

50

and Forward

GEORGIA HIGHLANDS COLLEGE

GHC
STRATEGIC PLAN
2021-2026



GHC STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026



50 & Forward

When a college first makes its mark in history, it's to say, "We are here." Now, after 50 years of making history, that statement becomes, "We are here to stay."

For five decades, communities throughout northwest Georgia have looked to us as a provider for accessible, low-cost, high-quality college degree opportunities.

In the 70s, when our communities needed more qualified nursing graduates, they looked to us.

When area teachers needed specialized training, like those professionals seeking careers in the nearby Georgia School for the Deaf; or when the community needed a regional police academy; and when there was a need to train the next generation of journalists through hands-on publication work with a direct connection to the Georgia Press Association – they looked to us.

In the 80s and 90s, when the University System of Georgia sought the first institution to adopt computer literacy and install computers throughout a college, they looked to us. When our service area needed dental hygiene graduates; when communities needing a stronger college presence requested a site closer to home; and when a growing need to provide online options for students working full time while taking care of their family continued to rise – they looked to us.

All through the 2000s, our communities looked to us for expanded course and degree offerings, and we delivered.

From foundation camp to S.T.E.M. camp; from articulation to graduation, from art to zoology; and from mentorships to entrepreneurship; GHC has addressed the needs of our communities.

For 50 years, GHC has been a community that takes charge and helps others take charge too. We have NOT simply been on the sidelines of history, instead we were making history – making our college community better and stronger –meeting the needs of the students we serve. For 50 years, our communities have looked to us.

And they look to us now.

From our 50-year foundation, we now charge forward.

We charge forward by building upon who we are and by remembering who we are in every action that we take next.

As we have always done, we will answer the call across northwest Georgia for more graduates of innovative curriculum designed around rising careers in areas like logistics and supply chain management, criminal justice, building information modeling, healthcare management, financial technology, and so much more.

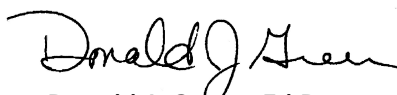
We will continue to make college career programs affordable and accessible to the communities we serve. And those programs will be carefully crafted to instill the highest levels of academic excellence in each of our graduates.

At the forefront of our decision-making will remain the inclusion of diverse backgrounds, talents, and perspectives through the ever-focused engagement among everyone in the GHC community.

We will work together with our students, our alumni, our employees, and our communities to ensure Georgia Highlands College is a place for all students to excel.

And at the center of all we do – and all we are – and all we have always been – is the heart of Georgia Highlands College, the heart of the past 50 years and the future, the heart of our 50 years and forward: WE CARE.

And for the next 50 years and beyond, that will never change. It is who we are. And we are here to stay.



Donald J. Green, Ed.D
GHC President
2014-2021



Dana Nichols, Ph.D.
GHC Interim President

Development of “50 & Forward”

The process of developing the new strategic plan began in November 2018, when President Green and Dean of Planning, Assessment, Accreditation, and Research (PAAR), Jesse Bishop, convened and charged the Strategic Planning Council (SPC). The group began the work by reviewing the existing plan, discussing the institutional mission, goals, and values, and considering two important questions: Who are we now? Where do we go next?

Members of the Strategic Planning Council included members of the Executive Leadership Team, President’s Cabinet, and a diverse group of other employees and faculty (see Appendix A for a complete list of those involved). Guided by the Dean of PAAR, through the next three months, the SPC worked through initial rounds of SWOT analyses, giving insights into the state of the institution.

From the start, the SPC discussed the institutional values. This was the result of data from Organizational Climate Surveys conducted in 2017 and 2019. Using data from 2017, PAAR designed a qualitative survey as a precursor to the formal planning process. Participants, including 30 employees, were asked a series of questions including the following:

When you think about GHC, what words come to mind?

When you think about how others view GHC, what comes to mind?

From the list of our current values, please identify three values you think are essential to our existence and performance as a college. Explain why you think this value is essential.

If you could eliminate three values, which three would they be? Please explain your rationale.

What is your one big complaint about GHC? Why? Be as specific as possible.

What is one thing you want GHC to do better than anyone else? Why? Be specific.

