is developing a new strategic plan devoted to enhancing the college. “We have made incredible achievements in a very short time,” said GGC President Daniel J. Kaufman. “We can all be proud to have come so far. The college...
has already become integral to the community and state, and we intend to be a player on the national and international stages. Thanks to the hard work of our staff, faculty and students, Georgia Gwinnett College has built a solid foundation that promises a bright future."

GGC President Dan Kaufman guides U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson on a recent tour of campus.

GGC’s national reputation grows rapidly

The college recently hosted officials with the University of North Texas at Dallas (UNT-Dallas), who hoped to learn from GGC’s success.

Like Georgia Gwinnett, UNT-Dallas is the newest public institution in its state, having been established in September 2010. The UNT-Dallas team included John Beehler, provost and vice president for Academic Excellence and Student Success.

“IT is great to visit GGC and review best practices in achieving high rates of student success,” said Beehler. “UNT-Dallas hopes to replicate key aspects of GGC’s model.”

This marks the first site visit by another college seeking to learn from Georgia Gwinnett, but Kaufman said it will not be the last.

“We intended that the college would be a wellspring for innovation and new ideas,” Kaufman said. “Thanks to our faculty and staff, this part of our vision is coming to fruition.”

Another national distinction was Georgia Gwinnett’s selection as one of only eight institutions in this year’s American Council on Education (ACE) Internationalization Laboratory. Guided by ACE, Georgia Gwinnett will increase global engagement by working on strategic planning and student outcomes and participating in site visits, peer reviews and other activities.

“Being a 21st century institution means embedding internationalization within our core mission,” said Anthony Pinder, director of Internationalization. “Our participation will build on current successes and advance the college’s internationalization efforts.”

National distinctions achieved

In only its sixth year, GGC ranked 70th in the list of “Best Regional Colleges – South” in the U.S. News & World Report’s 2012 edition of Best Colleges. Key factors vaulting GGC into the rankings were the percentages of full-time faculty (92), the acceptance rate (96) and alumni giving (32). Its peer ranking was also significant.

Because GGC is still a young institution, we lacked data for other measurements,” Kaufman said. “We are very pleased that GGC was ranked so favorably based upon the limited data available.”

Best Colleges is a popular reference for prospective students and their parents when considering colleges and universities.

Georgia Gwinnett College is also one of 200 institutions listed in Colleges of Distinction, a guide listing colleges excelling in four key areas: engaged students, great teaching, vibrant communities, and successful outcomes.

GGC debuts on national TV

“Game of Your Life,” a made-for-TV movie was partially filmed on the Georgia Gwinnett campus and aired on NBC in December. The movie was about a student who lands a scholarship in an exclusive video game design program. Dozens of GGC students appeared as extras in multiple scenes, giving them an opportunity to experience real-life film making.

“GGC was a great location to film this movie because it embraces all of the qualities of a high-end scholastic environment in an idyllic setting,” said David Rosemont, executive producer of HCP Productions II, LLC of Atlanta.

The movie’s topic foreshadowed the future for some GGC students, as the college will soon introduce a gaming concentration.

“Gaming technology is important to local economic development,” said Thomas Mundie, dean of the School of Science and Technology. “Graduates with this expertise are in demand as the field continues to expand.”

Students and faculty achieve a winning record

Some might think of Georgia Gwinnett as an underdog because of its youth. However, that is not the case. From athletic club teams to academic competitions, this 21st Century “success institution” is living up to its reputation.

GGC’s innovative iTouch Chemistry Project took home top honors at the Technology Association of Georgia (TAG) 2011 Excalibur Awards Ceremony. The prestigious program recognizes innovative use of technology in the fields of business and education.

This was the first time Georgia Gwinnett educators entered the competition, which attracted more than 20 other Georgia institutions. The iTouch Project was designed to improve the retention rate in the college’s chemistry discipline. It is common at any college to find that 40 percent of students who take Organic Chemistry I do not take Organic Chemistry II.

