



**Georgia Gwinnett College:  
Advance – Enhance – Thrive**

**STRATEGIC PLAN 2017 – 2022**

April 2017  
Georgia Gwinnett College  
Office of Plans, Policies and Analysis

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## **Georgia Gwinnett College: Advance – Enhance – Thrive**

Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) has had a remarkable first decade and has become a “full-fledged member” of the University System of Georgia (USG) and the higher education landscape. The College has much to be proud of, including its focus on students, its rapid enrollment growth to over 12,000 students with commensurate staff and faculty growth, its diversity, its facilities, its reputation within the USG and its various communities, and ultimately its positive effect on thousands of students. It serves a critical need in the USG and has a remarkable future to which it can look forward. The College’s strategic framework (its vision and mission, institutional goals, operating principles, and strategic priorities) have remained virtually unchanged since the College’s beginning and have served to provide focus to all of GGC’s plans and activities. Faculty and staff continue to buy into Georgia Gwinnett College’s vision and mission, many citing that they were the reason they joined GGC. The strategic framework and the strategic analysis guided this planning effort. The plan focuses on how to deliver even better on the College’s vision, mission, institutional goals, and operating principles.

GGC has been evolving since day one, and its three strategic plans show this. The first plan focused on creating a college from scratch. The second plan began to enhance particular aspects of the College while it was still undergoing rapid growth and change. This third plan is the first plan in the College’s history that truly can focus on enhancements, and not growth, as plans call for enrollment to level off at 13,000 in the near future. Without what has been an ever-present need to grow the number of faculty, staff, programs, support services, and facilities to accommodate the growth in student population, GGC can redirect energy to enhancing the student educational experience, and the staff and faculty experience as well.

The strategic planning process, including both the strategic analysis and cross-functional planning, heavily involved GGC faculty and staff. In the strategic analysis, over 40% of faculty and staff participated in focus groups or individual interviews, which provided rich insights into the opportunities and challenges facing the institution. The cross-functional planning groups, which identified important strategic initiatives, were comprised of faculty and staff representing all areas of the College.

This plan includes key insights based on the strategic analysis, the resulting new strategic priorities, the College’s strategic framework, and the strategic initiatives that address each strategic priority. This plan is designed to advance Georgia Gwinnett College forward in specific arenas, enhance the institution in strategic areas and enable GGC students to thrive in an environment that is ready and designed for them to succeed.

## **Key Insights from the Strategic Analysis**

### **GGC Students are at the Heart of Everything the College Does**

GGC students represent an amazing array of cultures, life experiences, preparation, life obligations, and dreams for the future. In a superficial sense, many GGC students are like other college students - fresh out of high school and young - the “traditional college student.”

However, these students are not homogenous. Many are less well-prepared academically, first-generation students, and have obligations outside of college (both work and family). The large majority are commuter students making the traditional residential campus and college life experience rare. The majority depend on significant amounts of financial aid. A third are part-time students. Many do not have a complete appreciation of what college will be like and have difficulty managing aspects of college ranging from financial aid to working with mentors. In total, the student body is the most racially and ethnically diverse of any USG institution. For most GGC students, college is a part of their lives; it is not the central focus of their lives. A third of GGC students came to GGC with strong high school GPAs, conceivably more ready to take on the rigors of a college education.

Every year GGC brings in over 5,000 new students – over 40% of current enrollment. Unfortunately, too large a percentage of them do not retain into the second or third years. First-year retention is 67%, and second year retention is 64%. In GGC’s early years, first-year retention was in the mid-70s, then dropped to the low 60s, but has now been stable for the last two years. Second-year retention has been consistently lower than first year retention.

GGC has a conceptual framework for introducing students to the College and college life. However, results indicate that the College is not doing enough, and more concentrated efforts will be required to help more students remain and progress at GGC and in college. The conceptual framework and its elements are solid, but the resources provided for them, and the execution of many aspects of the framework, need to be enhanced.

In today’s world, college students and their families expect students to be “job ready” when they graduate. It is no longer enough to have a strong liberal education that prepares young adults to be contributing citizens over the full length of their lives. Students want, need, and expect to have the skills necessary to gain meaningful employment, or to continue on graduate studies, when they graduate. GGC students and their families are no exception. Job-placement statistics are now the most important indicator of the value of a college education for high school students and their families looking at colleges. This is a new reality that GGC must address for all its students. Co-curricular support, opportunities to learn outside the classroom, and opportunities to experience the real world need to be provided along with the academic experience.

Effectively teaching today’s college students, including GGC’s, requires engaged and trained faculty in every class. GGC’s faculty are a teaching faculty, but in their formal education,

few faculty are trained to teach. Today's students have more diversions available that can keep them from being engaged in class, and GGC students in particular can be distracted by their outside obligations. Students also have differing levels of preparation for college. While it may be appealing to some to harken back to the days when faculty could stand in front of a class, lecture, and assume students are obligated to absorb information, those days have passed. Today's students must be engaged to learn.