Responses to these questions began to help shape the outline and structure of the planning process by allowing us to consider how we viewed ourselves, how others viewed us, and where discrepancies might exist.

In the 2019 Organizational Climate Survey, when asked if GHC’s actions reflected the institution’s shared values, only 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Other responses from the 2019 Organizational Climate Survey suggested potential discrepancies in how individuals and the institution might be living the shared values. At that time, the shared institutional values included ten overlapping and sometimes confounding values: Access, Student Success, Integrity, Excellence, Freedom of Expression, Cooperation, Passion, Critical Thinking, and Collaboration. Operationalizing those values had proved difficult in the years after approval and implementation, especially with regard to operational planning.

Through a long, deliberative, and inclusive process, including the aforementioned survey, as well as focus groups and workshops, five revised and/or new values were identified: Access, Caring, Inclusivity, Engagement, and Excellence. Several workshops were held in the spring of 2019 to solicit input on the institutional values. Over 50 faculty and staff participated in the focus groups and workshops, providing essential input on this work. Between surveys, focus groups, workshops, and other meetings, over 150 faculty and staff had the opportunity to provide direct input on the new values. Additionally, PAAR organized several forums to share drafts of the document along the way, allowing more of our campus community to learn about the process and the new values. Every campus was included in the scheduling of forums.

Heading into the summer of 2019, groups were formed from SPC membership to conduct environmental scans across several key areas. Table 1 shows the environmental scan group and the facilitator assigned to each.

Table 1. Environmental Scanning Teams & Facilitators

| Group | Facilitator |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Sociology & Demography | Leslie Johnson |
| Technology, Science, & Environment | Don Green |
| Economics, Business, & Industry | Todd Jones |
| Education (Higher Education & K12) | Ken Reaves |
| Politics & Policy | Christina Henggeler & Andrew Torres |

The scanning teams were asked to examine multiple data sources and explore both the obvious and “non-obvious” trends, opportunities, threats, and patterns in our world to help us make sound decisions about our planning processes (Bhargava 2015). Specifically, facilitators were tasked with engaging in the “five habits of curators” as described by Rohit Bhargava (2015, 2019):

- 1) Be curious:** Ask questions about why things work or appear the way they do and embrace unfamiliarity with a sense of wonder.
- 2) Be observant:** Train yourself to see details that others often miss; watch people, processes, situations, and industries carefully and record the details.
- 3) Be fickle:** Capture ideas/details without needing to fully understand or analyze them in the moment.
- 4) Be thoughtful:** Take time to reflect on your ideas and share the reflections in a considered way.
- 5) Be elegant:** Develop the ability to describe a concept in a succinct, simple way for easy understanding.

Data Sources used for the scanning teams included the following:

| External Sources | Internal Sources | Original Sources |
|--|--|---|
| Literature reviews External surveys Analyses of trends Industry publications Books, lectures, etc. | Past internal surveys Meeting minutes Annual reports Reviews of records (e.g. SACSCOC, etc.) Statistical analyses of internal data | Focus groups Interviews Direct observations Questionnaires |

Combined with initial reviews of progress on the previous plan, SWOT analyses, comments and concerns shared during regular meetings, and happenings in the external world around GHC, the environmental scans began to allow the SPC to see a fuller, richer picture of the institution. The decision was made by the SPC that no change to the mission was necessary. Any modification to the institutional mission necessitated approval by the University System of Georgia Board of Regents (USG BOR) and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The mission of GHC remains unchanged.

The mission of Georgia Highlands College, a state college of the University System of Georgia, is to provide access to excellent educational opportunities for the intellectual, cultural and physical development of a diverse population through pre-baccalaureate associate degree transfer programs, career associate degree programs, and targeted baccalaureate degree programs that meet the economic development needs of the region. ([GHC Mission & Goals](#))

By the fall of 2019, the outline of the new plan and its priorities was formed. We had identified several strengths and opportunities that we felt confident we could capitalize on, while also acknowledging potential weaknesses and threats. GHC was performing well across many areas. We had been recognized for many efforts in the preceding months, though we were aware of some perennially looming challenges, such as the impending enrollment drop aligned with declining birthrates, the ever-present challenge of reduced state allocations, among others.