The project organizers distributed iTouch devices to students who used them to access specially designed organic chemistry flash cards and podcasts. These learning modules reinforced basic concepts, allowing faculty to use classroom time for more challenging material.

Another Georgia Gwinnett team placed third among 38 institutions in a highly competitive social business plan competition held during the University System of Georgia Social Business and Microcredit Forum. This marks GGC’s first academic trophy in a state-wide competition. In a recent workshop, the team earned a shot at a $50,000 business investment.

The five-member Georgia Gwinnett team presented a business plan designed to eradicate adult illiteracy in Georgia, entitled “Read4Life!”

Growth impacts highway plans

Georgia Gwinnett’s dramatic growth is leading to dramatic changes in the Lawrenceville community. The Georgia Department of Transportation recently began construction on a new interchange at Route 316, Collins Hill Road and Route 20 to accommodate increased traffic generated by the college. The project will be completed in late 2014.

In addition, the City of Lawrenceville plans to widen and improve the Collins Hill Road corridor, linking the college more easily to the vibrant downtown area and local events.

Considering that the college, its faculty and students have attained such impressive achievements in only its sixth year, the future bodes well for Georgia Gwinnett.

A team of GGC faculty and staff took top honors at the Technology Association of Georgia 2011 Excalibur Awards Ceremony for the iTouch Chemistry project.

A large movie camera captures a scene in the library during the making of the television movie, “The Game of Your Life.”

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Leadership earns student place on national stage

Kaveh Vakili’s leadership with the GGC Dragon Boat Team was one of the reasons he was selected as one of 10 students who presented parts of “Let My People Go,” a litany of commemoration included in the nationally televised, official Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Service. “I was honored to have this opportunity to speak at the MLK event,” he said. “To me, it represented how involved I was in events like the Dragon Boat Race.” Vakili had so much fun at last year’s race that he established the team as an official student organization, which requires steps designed to help students consider structure, purpose, leadership and other factors necessary to ensure a club’s success. “President Kaufman says that education is not confined to the four walls of a classroom, and I believe that, too,” said Vakili. “I saw my team members grow and become leaders through participating in this club for this race. These activities allow you to see a side of people you don’t always see in the classroom.”

The Grizzly Dragon Boat Team club will race again next year, and the members have already taken steps toward ensuring victory by holding elections to secure solid leadership, perpetuating the organization Vakili founded. Someday, the club hopes to obtain its own boat. With third and second place finishes behind them, the team is focused on taking first place.

Vakili will have graduated by then and plans to attend graduate school, but he intends to be there to cheer his fellow Grizzlies into the number one spot.

Leadership earns student place on national stage

Kaveh Vakili

The certificate recognizes knowledge and understanding of a region of growing importance, both economically and culturally. The course of study is designed to be interdisciplinary and complementary to existing undergraduate programs. U.S. relations with Latin America have been altered significantly by global and regional economic diversification and growth. The Southeast is one of the U.S. regions most integrally linked to rapidly evolving Latin American nations. An estimated 700,000 Latinos live in Georgia.

Latin American studies certificate introduced

Georgia Gwinnett College students may now earn a certificate in Latin American studies, developed by the Americas Council of the University System of Georgia. Offered through the School of Liberal Arts, the 18-credit-hour certificate is available to students in any bachelor degree program.

“Believe in challenging myself and pursuing opportunities to broaden myself as a person... I love this school. It’s given me a chance when other schools would not.”

-Kaveh Vakili

Dragon boat racing inspires student, teammates to succeed

It is a known fact that involved students stay in college. For this reason, Georgia Gwinnett College strives to ensure that its students have a variety of venues through which they can enrich their college experience.

One student found inspiration in one of the college’s more unusual activities—racing a dragon boat.

GGC has competed twice in the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Race Festival at the Lake Lanier Canoe and Kayak Olympic Venue. Last year, the students competed with only 17 people—a short full team—and walked away with an impressive third place finish against much larger and more experienced teams.

The team was better prepared for this year’s race, with 26 members, some of whom alternated between the race’s three heats. They out-paddled seven other collegiate teams, finishing only two-tenths of a second behind the first team.

