

Georgia Highlands College Completion Plan

August 22, 2012



Part One: Goals and Data Analysis

Georgia Highlands College (GHC) has always held its access mission in high regard. Founded over forty years ago to serve the population of Northwest Georgia, the college provided an option for local students who could not afford the two private colleges nearby. As time has progressed, however, enrollment growth, geographic expansion, and sector change have forced the college to examine its metrics and expectations for students in our varied communities. As with the other access institutions, the goal of the past was to get students into the pipeline. The focus today has shifted to completion. Use of the National Student Clearinghouse and more detailed transfer reports from the USG have enabled the college over the past two years to delve more deeply into the educational pathway of our students, providing a richer and detailed picture of the student body. GHC's analysis of the Fall 2005 FTFT cohort reveals that while the GHC transfer rate within the USG stands at 29% (using a four-year transfer window), when transfers to all four-year institutions are included (using the National Student Clearinghouse), that rate increases to 43%. Additionally, when you include transfers to TCSG institutions, it further rises to 57%. Likewise, the Fall 2006 FTFT cohort data show similar figures: 27% transfer within USG, 39% transfer to all four-year schools, and 58% transfer to all four-year schools plus TCSG institutions. The USG Metrics Working Group recommendation that USG access institutions be able to count transfers to TCSG schools in addition to USG schools will help access institutions better tell their story and point to the complexity of the notion of success for a diverse student body.

However, transfer does not always equate with completion. Taking the above-mentioned Clearinghouse data into account, GHC has done additional study over the past six months of the Fall 2008 FTFT cohort to discern patterns of student behavior. Of the 1101 students in this cohort, 579 (53%) have graduated, transferred, or are still in school at GHC. The students who remain with us for more than three years represent a variety of circumstances. Some started as full-time students, but have dropped to part-time

courseloads; some have simply accumulated many more credits than they need to graduate due to a change in program; many began in learning support courses and had a slower start towards credit-level courses. The other half of that cohort is a concern – the students who have dropped out of sight. Many of those (63%) were last at GHC, but are not currently enrolled. For these students, the pattern is more discernible: their average GPA is 1.62, and over half of them are out of Satisfactory Academic Progress. So, the college is losing them for a variety of reasons, which are ultimately manifested as poor academic performance. GHC anticipates that the strategies contained in this Completion Plan will create better outcomes and stronger successes for just these types of students, leading to higher completion and transfer rates.

Additionally, exploration at the USG level of a transfer-of-credits program that would enable access institutions to award associate degrees to students who transfer to a four-year USG institution without graduating with their associate degree will further highlight and recognize the progress that these students make toward completion while at their access institution. While the ultimate goal would be for the student to attain a baccalaureate degree, if the sending access institution could automatically award an associate degree upon attainment of the appropriate credits, the student would be assured of some type of credential even before success at the four-year level.

Another area of research at GHC over the past year has been in relation to diversity. The Diversity Committee of the college was formed as a result of the Diversity Summits held by the USG. A key action item of the committee was investigating potential performance gaps within the student body. We broke the findings down by learning support courses and gatekeeper courses (credit-level courses required of all students). For learning support, some of the highest success rates (grades of A, B, or C) were achieved by male Latino students (78% in MATH0097 and 74% in READ0099, for example). The lowest success rates were more mixed, being achieved by either white males (40% in ENGL099) or African American males (27% in MATH0097). Latino males also did well in gatekeeper courses (success rates of 62% in MATH1111 and 78% in POLS1101), while white students overall had the highest success rates in ENGL1101 (69%). We believe that at least part of the credit for the success rates of Latino male students goes to the college's Brother 2 Brother initiative, a program dedicated to promoting the success of our minority male population.

Last year, men in the program had a Fall to Fall retention rate of 75%, as compared to the overall college retention rate of 61%, and a 36% graduation rate (four-year), as compared to the overall college graduation rate (four-year) of 12%. Despite the great success of the program, there are still performance gaps in the African American male population. There are opportunities there for GHC to increase success for those students.