An important element of GGC's vision is to be a wellspring of educational innovation. The most effective way this can be accomplished is by 21st century faculty and staff who understand their students thoroughly enough, who know the most effective tools and technologies, and who have adequate resources to experiment and implement innovation. Chasing the latest technology is a battle lost before it begins, but innovatively using effective tools that are available will lead to success.

### *The Implications of Enrollment Leveling*

During the life of this strategic plan, GGC's enrollment will level off at 13,000 students. Once the College reaches this, maintaining enrollment goals will no longer be a significant challenge. GGC's new student requirements will stabilize at 2015 levels, assuming retention is stable. Improved retention, which is a goal for the College, will lessen the number of new students required. The College's main source of students, Gwinnett County, will continue to grow, and GGC's reputation also will continue to grow in the area. Even now, GGC attracts more students from Gwinnett County than does any other USG institution (or any other institution in the world).

GGC's very competitive cost, the quality of its education and faculty, and its ability to enroll students who may not have excelled academically in high school are GGC's most important attributes for high school students deciding on college. These strengths will continue.

GGC's location, in the heart of Gwinnett County, also enables students to reduce the cost of their education by being commuters. The growing diversity of Gwinnett County high school graduates will also help to ensure that GGC remains diverse.

GGC is now graduating a significant number of teachers and the Gwinnett County Public School System is eagerly hiring them. The growing impact of GGC graduates teaching in the schools will enable its message to get out more than ever.

However, there are offsetting issues to be considered. Other institutions will likely continue to target Gwinnett County. The recent merger of Georgia State University and Georgia Perimeter College (GPC) may reduce the number of transfer students from GPC. Gwinnett Tech students are now eligible for HOPE scholarships. "Move-on-when-ready" can bring in more high school students, but negatively affects revenue.

Nevertheless, GGC's positive attributes and historic ability to attract large numbers of students will be hard to match.

### ***External Forces that Could Influence the College***

The local community, the USG, federal initiatives, and trends in higher education will have varying effects on GGC's future.

GGC is becoming more a part of the local community, but still has substantial opportunity to involve more of the community in the life of the College and involve the College (students and employees) more in the life of the community. Over time, GGC will become the leading "supplier" of college graduates to the community. Many in the community are not aware of this or the implication it can have on the relationship between GGC and the community. Community leaders are actively working with the College, examples being the College Corridor to Lawrenceville and the Fine Arts Center in Lawrenceville, to create more connections.

The USG has been playing a more active role in the life of member institutions (for example through consolidations of institutions, specific educational initiatives, and administrative areas). It is likely that this will continue. GGC has the opportunity to leverage some of these efforts, while at the same time needs to ensure that GGC students who do not always fit the description of the typical USG student are not adversely affected by USG initiatives. The Board of Regents recently named a new chancellor of the University System of Georgia. In addition, while funding levels have grown since FY12, they still remain below pre-recession FY08 levels.

Issues and initiatives at the federal level tend to be slower to develop, but a key issue is the cost of higher education which has been spotlighted for some time. GGC's low cost/high quality education is a substantial benefit to offer students. The implications of the 2016 elections, and whether low-cost college education, a message during the campaign season, can actually be delivered en masse, are yet to be determined.

Changes in higher education may be even slower-moving than ever before due to initiatives from the federal government. After all, the federal government is less than 250 years old; higher education dates back much further. Many in higher education say the current model works "just fine," and things need to change around it. Because higher education changes so slowly and data suggest that today's students would be better served if some changes occurred, GGC has the opportunity to be a leader in educational innovation, particularly for the student population GGC serves.

Potential resources exist within each of these areas, as well as other areas. Initially GGC had a "dream," but not a "story" to tell that could interest funders. Today, its story is real, powerful, and continues to develop. There is opportunity going forward to leverage some of these resources to provide the College with supplemental funding.

### ***GGC – The Organization – An Amazing Array of Faculty and Staff in an Ever-Changing Environment***

To accommodate the rapid and constant growth in enrollment, for the last decade Georgia Gwinnett College "transformed" itself time and again. "Transformed" is in quotes because the

most fundamental aspects of GGC – its vision, mission, institutional goals, and operating principles have remained steadfast. Faculty and staff come to GGC because of what GGC continues to stand for and tries to do. The complexity of the College, the number and size of its facilities, the number of faculty and staff, and the magnitude of interactions required to fully serve students, however, have changed annually. The number of “new folks” who were not at GGC in its infancy dramatically outweighs the number of “old-timers.”