Steeped in a 2000-year-old Chinese tradition, dragon boat racing honors the memory of failed efforts to save a drowning man.

The boats themselves are specially handcrafted in only a few Hong Kong boatyards. The 39-foot boats are made of teakwood or fiberglass and adorned with a dragon head and tail. The race exposes the students to Asian traditions including special dances and ceremonies to bless the boats and awaken the dragon’s spirit for the race.

However, Kaveh Vakili said he believes the race is much more than paddling and tradition. As one of the team’s original members and now team captain, he credits his overall collegiate success to his participation in the race and other outdoor recreational activities.

“I had attended other schools and I was unsuccessful,” Vakili said. “When I came to GGC, I decided to be involved in as many activities as possible. As a result, I have done well at GGC, and I am happier here than at any other school. I have the same brain as before, so I know it is because I have gotten involved in events like the Dragon Boat Race.”

Vakili had so much fun at last year’s race that he established the team as an official student organization, which requires steps designed to help students consider structure, purpose, leadership and other factors necessary to ensure a club’s success.

“President Kaufman says that education is not confined to the four walls of a classroom, and I believe that, too,” said Vakili. “I saw my team members grow and become leaders through participating in this club for this race. These activities allow you to see a side of people you don’t always see in the classroom.”

The Grizzly Dragon Boat Team will race again next year, and the members have already taken steps toward ensuring victory by holding elections to secure solid leadership, perpetuating the organization Vakili founded. Someday, the club hopes to obtain its own boat. With third and second place finishes behind them, the team is focused on taking first place.

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With the Grizzlies’ first season of competition only five months away, Director of Athletics Dr. Darin Wilson has wasted no time in hiring a staff of talented, enthusiastic coaches to build the college’s first intercollegiate athletic programs.

“I am very excited to have built such an outstanding team of coaches,” said Wilson. “They all have winning records as coaches but more importantly, they understand that the core of the athletic experience is helping young people to develop the skills and attitudes they need to succeed in life, no matter their career path. They are also committed to reaching Georgia Gwinnett College’s goal of creating a quality athletics program in record time.”

The hires were made as GGC applied to become a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The Grizzlies plan to field varsity teams in men’s and women’s soccer, softball, men’s and women’s tennis, and baseball in the 2012-2013 school year.

Men’s baseball – Brad Stromdahl

Brad Stromdahl became the Grizzlies’ first coach, and will lead the development of its men’s baseball program. A former catcher, he played two years of junior college baseball at Bethany Lutheran College in Mankato, Minn., and two years at Division-II Southwest Minnesota State University before a short stint playing professionally in independent baseball leagues. He made coaching stops at Southwest Minnesota State, Marshall University and Central Michigan University before spending the last six years at Georgia State University. He also coached collegiate summer baseball in the Coastal Plain League and Northwoods League.

“As a baseball coach this job is interesting because Gwinnett is flush with baseball talent. I plan to make it a point of emphasis to get that local talent. When you recruit the local student athlete, they not only have ties to the community, but they will be great alumni and supporters of the program in the future,” Stromdahl said.

Women’s softball – Kat Ihlenburg

As a college softball player, Kat Ihlenburg caught and played outfield for Barry University, helping to guide the Buccaneers to the 2002 Division II College World Series. She brings eight years of collegiate softball coaching experience to GGC, spending 2004-2005 at Reinhardt College and the past seven years at the College of Charleston.

“National championships are in our future,” Ihlenburg said. “That is the bar that has been set by the GGC administration, and I wouldn’t want it any other way. I expect us to be a team to be reckoned with regionally in the NAIA within four years, and a program with a national profile of success within eight years.”

Men’s soccer – Steve DeCou

Men’s soccer coach, Steven DeCou, also has no doubts that the Grizzlies will make an intense impact on the face of national collegiate soccer within a few short years.