Alongside these planning efforts, the institution was preparing to celebrate its 50th Anniversary in 2020. The SPC saw opportunities to use the celebrations around the 50th Anniversary as opportunities to share our new plan and solicit feedback. However, in January 2020, as we began to plan a series of Town Hall sessions across our communities, it became clear that the world was changing right before our eyes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In late February 2020, we elected to pause our strategic planning efforts, allowing us to put more energy into the pivot from an on-campus experience to a fully online experience for our students, faculty, and staff. While we understood the gravitas of the moment, we did not fully realize for some time how illuminating the pandemic would

prove to be. For many institutions, the pandemic highlighted glaring weak spots in organizational structure and culture. While some weaknesses were magnified, GHC largely saw the best of our institution in the spotlight. We saw caring faculty and staff who went above and beyond to support student success. We saw an institution that was agile and flexible, adapting to change at speeds that defied case studies and textbooks. We saw resiliency and perseverance from our students and employees. We saw leadership, at every level, committed to the health and safety of our communities.

Our response to the pandemic galvanized some key aspects of our planning work. Caring is one of our strongest values and an institutional asset; our institutional response to the pandemic exemplified caring in more ways than we could have anticipated. Our commitment to high-quality, personalized learning for students allowed us to pivot much more easily than other institutions. Our IT structures and personnel and our faculty development team allowed us to move courses online quickly and effectively. We saw students, faculty, and staff who were willing to adapt and innovate, who rose to most every challenge posed to them.

However, the effects of the pandemic took tolls on the institution. Budget reductions because of reduced state allocations, lost tuition and fee revenues, among other issues, led to the reductions in several critical lines. This strategic plan recognizes those reductions and while working to recover from them, it also seeks to establish a longer vision and set direction for how we might emerge stronger from this pandemic than we once were. This plan captures some of the aspirational elements of the pre-pandemic work at GHC. We know that the pandemic will continue to impact our work and budgets for some time, but this plan is a responsive tool that goes beyond reacting to the immediacy of this global disaster.

In the early part of 2021, as the effects of the pandemic began to come under control, GHC leadership once again shifted their focus back to strategic planning. We reviewed where we had been prior to the pandemic, took stock of the work done through 2020, and began to revise our plans for 2021 through 2026. The next three to five years will prove important as we seek to thrive into our next half-century. This plan is the culmination of months and months of work, analyzing nearly every facet of the institution before and through the midst of the pandemic. It is the result of shared governance operating as intended, giving everyone at the institution a clear voice. While there is no way to build a plan that represents every singular voice, the material that follows comes directly from a strong consensus of stakeholders who wish to see the institution succeed. Students, faculty, and staff have given their time and ideas to build our shared future. For that we are grateful and humbled that so many engaged in this process over time and worked to map out GHC's next several years. With 50 years as a foundation, we charge forward with a renewed sense of our core values, a more important commitment to the services and opportunities we provide, and a clear vision for success in the future. 50 and forward.

USG Strategic Goals

The GHC Strategic Plan is guided by the University System of Georgia Strategic Plan (USG 2024). As a leader in the state college sector, GHC has the opportunity to help meet the needs of the State of Georgia in a variety of ways. To help fulfill this aspect of our mission, USG 2024 provides direction and guidance for our institution.

USG Goal 1: Student Success

We will increase degree completion through high-quality and lifelong academic options, focused learning and elimination of barriers to access and success for all Georgians.

USG Goal 2: Responsible Stewardship

We will ensure affordability for students by containing costs and optimizing efficiency across the system.

USG Goal 3: Economic Competitiveness

We will advance Georgia through investing in world-class research and equipping students with marketable skills, knowledge and experience.

USG Goal 4: Community Impact

We will work with our communities to improve quality of life.

GHC MISSION GOALS

GHC will meet its institutional mission through six specific mission goals, guided by our shared institutional values.

1. Create a culture of teaching and learning focused on excellence in academic, personal, and professional growth.
2. Provide comprehensive services that encourage and empower students, employees, and communities to be successful.
3. Engage students through evidence-based practices that develop them into successful learners and leaders.
4. Utilize appropriate technologies and practices to advance programs, services, and operations to support teaching and learning.
5. Optimize resources to support efficient and effective operations at all levels of the college.
6. Engage community partners to create, improve, and maintain relationships to promote success for GHC students, employees, and communities.

