



Good afternoon, everyone—thank you so much for being here.

I really appreciate you taking the time to join us, to listen, and to be part of this year's Charger Kick-Off.

At today's State of the College... **We have so much to celebrate!**



Over the last three years, we’ve built real momentum together.

In **Year 1**, we shifted from being known as the region’s ‘best kept secret’ to really telling our story.

We made sure people saw and felt GHC’s presence—on campus, in the community, and in the conversations that matter.

In **Year 2**, we took that visibility and turned it into deeper partnerships—especially in workforce development.

We positioned GHC as a true talent engine for this region, preparing graduates who are ready to step right into the workforce.

In **Year 3**, we expanded our community connections even further, invested in our employees and in facilities upgrades, and made sure we’re on strong footing for SACSCOC accreditation readiness.

INTRO VIDEO: Let’s take a moment to celebrate the incredible momentum we’ve built together. Here’s a look at how the past year has been captured in the headlines!



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

I want to talk about those last three headlines...

ASPEN - GHC was recognized in Washington D.C. during the national Aspen Award Ceremony...The Aspen Institute named Georgia Highlands College as a top 10 finalist... ***That's huge!***

LAKEVIEW - Georgia Highlands College Launches Nearly \$12 Million Renovation of Floyd Campus to Expand Healthcare Education! ***Again... that's huge!***

GHC DEGREE - An economic study shows the value of a GHC bachelor's degree equals \$1.4 million more in lifetime earnings. That's not just an education—it's life-changing.... ***Now everyone say it with me... That's Huge!***

These are not just good stories, that's ***our story***. It validates everything we're doing!



When we look at GHC today, the numbers really show our impact.

Since our founding, we've served almost **250,000 students**—a quarter of a million lives shaped by this college.

Our **regional economic impact** is more than **\$167 million** each year, which means we're not just educating students, we're fueling local growth.

Finally, we're not standing still—we're already preparing **new programs** to meet workforce needs and to give students even more pathways to success.



As part of our ongoing strategic planning, we are preparing for our upcoming **SACSCOC re-accreditation cycle**.

This is an important process that ensures we remain strong and gives us the opportunity to sharpen our focus for the future.

Alongside this, we're about to launch our next **Quality Enhancement Plan — or QEP**. We're calling this the '*Year of the QEP!*'

To make sure everyone's voice is heard, we'll be hosting **town halls on every campus this month!**

This will be a chance to share ideas, ask questions, and help shape a plan that will guide how we continue improving student learning and student success in the years to come.

Our theme today comes from the planning and work already in action.

Let's talk about the phrase "Where Talent Meets Purpose" and what that means!



Our mission is about what we do and why it matters. Our vision is about where we're going and the impact we want to have.

And right in the middle of both is this idea: *Where Talent Meets Purpose*.

It's the common thread that connects our work today to our aspirations for tomorrow.

The 'Talent' speaks to our students, faculty, and staff — and the skills they gain here.

The 'Purpose' speaks to the lives changed, the careers launched, the communities strengthened, and the impact we all have together.

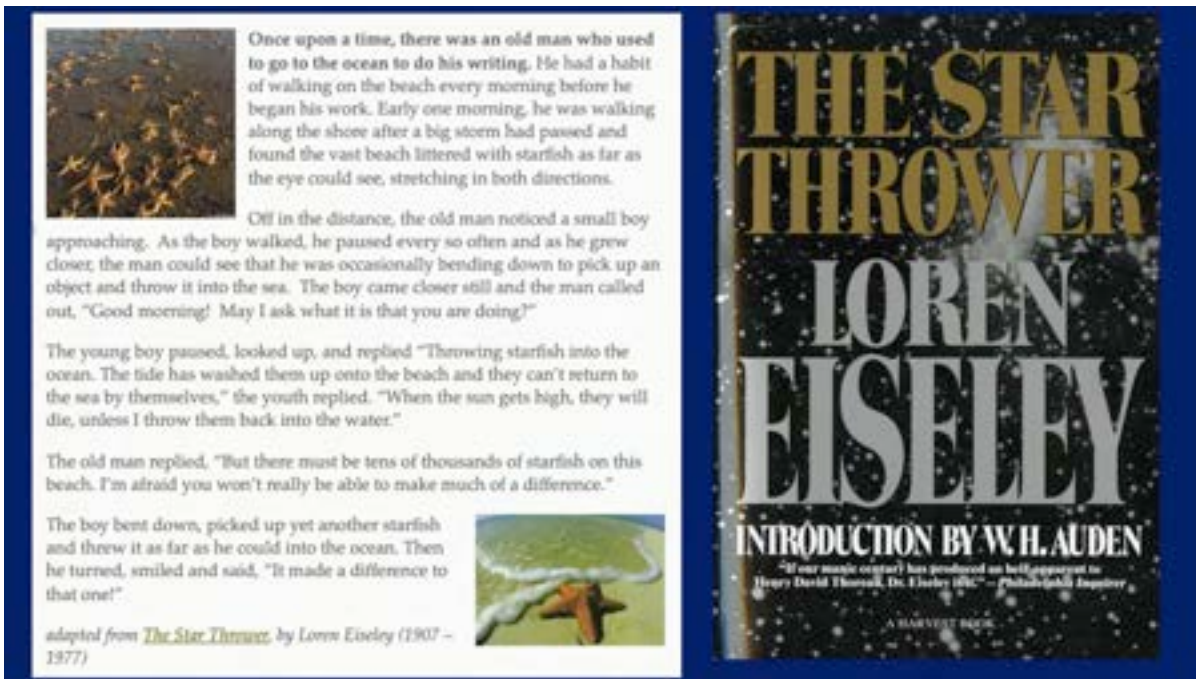
It's not just about producing graduates — it's about producing graduates with direction, with meaning, and with purpose.