Along with GHC's internal research, the data provided by the USG is extremely helpful in identifying strengths and areas for improvement. Some areas of strength for GHC are successful completion of learning support courses. GHC traditionally has high success rates for students exiting learning support as compared to other USG institutions. For the Fall 2008 student cohort, for example, GHC successfully exited 77% of both Reading and English learning support students – the highest percentage of any state college. In mathematics, the successful exiting percentage was only 50% for GHC, but that was still the third highest success rate in our sector. Since remediation is an important part of the completion agenda, GHC is proud of these success rates and anxious to implement additional strategies in the learning support area. Areas for improvement clearly include retention and graduation. Non-residential access institutions such as ours have traditionally lagged behind in this area, for a wide variety of reasons (academic, personal, occupational, etc.). The Complete College Georgia initiative affords (and mandates) the college the opportunity to be creative as well as strategic in goal setting for the future. For example, the college is exploring the idea of automatically granting the associate degree to students who have accumulated the correct number of appropriate credits, even if they do not apply for graduation. Students would essentially have to opt-out of graduation, rather than opting-in. Taking into consideration that the latest GHC fall-to-fall retention rate hovers at 60%, and the four-year graduation rate is at 12%, the college proposes to increase both of those metrics by 10% over the next three years. Also, degree production could increase by an additional 10% if the college puts into place a program to automatically award the associate degree to qualified students.

Part Two: Strategies and Objectives/Part Three: Planning and Implementation

■ Partnerships with K-12

As a state college, GHC recognizes the vital role that the college serves in working with partners in the K-12 system to improve high school graduation rates and college

enrollment. In 2011, GHC restructured its organizational model to allow individual campuses to actively engage and participate with key organizations within the counties we serve in focusing on these metrics. The college continues to identify key personnel to serve as committee and board members for organizations whose missions focus on developing programs and strategies to improve student success in the K-12 system. This strategy ensures that the college has a voice in the strategies and programs that are being developed within our communities. Each GHC Campus Dean (our campus leaders and liaisons to the communities we serve) is a member of a local board or chamber of commerce for that particular county (Bartow, Cobb, Douglas, Floyd, Paulding), and has participated in a local leadership program.

In addition to maintaining key memberships within organizations that have a direct impact on educational outcomes within our communities, GHC will explore how we can further enhance and expand opportunities for young students to experience the college environment. In 2008, GHC developed a program known as Fabulous Fridays to partner with our local middle schools in Floyd County to bring all sixth graders to the college. The objective of this program is to expose students to a college campus and educate them about the benefits of a high school and college education. This program allows students to interact with faculty and staff from the college, as they participate in structured academic activities and learn about what it takes to get to college. GHC has already expanded this program to other campus locations. Two of our five campuses have Fabulous Fridays programming. The only obstacle for the other three campuses is an appropriate level of financial and human resources. We anticipate expanding the programming to one other campus every two years, as resources allow. The college is hopeful that our connections with K-12 will result in increased student interest in GHC, leading to increased high school graduation rates and, ultimately, increased enrollment and completion for the college. Our outcomes also include increased awareness in the middle school population of the importance of higher education. We have always gone back and surveyed the attending middle schoolers when they reach eighth grade to track their continued interest in college as they approach high school. Additionally, this year, under the auspices of the newly-formed Office of Community Outreach, GHC will bring these students back to campus when they reach high school for a night of information specifically about attending GHC (or any college). This year, the inaugural class of Fabulous Fridays students will be in tenth grade.

For students who are a bit older, GHC is expanding dual enrollment options for students. In addition to dual enrollment categories that typically cater to better-prepared high school students (such as ACCEL and Move On When Ready), GHC is working with local partners to engage different populations of high school students in college work. In the Floyd and Bartow County areas, for example, GHC is working with the College and Career Academy (CCA) and the Performance Learning Center (Floyd County) to provide students in alternative high schools the opportunity to gain college credit at GHC. Programs at the Floyd CCA have been in place for over a year now; the articulation agreement with the Bartow CCA is currently in development and would allow GHC to place a recruiter onsite at the CCA. Many such students have had academic difficulty in their traditional high school setting, but are given the chance to progress at an alternative high school. Reaching out to these students will create a bridge to college, facilitating their success at GHC when they exit high school.