DeCou played soccer at Tennessee Temple University and later earned a master’s in sports medicine from the United States Sports Academy, an athletics-specific graduate school. He then served as head coach at Huntington College in Huntington, Ind., guiding the Foresters to their first winning campaign in eight years in 2001. From there, he coached at Trinity Christian College. He also spent three summers coaching in the United Soccer Leagues’ Premier Development League. DeCou spent the last five years as head coach and assistant director of athletics at Belhaven University.

“So far, the Grizzlies’ intercollegiate athletics staff includes (center) Dr. Darin Wilson, director of Athletics and (clockwise from top) Ian Potter, assistant athletics director for Compliance, Academic Services and Game Operations; Mandy Schneider, assistant coach - women’s soccer; Kevin May, assistant coach – men’s soccer; Steve DeCou, head coach – men’s soccer; Kat Ihlenburg, head coach – women’s softball; Erin Lee, business manager; Dom Martelli, head coach – women’s soccer and Brad Stromdahl, head coach – men’s baseball.

“Georgia Gwinnett represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” DeCou said. “I’m excited to build a new program at an institution that is growing, and in a location with a great talent pool. GGC is a hidden gem, but the world will know about us in a couple of years.”

Women’s soccer – Dom Martelli

Veteran women’s soccer coach Domenic Martelli will lead the Grizzlies’ women’s soccer program. He comes to Georgia Gwinnett College with 18 years of Division I coaching experience. He spent the last 12 seasons at Georgia State University, where he served as the institution’s winningest coach in school history, amassing a record of 109-106-25.

“It’s thrilling to be a part of what is beginning to take place at GGC,” said Martelli. “This is a golden opportunity – a college growing academically, technologically and athletically. To start a new program and be on the cusp of building a new athletic facility is extremely exciting.”

A native of Newburgh, N.Y., Martelli played collegiate soccer at Ohio State University. He began coaching at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, until taking the head position at Georgia State. Martelli also served as a Region III Olympic Development Program staff coach and has spent countless hours recruiting, coaching and teaching soccer in metropolitan Atlanta.
Assistant soccer coaches – Kevin May and Mandy Schneider

Kevin May has joined the Grizzlies as assistant men’s soccer coach. He spent the last three years as the director of soccer operations at the University of Connecticut. He began his coaching career as an assistant coach at his alma mater, Nazareth College in Pittsford, N.Y., then served as an assistant coach at Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, N.Y. Coupled with his collegiate coaching experience, May spent time coaching high school boys in club programs in New York and Connecticut.

Mandy Schneider, assistant women’s soccer coach, comes to GGC with five years of Division-I coaching experience, spending the 2007 and 2008 seasons as an assistant at Jacksonville University and the past three years as an assistant to Martelli at Georgia State.

In addition to her collegiate coaching experience, Schneider served as an assistant at Salem High School, her alma mater, coached several club teams and currently serves as the 14 and under girls’ coach with the Atlanta Youth Soccer Association.

Professional staff – Ian Potter and Erin Lee

The Office of Athletics has two additional staff members. Ian Potter is assistant athletics director for Compliance, Academic Services and Game Operations. Potter worked in a similar position at Augusta State and has been an athlete himself, competing in high school football, basketball and track at Berkmar High School in Gwinnett County before joining the Clemson University track team.

Potter will ensure GGC’s compliance with policies regarding athletic eligibility, financial aid, academic standing, team participation, recruiting activities, playing & practice seasons, camps/clinics and amateurism. He also serves as a liaison to the college’s offices of Admissions, Financial Aid and the Registrar.

Erin Lee, business manager, has a background that provides a broad perspective on her duties overseeing budgets for the Office of Athletics and serving as liaison with the GGC Business Office. Former head volleyball coach at Florida Institute of Technology, Lee has experience in marketing, fundraising and licensing operations. Lee was a star volleyball player and team captain at the University of Alabama, receiving the distinction of SEC Scholar Athlete of the Year in 2003 and was the first in the universi-

ty’s history to hold a record of 1,000 career kills and 1,000 career assists.

Breaking ground and forging ahead

Much work remains to be done in the months leading up to the Grizzlies’ inaugural season. A decision on the college’s acceptance into the NAIA is expected in mid-April, and a search continues for tennis coaching staff.