The organization has been stressed. Some faculty and staff say that the culture has gotten worse. While their local/peer group environment is often excellent, the larger work environment can be stressful. As a result, communications can suffer, taking initiative to innovate has lessened, desire to work cross-functionally is negatively affected, and reasons for decisions can be unclear. Additionally, some of the structures set in place when GGC was new may not be scalable or may be out-of-date.

### *Strategic Plan*

GGC’s growth and development over the next five years will be guided by a set of specific strategic priorities. Together with the College’s vision, mission, and operating principles, these form the ongoing strategic framework for GGC. The strategic framework and the specific strategic priorities of this plan are incorporated into operational planning and serve to focus the efforts of all units of the institution.

## **Strategic Framework**

### ***What it Means to be a Grizzly***

Grizzlies selflessly attend to the strengths, needs, and uniqueness of everyone at GGC. We work together to build meaningful experiences, solve problems, and share resources. Grizzlies create caring and supportive relationships that are essential to learning, persistence, graduation, institutional health, and community growth.

### ***Vision***

Georgia Gwinnett College will be a premier 21st Century Liberal Arts College where learning will take place continuously in and beyond the confines of the traditional classroom. Its cornerstones will be innovative use of educational technology and a commitment to an integrated educational experience that develops the whole person. GGC will be a wellspring of educational innovation. It will be a dynamic learning community where faculty engagement in teaching and mentoring students will be the hallmark. It will be a driving force for change in student success. As such, it will be a model for innovative approaches to education, faculty engagement with students, and highly efficient student, facility, and administrative services.

### ***Mission***

Georgia Gwinnett College provides access to targeted baccalaureate and associate level degrees that meet the economic development needs of the growing and diverse population of the northeast Atlanta metropolitan region. It emphasizes the innovative use of technology and active-learning environments to provide students enhanced learning experiences, practical opportunities to apply knowledge, increased scheduling flexibility, and a variety of course delivery options. Georgia Gwinnett's outstanding faculty and staff actively engage students in various learning environments, serve as mentors and advisors, and assist students through programs designed to enhance their academic, social, and personal development. GGC produces contributing citizens and future leaders for Georgia and the nation. Its graduates are inspired to contribute to the local, state, national, and international communities and are prepared to anticipate and respond effectively to an uncertain and changing world.

### ***Institutional Goals***

As a charter 21st Century Institution GGC will:

- Produce graduates who can anticipate and respond effectively to the changing world
- Inspire graduates to be contributing citizens and community leaders
- Achieve significant levels of student success in retention, progression and graduation
- Innovatively design and deliver educational programs and support services
- Engage with Gwinnett and surrounding communities to support student development and community needs
- Create a culture devoted to the holistic development of students
- Acquire the resource base needed to accomplish its mission and vision



- Serve as a resource for innovation for the broader educational community

### ***Operating Principles***

Georgia Gwinnett College is committed to:

- Continuous review, assessment, change, and experimentation
- Holistic development of students
- Building partnerships with its business and community constituents
- Developing a workforce of highly competent teachers and staff who are also action oriented and innovative
- Innovatively integrating technology into educational experiences
- Diversity and building a multicultural environment to prepare students to succeed in a global society
- Being the community of choice to work for faculty, administrators, and staff
- Providing a supportive work environment that encompasses involvement, open communications, a spirit of collegiality and an appropriate reward system

### ***Strategic Priorities***

1. Our students are distinctive and the way we relentlessly focus on them will be extraordinary.
2. To serve those students we will ensure our faculty and staff have 21st century skills.
3. We will establish a robust and sustainable resource model.
4. We will build and reinforce a collegial, collaborative, and innovative organization as GGC transitions from a rapid growth institution into a more sustainable model.
5. To better serve our students we will leverage and address our external environments, in all their forms, by committing to greater awareness, purposeful engagement, and intentional conversations.

## **Strategic Priorities and Strategic Initiatives**

Cross-functional groups were established for each of the five strategic priorities to identify major strategic initiatives required for each of the strategic priorities. Cross-functional groups were a critical aspect of the planning process because strategic priorities seldom fall neatly into just one area of responsibility. The cross-functional group meetings allowed areas that would be involved in implementing plans to collaborate, build on and discuss planning ideas. Each of the strategic priorities is described in more detail below, followed by the strategic initiatives that address each strategic priority.

### **Priority 1: Our students are distinctive and the way we relentlessly focus on them will be extraordinary.**

GGC's strategic framework makes it clear that our primary focus will be our students and their academic and personal growth and well-being. Accordingly, the first priority in this strategic plan is to focus on and enhance the structures, programs, and services that support students through GGC and into their subsequent lives.