■ Improving Access and Completion for Students Traditionally Underserved

Beginning this Fall, GHC is launching an Office of Community Outreach, which was a student success measure funded by the USG for FY2013. This office will initially include a Director of Adult and Service Learning, working in concert with the college's already-existing Coordinator of Veterans' Services. As the veteran population increases, all institutions need to be prepared to offer increased services and develop strategies to maximize the impact of potential prior learning experiences to lessen time to degree. Because so many factors are important in terms of completion for adult learners, this new umbrella office will offer an excellent one-stop shop for students looking for information related to prior learning credits, civic engagement, veterans information, study skills, time management, etc. This office will work closely with GHC Student Support Services to make sure that any counseling or disability needs are addressed for students, as well as with the leaders of the First-Year Experience program to help instill in students the strategies necessary for their academic success and social engagement. The office has already formulated a mission statement and goals that it will assess annually. The two staff members for the new office will evaluate the overall office goals, while distinct goals for service learning, adult learning and veterans' services will be assessed individually. Service learning goals will also be assessed in the

classrooms where service learning activities take place, such as in GHC's freshman experience course.

The college's participation in the USG Adult Learning Consortium will further these goals. GHC plans to apply to the Consortium this Fall, when the invitation goes out to USG institutions. The Consortium provides access to valuable resources related to serving the adult learner, including tools to assess prior learning and top methodologies to address the specific educational needs of older students. Adult learners and veterans (and their family members) often gravitate towards distance education due to constraints created by work or geography. GHC's Academic Success and eLearning Division has already begun to address this need by expanding online course offerings and reaching out to veterans. Increased community exposure and advertising that is currently underway will increase the number students engaged in distance education. Approximately 1000 of the college's 5500 students were enrolled in some form of distance education course during Fall 2011 and Spring 2012. Increasing capacity and offering fully online degrees are soon-to-be-realized strategies that will increase efficiency and access to underserved students. Specifically, if students can build a complete course schedule via distance education, they can more efficiently move through their core curriculum and not accumulate unnecessary credit hours in order to obtain their degree. These types of offerings will also increase access for students who cannot physically commute to a campus location. GHC plans to have four associate degree programs available totally online by Fall 2013. The college has committed to this effort by using USG funding to create a full-time position for a Director of eLearning.

Finally, GHC plans to address the needs of the ever-growing population of students with learning disabilities. The college has always provided disabilities services; as the college has created new campuses, disability support counselors have been added to ensure services at all locations. Over the past year, it has become apparent that many of our students require specialized psychological services and evaluation, but that they do not have access to medical professionals. To that end, the college has created a protocol to retain the services of local psychologists who will be available to those students in need of evaluation. Through this plan, which begins with the 2012-2013 academic year, the college hopes to address the needs of such students, and thus facilitate their academic success.

■ Shorten Time to Degree

Just as providing increased distance learning opportunities and using prior learning can shorten a student's time to degree, so can taking the correct courses while enrolled. GHC is focusing on improved advising that will consider credits toward degree as well as GPA for certain programs and actively provide alternatives to students who are not on track for completion. For instance, we have developed a career brochure for students in Pre-Nursing (our most popular area of study) who are not making adequate progress to enter the Nursing program and are reaching out to those students. Brochures and contacts in other areas are planned for design during the 2012-2013 academic year. We already have program maps for our degrees, degree audits, a two-year schedule, and other resources to help students stay on track through increased efficiency, but we can improve the use of them by both teachers and students. Our Early Bird Advising program provides an opportunity for students to do multi-term planning with a faculty member in their area of study. Participation in it can be increased as well.