The college eagerly awaits final approval of its $13.5 million athletics complex from the University System Board of Regents. Once construction is approved, work will begin on the facilities, which will be located along Collins Hill Road near GGC’s main entrance.

“The construction schedule will be a challenge,” Wilson said. “We all knew we would be developing this program at a record pace and we are excited to being ready for the soccer season the fall.”

The Grizzlies’ historic, first intercollegiate event will be a double-header for the men’s and women’s soccer teams against Tennessee Temple University at home, Aug. 25.

Wilson and his coaching team have worked quickly to build contacts, visit local high school coaches and host prospective athletes on campus tours.

“The community has been very welcoming,” Wilson said. “Everyone we’ve met has been excited and supportive. We’re building great relationships and that will help us build strong programs.”

-Dr. Darin Wilson

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GGC selected for Completion Innovation Challenge

Georgia Gwinnett will receive $150,000, as part of the $1 million Completion Innovation Challenge grant recently awarded to Georgia by the Complete College America program and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Georgia is one of 10 states to win the grant out of 33 that applied. The 18-month implementation grants support innovative, high-impact college completion initiatives designed to enhance student success and close attainment gaps for traditionally underrepresented populations.

Georgia Gwinnett College is one of two University System of Georgia (USG) institutions to receive grant funds, the other being the College of Coastal Georgia. The grant will fund pilot innovative remediation programs that, if successful, will serve as models for other institutions.

The overall goal is to transform remedial education by helping students shorten the time it takes to complete remedial education so they can move forward with college-level courses,” said John Muth, dean of the School of Transitional Studies. “Our program is unique in that students may take remedial courses at the same time they are taking some selected college-level courses, enabling them to improve and apply their skills more quickly.”

GGC’s program will use diagnostic software and electronic writing analysis to assess students who place into remedial math and/or English. While Georgia Gwinnett College already has teaching modules in remedial math, the grant will fund development of similar modules in remedial English. Faculty mentorship, the hallmark of a GGC education, will play a key role in facilitating student engagement in the program.

Leading EDGE
GGC receives $50,000 gift from Gwinnett Federal Credit Union

Gwinnett Federal Credit Union (GFCU) has made a gift of $50,000 to Georgia Gwinnett College for an additional scholarship in the School of Education.

“This gift celebrates our 50th anniversary and represents continued support of GGC’s mission,” said Marshall Boutwell, president/CEO of Gwinnett Federal. “We are proud to be associated with the college and be part of its important impact on students and our community.”

“We are deeply appreciative of this gift, which will be added to the Gwinnett Federal Credit Union Scholarship Fund that was established last year," said Lori Buckester, director of Development at GGC. “Thanks to this generous support, we will now be able to support two deserving GGC students with an annual Gwinnett Federal Credit Union scholarship.”

The fund provides scholarships in the School of Education for students majoring, or who intend to major, in early childhood education, special education, or other major leading to teacher certification.

“This gift from Gwinnett Federal will support GGC in its commitment to recruit talented individuals into the field of education,” said Cathy Moore, dean of the School of Education. “We are delighted and honored to partner with GFCU in the mission of building quality future teachers for our community.”

“Scholarships are critical in enabling students to pursue their education,” Buckester said. “And in turn, they benefit the community at large by providing a skilled workforce of educated, contributing citizens. Establishing scholarship funds is an easy way to create a legacy and make a lasting impact.”

Individuals or businesses interested in supporting scholarships or other important needs at GGC are invited to contact its Office of Development at 678-407-5588.

Alumni returns to inspire others

GGC alumnus Jason Lee recently visited campus to give his former classmates an encouraging message: medical school is a very achievable goal.

“Six months ago, I was sitting in your seat and now I’m a medical student,” said Lee, a biology major who graduated from GGC last June with a 4.0 grade point average. Lee has maintained that 4.0 average as a first-year medical student at the Medical College of Georgia. When he spoke to his former classmates, he emphasized the importance of balancing studies with personal growth.