When we think about the future of GHC, it comes down to five pillars that align with our strategic priorities: Access and Opportunity / Community Impact / Student Success / and Responsible Stewardship

Those five pillars can be broken down this way:

- Employers know that their future workforce is sitting in our classrooms today.
- When a student succeeds here, their family and their hometown benefit.
- We are keeping tuition affordable, while ensuring programs align with workforce needs
- Eighty-five percent of our students stay right here, fueling the economy and filling critical workforce needs for our region
- And we are not standing still—new programs, new facilities, and new partnerships are positioning us for the next decade.



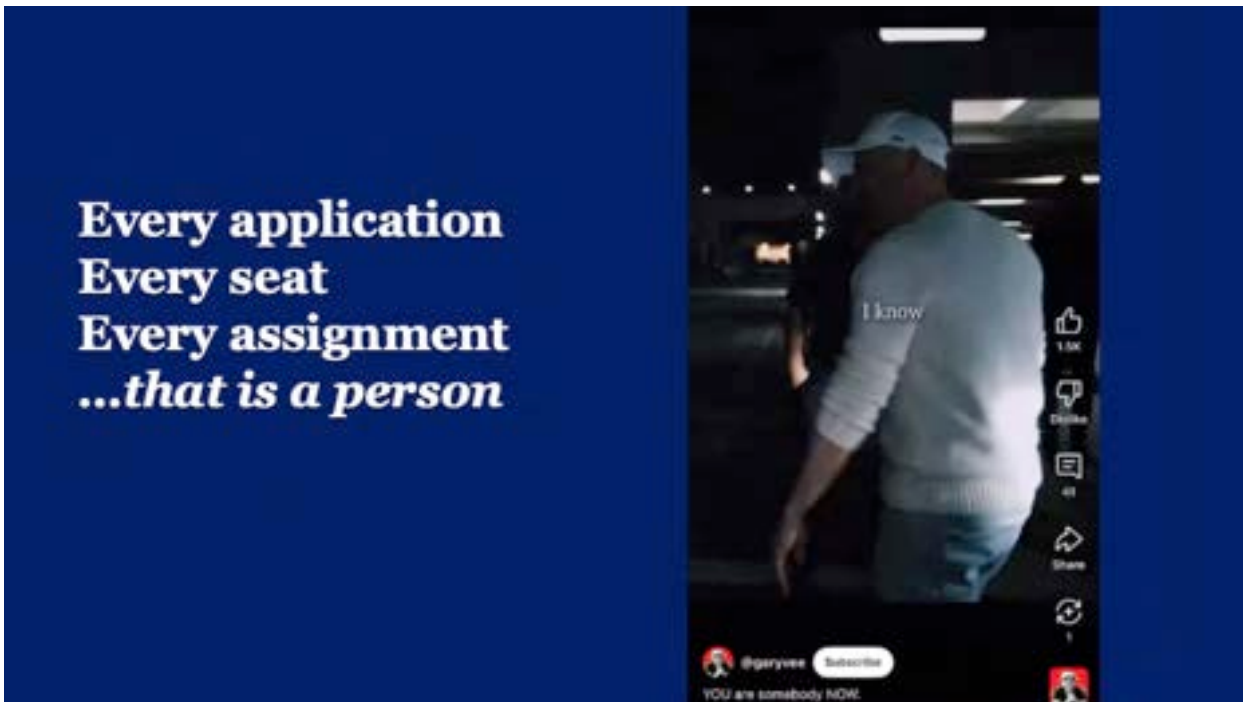
But here's the key: while these five pillars sound big and broad, success always comes down to the individual student.