For students who work, we have cohort programs that run in the evenings and via hybrid and distance formats to enable them to stay on track as they work toward their degrees. Options in these programs are reduced and classes are sequenced so that their path to degree is clearer. A program for adult working students in Pre-Nursing is being piloted during the 2012-2013 academic year, with a Business cohort program to follow the next year.

For identifying students who are struggling with their classes as early as possible for intervention, GHC has an Early Warning Program in place that requires notification from instructors at the two-week point for attendance, the five-week point for participation, and mid-term for grades. Messages are automatically sent via e-mail to students who are flagged at these times, directing them to see their instructors or seek additional support from advising, tutoring, or other sources. We have moved our withdraw date to a week after mid-term so that students have time to be notified about poor midterm grades, speak with instructors or advisors, and decide whether or not to withdraw. For core classes with high DFW rates, GHC is starting a review of pre-requisites to ensure that students are guided correctly about the prior knowledge required to succeed in these courses. The Early Warning Program is designed to give students ample opportunity to address any academic

struggles they may face in individual courses. This program is overseen by the Academic Success and eLearning Division of the college.

To shorten or even eliminate the time spent in remedial courses before taking credit-level courses, we are providing COMPASS preparation materials and letting students know about them. For instance, students sign up for a COMPASS placement test electronically as they check their Admissions status. On the signup window, a reminder about COMPASS preparation appears with a link to our list of resources. Included on the list is our COMPASS preparation class in mathematics through our Office of Continuing Education with sections running presently at two campuses. We plan to add preparation classes in the other COMPASS areas as part of this plan during the 2012-2013 academic year. Students who do not score above the required levels for admission to the college on the first try at the test are guided to a video that explains the entrance standards and recommends preparation before the next attempt, with the resource link available.

■ Restructuring Instructional Delivery

Some of the most dramatic changes occurring at GHC are in instructional delivery. We are taking many steps in distance learning to make entire degree programs available in a web-based format and improve our focus on quality standards for online course delivery and training for teachers of online or hybrid courses. For instance, in the coming year, the GHC's Teaching and Learning Center and Division of Academic Success and eLearning will program a year-long focus on "best practices in online teaching." We also plan to follow the lead of the University of West Georgia by providing each teacher of an online class with a two-week course that is conducted online. A key focus in that class will be activities and behaviors that teachers can utilize to keep online students engaged and progressing.

GHC is working on ways to reward and recognize employees who excel at their jobs and go above and beyond in their efforts to support student success. In the distance learning area, GHC is focusing on how to notice and reward good online teaching. In addition, we are planning for our first year with Blackboard's Collaborate software, through which we intend to provide specialized advising for students in online programs and orientations. We are acutely aware of the traditionally-higher DFW rates in online classes and are taking steps to set the best possible conditions for student success through advising and early intervention.

Restructuring instructional delivery goes beyond online options at GHC. For example, we plan to use Collaborate to change the course offerings at our smaller campuses and increase the opportunities for students to complete whole programs without having to drive to take classes at other campuses. By providing Collaborate's unique webinar-style access to a class that already exists at a larger campus, we can enable students at campuses with smaller populations access to a fuller range of courses than would otherwise be possible, allowing them to more efficiently complete their degree at the campus of their choice.

■ Transforming Remediation

Like many USG and TCSG institutions, GHC has been working on the task of transforming remediation for over a year. For instance, we have already redesigned our remedial courses to use approaches and techniques that are recommended in the student success literature, such as the "flipped" classroom and the use of co-requisite courses, as explained below. We are piloting designs in all Learning Support areas that "flip" the classroom to place video-based instruction and online tasks outside the class meetings, while the class periods are devoted to questions and help needed from doing the tasks. We expect all the Learning Support mathematics classes at our Floyd campus to be using the "flipped" design starting in the fall of 2012, with English and reading following with their redesigns in future semesters.