“I used to ask myself, ‘Am I good enough? A doctor has to know so much,’” he said. "It was then I realized I wanted to help people to treat first.

“I told them I’d want to save them all, but that if I had to choose, I’d save the person with a punctured lung,” he said. “I found out later there was no right answer, but the fact that I wanted to save all of them showed that I had the heart for the job.”

Lee’s dedication to becoming a doctor began in elementary school when he witnessed a man falling in his native Taiwan. Bystanders stared at the injured man, but did nothing to help him. In spite of his young age, Lee approached the mysterious man, pulled his hair aside, saw that he had a serious injury and summoned help.

“It then I realized I wanted to help people,” he said.

Lee attended Mill Creek High School, where he took AP science classes and filed more than 150 hours of volunteer work, some at VistA Care Hospice. Lee said such volunteer work is noticed by medical school admission officials, but he emphasized the impact it can have on personal development.

When he came to GGC in 2008, Lee dove as deeply into extra-curricular activities as he did his mainstream studies. He founded GGC’s Environmental Club, served as vice president of the Grizzly Vital Signs Allied Health Club and was a member of the Biology Club.

“They taught me leadership skills,” he said.

“Scholarships are critical in enabling students to pursue their education,” Buckester said. “It showed me how to be responsible.”

Lee has high praise for all of his professors, but was particularly inspired by Drs. Diane Dorsett, Candace Timpke and Julia Paredes. From the start, Lee worked closely with his Georgia Gwinnett professors to assure his academic life would be successful.

“The pool of dedicated professors that are here to help you is great. The courses are all relevant. They really get you prepared to do the work.”

Alumni association board formed

The recently formed GGC Alumni Association Board provides leadership and supports a long-term relationship with the college, alumni and community through academic excellence, leadership and tradition.

The alumni board fosters a spirit of fellowship and loyalty by providing alumni with opportunities to participate in the life of the college, encouraging charitable giving by alumni to the college and promoting communications between alumni and the college.

Students face off in “Iron Chef”-style competition

The heat was on in the GGC dining hall as two teams of students competed in an “Iron Chef”-style contest to create the best dishes for a panel of judges.

Under professional guidance, the teams had to plan, prepare, plate and serve an appetizer or salad, a main entree and a dessert within an hour and a half – and all including a secret ingredient: wasabi.

“We did this to get students involved and give them a taste of what goes on in the kitchen,” said Joe Polanco, GGC’s executive chef and mentor for the winning team. “The students came up with ideas for the dishes and we helped them with execution. They did an awesome job.”

In a “kitchen stadium” staged in the main dining room, the students received personal instruction from their mentors, and looked skilled themselves as they tackled double boilers and complex reduction sauces. Their audience included event judges, guests and students.

“I signed up because I thought it would be fun and I love to cook,” said Neil Hilario, a freshman majoring in biology. “Chef Polanco taught me techniques I will use in the future.”

GGC completes innovative pilot funded by Franklin Foundation

Georgia Gwinnett College recently completed an innovative pilot project thanks to a grant from The John and Mary Franklin Foundation of Atlanta. The pilot addressed an alarming trend among students taking the Advanced Placement Computer Science (APCS) test in Georgia.

Among students from demographic groups that are traditionally under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, pass rates are significantly lower than those of other students. In addition, very few of these students are achieving scores at the highest level.

The Franklin Foundation grant funded the project, “Resources for Educators and Programming Learning Activities for Youth (REPLAY) Online,” which enabled Georgia Gwinnett College to help prepare 14 students and one online instructor for the AP computer course. This was accomplished by boosting the students’ confidence through an engaging summer programming experience before they took the AP course.

The grant also made it possible for the project team to make a presentation about “REPLAY Online” at the 2011 conference of the Special Interest Group on Computer Science Education.

“We deeply appreciate the foundation’s support of this pilot, which resulted in strategies for improving the teaching of the APCS course by using knowledge-based technological developments,” said Lori Buckheister, director of Development.

“Like the Franklin Foundation, Georgia Gwinnett College believes that a knowledge-based economy is essential to healthy regional development.”
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