Strategic Priorities

1. **Access & Opportunity:** GHC will provide access and opportunities to high-quality academic programs by focusing on comprehensive enrollment management processes and employee recruitment and retention processes across the institution.
2. **Inclusivity & Engagement:** GHC will engage with our communities to ensure we meet the needs as a state college and to meet the needs of those diverse communities by being inclusive in all that we do.
3. **Student Success:** GHC will provide services, experiences, and resources that support student success across all modalities, programs, and courses.
4. **Efficiency & Effectiveness:** GHC will create and maintain a culture of continuous improvement allowing GHC to maintain low tuition and fees while increasing services to students to support academic achievement.

General Education Competencies

1. **Communication:** Students will demonstrate effective communication.
2. **Professional Skills:** Students will demonstrate skills necessary for success in a professional environment.
3. **Social Responsibility:** Students will demonstrate social responsibility.
4. **Inquiry:** Students will demonstrate the skills and disposition necessary for systematic inquiry.
5. **Empirical and Quantitative Literacy:** Students will demonstrate empirical and quantitative literacy.
6. **Digital and Information Literacy:** Students will demonstrate information and digital literacy.

Our Shared Values

Access—We provide access to high quality, affordable educational opportunities within the diverse communities we serve. Through intellectual, cultural, physical, and social developmental opportunities, we facilitate the growth and wellness of our students, employees, and our communities.

Caring—We demonstrate personal and professional caring for all students and employees. Through our shared values, we seek to ensure that students and employees know that we are invested in their well-being, growth, and success.

Inclusivity—We recognize the contributions of individuals with diverse backgrounds and talents and works toward inclusivity by creating a culture where diverse perspectives are authentically acknowledged and where those perspectives influence decision-making.

Engagement—We foster engagement for and between students, employees, alumni, and our communities. We encourage positive, meaningful interactions and relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations which lead to intellectual, cultural, physical, and social development.

Excellence—We champion excellence for and by each student, employee, and our communities. Through intellectual, cultural, physical, and social development, we strive to perform and achieve at the highest levels possible in all that we do by operating with the highest standards of academic achievement, personal ethics, and organizational stewardship.

Forward

Priority 1: Access & Opportunity

- A. Enhance and re-energize the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan to provide more opportunities and access to high-quality higher education in our region and sector
- B. Renew our focus on high-quality customer service experiences for all students
- C. Expand affordability initiatives for students
- D. Expand institutionally supported professional development for all employees
- E. Develop and implement an inclusive recruiting and hiring initiative
- F. Continue to support innovative approaches to cybersecurity that deny access and opportunity to protected data and systems
- G. Ensure campus facilities support safe and secure experiences for all

Priority 2: Inclusivity & Engagement

- A. Create an inclusivity campaign designed to promote social-belonging for all students
- B. Expand co-curricular student engagement programming
- C. Enhance internship programming
- D. Strengthen campus mental health initiatives to support students, faculty, and staff
- E. Expand inclusion, equity, and diversity efforts on campus
- F. Develop and sustain alumni engagement initiative
- G. Develop and sustain community engagement plans across units

Priority 3: Student Success

- A. Continue to develop and support high-quality, innovative academic curricula and modalities
- B. Expand high-quality advising to all students
- C. Support high-impact teaching & learning practices in the classroom and beyond
- D. Leverage existing and innovative technology solutions to support on-campus and online learning across the institution
- E. Reinforce graduation messaging across all departments
- F. Re-envision career services
- G. Implement a growth mindset campaign for students, faculty, and staff

Priority 4: Efficiency & Effectiveness

- A. Expand data informed decision making across the institution
- B. Support student affordability through innovative services and processes
- C. Reinforce a culture of excellence through accountability, recognition, and celebration
- D. Strengthen the integrated planning model to ensure quality assessment and alignment of strategic priorities and activities
- E. Identify new revenue sources that supplement the student experience
- F. Continue to build a more resilient and effective institution
- G. Maintain safe and secure experiences on campus and in virtual environments
- H. Support employee career progression and institutional succession planning

GHC

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