Teacher training is essential to success with the redesigned courses, as is support in the form of embedded tutors or mentors. We are committing time and resources to training all our Learning Support teachers, including part-time instructors, to use the new designs. With modular, "flipped" designs in hand and self-pacing options available, we plan to provide a clearly-delineated path by which each Learning Support course can be completed in eight weeks. Those who do not finish in eight weeks can continue through the full sixteen weeks, but we hope that a clear path will encourage those who can proceed to do so. GHC will pilot this type of course during the 2012-2013 academic year.

In the fall of 2012, we will begin our first co-requisite versions of Learning Support mathematics to allow students to enroll in a credit-level mathematics course concurrently with a Learning Support mathematics course. This will accelerate completion time by enabling the student to gain the background that he or she needs for credit-level

mathematics alongside the credit work. Attendance requirements will be stringent and absences can lead to students' automatic withdrawal from the credit-level course.

Perhaps the most dramatic change to remediation at GHC will be the creation of a one-course remedial mathematics pathway leading to statistics so that students who are not in STEM-related or Business areas of study will not have to take two terms of Learning Support algebra before they can proceed. We plan to use the model of Mathematical Literacy for College Students that is currently being piloted in several USG institutions as part of the Quantway project run by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For students who are not in a STEM field, this pathway focused on practical application will foster a great chance of success in the area of mathematics, which is one of the greatest areas of challenge for many access students.

GHC's Learning Support, tutoring, advising, testing, and eLearning units are administratively housed together in an Academic Success and eLearning Division, enabling us to study and plan approaches together in all areas. Our First Year Experience program is housed in the same division. We consider this organization to be essential to transforming remediation and to acting quickly to resolve issues and make adjustments as we try new things. Getting students supported when needs arise is a key part of our plans. The one-stop shop model of student success services has proven effective, as it prevents the student from having to seek guidance in multiple places on campus, thus eliminating potential frustration.

Part Four: Ongoing Feedback and Evaluation

The institutional effectiveness office at GHC (known as the Office of Strategic Planning, Assessment and Accreditation) will play a large role in generating the evaluative data necessary for the Complete College Georgia plan. This office already oversees most of the assessment reporting for the college, and is prepared to regularly report out on the initiatives contained in this plan. This is the main GHC office that works with the Research and Policy Analysis arm of the USG, so there will be a seamless connection between data generated at the system level and that generated at the college level. Several Banner reports have been created locally to help track the above-mentioned initiatives, and others will be added as needed.

In addition to the evaluation that will be conducted of new initiatives, GHC has a history of assessing already-existing initiatives. The GHC Division of Academic Success and eLearning, for example, has been successfully monitoring each of their current initiatives (such as the Early Warning Program and the use of the “flipped” classroom in remedial courses) from their inception. The work of this division in terms of data analysis is a large part of why GHC has some of the highest learning support exit success rates in the system. As the college moves forward with Complete College Georgia, we will focus on enriching our data analysis (particularly in terms of remediation techniques) by disaggregating all elements by campus, race, gender, and students traditionally underserved. This work has already begun, in fact. This Spring, the GHC Diversity Committee worked with the Office of Strategic Planning, Assessment and Accreditation to produce a document related to course success levels in our remedial courses and several gatekeeper courses. The full faculty dedicated time to the analysis of this material at our annual Assessment Day. Further study of this data and its ramifications will be a year-long project during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The use of data to track the success of the Complete College Georgia initiatives will ensure that timely adjustments are made as needed. As noted above, the faculty has already started to immerse themselves in targeted study of student success data. The GHC President’s Cabinet will also receive regular reports. All college constituents will receive updates at faculty-staff meetings, GHC Foundation meetings, academic division meetings, and our annual Fall In-Service gathering. As an access institution, we are keenly aware of the challenges we face in terms of retention, progression and graduation; however, the improvement of student success is paramount at GHC. We feel that the college has made positive progress over the past two years in relation to our USG Three-Year Plan. The work of Complete College Georgia will build upon that foundation while also expanding our vision of success to recognize the particular needs of underserved populations.