#### *Strategic Initiatives*

- a. Provide an entry-to-exit experience that is intentional, attentive, integrated, and transformational for each student as they progress through GGC towards graduation.
- b. Provide tailored and equitable support to each student based on an understanding of their individual needs. ("Case Management" approach.)
- c. Develop the organization structure to have someone with responsibility, accountability, and authority for enhancing retention and progression.
- d. Redesign mentoring so that it truly provides the support that students need on a timely basis.
- e. Provided increased support for co-curricular activities. (Discussion of co- and extra-curricular).
- f. Maintain affordability.
- g. Reaffirm GGC's commitment to small classes and reasonable faculty workload structure to enable sufficient time to work with students.

### **Priority 2: To serve those students we will ensure our faculty and staff have 21st century skills.**

As a student-ready and student-focused college, GGC recognizes the importance of ensuring that everyone is prepared to support the College's mission and culture. Therefore, the second priority in this plan is focused on faculty and staff and addresses their needs comprehensively.

#### *Strategic Initiatives*

- a. Define the expertise required of 21st century faculty and staff, as well as the expectations of faculty and staff in being student-centered and student success focused.

- b. Create and implement extensive faculty and staff professional learning and development programs to ensure faculty and staff are enabled and inspired to develop this expertise.
- c. Create and support opportunities for faculty and staff to use/implement 21st century expertise they have developed.
- d. Ensure feedback systems/assessment are in place to evaluate and communicate successes and lessons learned throughout the respective communities.
- e. Ensure technology in and out of classroom is appropriate (for faculty, staff and students) and that faculty and staff are proficient in best practices for effective use.
- f. Assess, identify, and create spaces and environments that will support 21st century teaching, innovation, and mentoring.

**Priority 3: We will establish a robust and sustainable resource model.**

State and federal changes in resource allocation, increased competitiveness for grants and private support, and our commitment to accessibility make it essential that GGC develop a sustainable resource model as the third priority in this plan.

***Strategic Initiatives***

- a. Establish a business model that targets use of resources to accessibility, affordability and attentiveness. (Transparent budgeting process)
- b. Assess and prioritize use of resources to enhance/transform the student experience and help to retain and progress students.
- c. Examine all revenue sources (current and potential) to identify areas of potential increases to support strategic and transformational needs.
- d. Conscious cost control.
  - Mindset
  - Reduce redundant and/or ineffective activities.
  - Sustainability
- e. Assess and address organizational staffing to ensure GGC has sufficient and qualified people resources.
- f. Enhance our capability to create, access, and use data that is critical to do our work efficiently and effectively.
- g. Create a comprehensive campus master plan.
- h. Improve retention students, donors and alumni. (Cross reference with Student focus/external)

**Priority 4: We will build and reinforce a collegial, collaborative, and innovative organization as GGC transitions from a rapid growth institution into a more sustainable model.**

In the College's first decade, exponential student growth and constrained resources, juxtaposed against the backdrop of a relentless focus on students and the desire to establish GGC as a well-respected and transformative institution, resulted in natural organizational stress. As the College intentionally slows its growth, GGC has the opportunity to develop a high-performing, values-based organization that reinforces and rewards effective leadership, collegiality, collaboration, transparent communications, and innovation. The fourth priority in this plan focuses attention on culture and structure to meet this opportunity.

*Strategic Initiatives*

- a. Improve all aspects of internal communications so that they are transparent, timely, relevant, broad based, and appropriate.
- b. Support that reinforces desired culture and transparently address issues and actions that get in the way of the desired culture as described in "What it means to be a Grizzly."
- c. Assess the organization structure and ensure it is relevant for today's (and tomorrow's) GGC and GGC's issues.
- d. Create an overall infrastructure that enables GGC to gather, analyze, visualize and use data (not just numbers).

**Priority 5: To better serve our students we will leverage and address our external environments, in all their forms, by committing to a greater awareness, purposeful engagement, and intentional conversations.**

The environment in which GGC operates presents opportunities that can help our students, as well as threats that can impede our ability to serve our students. The College is fast becoming an anchor institution and one of the most important economic engines in Gwinnett County and the region. The USG is an important source of support and direction for GGC. State and Federal government initiatives have the potential to create changes in the higher education landscape, disrupting the status quo of a largely static sector. Thus, this plan includes a strategic priority focused on understanding and effectively engaging with all external audiences and constituencies.

*Strategic Initiatives*

- a. More strongly establish constituents' understanding of GGC's distinctiveness.
- b. Develop a community engagement strategy based upon prioritized, purposeful and reciprocal external relationships.
- c. Develop a strategic alumni focus that engages alumni and nurtures their relationship with the College.

- d. Build a national alliance with institutions that share our values, to learn from others, and to promote and extend the GGC model which aspires to change the way that the “new American majority” (changing demographics) engages with higher education.