I often talk about the *Starfish Story*—that we can't save every starfish on the beach, but for the ones who come to us, we pick them up and help them succeed--that means everything!

INTRO VIDEO:

That's what we should always strive to do at GHC. One student at a time. One life at a time. When we do that consistently, our impact ripples...

Watch this video...



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

When we look at applications, classroom seats, or even assignments, it's easy to think in terms of numbers. Enrollment figures. Credit hours. Completion rates.

But behind every single one of those numbers is a person. A student with a story, with goals, with challenges and dreams.

This is why that matters... next slide



Nearly all of our graduates start their career right here in Northwest Georgia!

That means the work we're doing isn't just about preparing students to land jobs — it's about preparing them to make a difference in the very communities we all share.

Every graduate who stays becomes a teacher in our schools, a nurse in our hospitals, a small business owner, a little league coach, a community leader shaping our future.

It shows that our mission is alive and well: we're not only opening doors to opportunity, we're building a stronger, more vibrant community!



So when we think about where we're going next, it's important to pause and recognize what we're doing right now.

What do we do at Georgia Highlands College?

We **provide access** to high-value educational experiences.

We **transform lives** by opening doors that might otherwise stay closed.

We **strengthen communities** by preparing graduates who stay, serve, and lead right here at home.

In short—we **develop talent... and we help that talent find its greater purpose.**



You all are part of continuing GHC's legacy of greatness!

Every class we teach, every student we mentor, and every service we provide is part of that legacy. Our faculty and staff are the ones who bring it to life — shaping student success. ***That's you!***

It's easy to look at all of this in the abstract... but the truth is... ***you*** are the bridge between those words on the page and the lives that are transformed here.

INTRO VIDEO:

Raise your hand if you like to go out to eat! (Show of hands.) We all do!

I'm going to show a quick video about restaurants.

And I want you to think about the BEST experiences you've ever had... and the WORST... and find what's common between the two...

Let's watch.



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

When we think about the question ‘*Why should I care?*’ or ‘*How does what I do really make a difference?*’—it’s an important moment of reflection.

This video gives us a great picture. In a restaurant, it takes so much more than the food to make the whole experience work.

The same is true here at GHC.

Every role matters. Every detail matters.

Student success isn’t just about the classroom, or the program, or the final diploma.

It’s about the entire experience that surrounds a student—the advising they receive, the technology they use, the events they attend, the financial aid support, the facilities they walk through, and yes, the teaching and mentoring in the classroom.

So ‘*Why should I care?*’—the answer is because without you, the experience isn’t whole. What you do matters to every student, every day.



One of the biggest challenges we face today is the changing perception of the value of a college degree.

More and more people are asking, *'Is it really worth it?'*

We know the answer lies in what we deliver.

Our job is to produce graduates who are **skilled, adaptable, and ready to contribute on day one.**

That's how we prove the value of higher education — not just in words, but in results.

We're not just moving students across a stage at graduation. We're preparing them to step directly into the classrooms, hospitals, businesses, and industries that keep this region moving forward.

INTRO VIDEO: Does everyone know who Mike Rowe is? (Explain who he is.) I want you to hear from someone else, today. **Let's play a short clip from a billionaire's perspective...**



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

Mark Cuban emphasizes the value of a college education—how it not only opens doors but prepares people to have an immediate, *day one impact* in the workforce, no matter what path they choose.

Adding to this, I would say... graduating college means you had 40 professors. And that means you had 40 bosses.

Your GPA and your degree reflects how well you performed for those 40 bosses.

And like we said earlier... a bachelor's degree from GHC leads to about **\$1.4 million more in lifetime earnings.**



I know what you're probably thinking right now... *Okay, I get it!* I know what we do. I know what we're up against.

So the real question becomes: *Where are we going? And how do we get there?*

The truth is our **legacy of success** and the progress we're making right now give us the momentum to shape our future in powerful ways.

Because of that momentum, we have the ability — now more than ever — to rise to the top in a few specific areas.

Here's what we are becoming:

- **A national leader in student success.**
- **The top higher education pillar in our communities.**
- **And the premier producer of talent for our region.**

INTRO VIDEO: Some of you may be sitting there thinking... “What do you need me to do?” I want to show you a quick video clip of one of the greatest stories in basketball. **Let's watch...**



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

After seeing that video, I love the lesson it leaves us with. Dennis Rodman didn't win championships by being the leading scorer. But he found his role—**getting rebounds**—and he did it better than anyone else.

Over the next few years, we are going to measure what we care about.

Soon, you'll see 24 Key Performance Indicators aligned with our strategic priorities. These will be published and widely distributed.

A big part of this will include unit goals. This is how you and your team will help.

So when someone asks, '*What do you need me to do?*' the answer is simple: **find a way to add value.**

What are our goals and direction, Mike? I'm glad you asked. Next slide...



Our Goals, Our Direction

65 in 5 - Increase Enrollment

Achieve 2% increases and higher in enrollment for the next 5 years bringing total enrollment to 6,500 students

75 in 5 - Increase Retention

Increase our retention rate to 75% in 5 years

1 in 3... in 5 - Increase Graduation

Improve from roughly 1 in 5 students graduating to 1 in 3 in 5 years

As we look ahead, we've set some ambitious but achievable goals for the next five years.

65 in 5 (Increase Enrollment)—

That means being aggressive about recruitment, innovative about retention, and focused on creating new opportunities for students to find their place at GHC.

75 in 5 (Increase Retention)—

That's about making sure students don't just start here, but that they stay, succeed, and finish strong. (Current retention rate is 68%)

1 in 3... in 5 (Increase Graduation)—

We want to improve from roughly 1 in 5 students graduating to 1 in 3... That's a big step forward, and it reflects the kind of outcomes our students deserve.

That's it, Mike? Nope. Next slide!



In addition to enrollment, retention, and graduation, our future is about *how* we help students succeed.

One thing won't change — our **academic rigor**. We will continue to uphold high standards while also focusing on innovation. We are not lowering the bar, we are raising opportunity.

To help us get there, we're investing in you. This year, we are planning additional salary adjustments and development opportunities—around \$100,000 worth.

This investment is added to other recent salary adjustments and development opportunities for a total of \$200,000!

We said we would invest in our people as enrollment goes up—and that's what we are doing!

For our students, we want more **internships, co-ops, service learning, and community projects — starting from day one.**

Students shouldn't have to wait until their junior or senior year to get those real-world experiences. The sooner they connect what they're learning in the classroom to what they'll be doing in the community or workforce, the more meaningful their education becomes.

INTRO VIDEO: So when we ask ourselves: *How do we do it? How do we reach our goals? How do we accomplish what we've set out to achieve?* — the answer is the same: we have to know our *why*. Knowing your “why” makes all the difference. **Just ask Buster Douglas. See how his “why” set the stage for him in this short clip.**



LET VIDEO PLAY FIRST

That's how it feels during registration... or finals week, right?

But we can't give up. We have to keep fighting.

Our *why* is simple. It's our students. It's the lives we're changing every day. It's the opportunity we're creating.

Stand up if you ever took a class at GHC or Floyd College. Keep standing. Now stand up if you ever took a class at a college like GHC or Floyd College.

Look around. If I asked people to stand at any business or community club anywhere in our service area, this is what it would look like.

Now imagine if GHC didn't exist. Everyone sit down.

That's the difference. That's our why.

Let me give you a number... Next slide.



Next year, GHC will reach it's 250,000th student since our founding.

That's a quarter of a million lives touched, changed, and given new opportunity.

Think about what that means:

- That's 250,000 students who took a step toward building a better future.
- 250,000 families who were strengthened by someone in their household pursuing education.
- 250,000 examples of talent being developed and purpose being lived out.

Some of those students went on to become nurses, teachers, business leaders, public servants.

Some were the first in their families to graduate.

So when we talk about goals like growing enrollment, improving retention, and increasing graduation rates — it's not about statistics on a page.

It's about the next 250,000. It's about continuing this impact for the next generation of students who will walk through our doors.

This single number ties into everything we've talked about —each of those 250,000 students represents the very heart of ***Where Talent Meets Purpose.***



As we wrap up today, I just want to take a moment to thank you.

Thank you for the work you do, the time you give, and the commitment you've shown to Georgia Highlands College and to the students we serve.

We've talked a lot about numbers, goals, and strategies — but at the end of the day, it always comes back to people:

- To students who take a chance on themselves.
- To faculty and staff who guide them.
- To partners in business and the community who believe in them.

That's what *Where Talent Meets Purpose* is really about. It's about the difference we make together — one student, one family, one community at a time.

So thank you for being part of this journey with me.

Thank you for believing in me to lead.

And thank you for helping us ensure that our next chapter is even stronger than the last.