

**Complete College Georgia Report**  
**Georgia Southwestern State University**

**August, 22, 2012**

**Introduction**

Georgia Southwestern State University (GSW), founded in 1906 as an Agricultural and Mechanical teaching institution (A & M), is proud of its heritage and tradition of service to this particular region of Southwest Georgia. Based on data that we have collected, our institution serves a high percentage of first generation college students (over 50 per cent), and also a high percentage of students who are economically challenged (roughly 45 per cent receiving Pell Grants). With these factors in mind, GSW embraces its mission statement, in which we indicate that we are an institution that cultivates excellence in learning and teaching, and that encourages intellectual, personal, and social growth for students, faculty, staff, and the community. Georgia Southwestern State University is a comprehensive state university within the University System of Georgia that offers a full range of bachelor degree programs, along with selected master's and specialist degree programs. As the following report indicates, we are looking at multiple ways in which to increase our retention and graduation rates, all tied to our Strategic Plan, "Moving Forward."

**Part I: Goals and Data Analysis**

Georgia Southwestern State University looked at data from a number of sources. One key source is the Complete College America data set from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* regarding our institution (<http://collegecompletion.chronicle.com/>) in comparison to the 20 other public universities and state colleges in the University System of Georgia that have to this point offered bachelor degrees. Some key findings are these:

1. Our six year graduation rate is 30.8 per cent. This puts us 15<sup>th</sup> out of 20.
2. Our four year graduation rate is 11.4 per cent. This puts us 13<sup>th</sup> out of 20.
3. Our rate of completions per 100 students is 17.7. This puts us 8<sup>th</sup> out of 20.
4. Our spending per completion is \$35,137. This puts us 20<sup>th</sup> out of 20, indicating that we are the leanest of the 20 institutions. Indeed, even in comparing this figure to the two-year institutions within the USG, we find eight schools that spend more per completion rate than we do.

5. Our student aid per recipient is \$5,389. Eleven institutions award more aid per student than we do.
6. Our student population with Pell grants is 43.1 per cent. Thirteen institutions have fewer Pell recipients than we do. These last two statistics indicate that we have a significantly larger percentage of our student population that is economically depressed.

In comparing ourselves nationally to our peers, we find the following:

7. We rank 460 out of 622 public four year institutions regarding six year graduation rates.
8. We rank 76 out of 110 comprehensive institutions regarding six year graduation rates.
9. We rank 16<sup>th</sup> out of 20 selected peer institutions regarding six year graduation rates (these institutions are [in rank order]: Gwyneed-Mercy College, Molloy College, Alvernia University, CSU-Stanislaus, Ferris State University, Saint Leo University, CSU-San Marcos, Ursuline College, Tiffin University, University of Michigan at Flint, UNC-Pembroke, Texas Wesleyan University, Nicholls State University, University of Southern Indiana, Angelo State University, {GSW}, Montana State University-Billings, Southeastern Oklahoma State University, Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Augusta State University). Source: <http://chroni.cl/OypNwb>

Data that unequivocally show specific reasons for low retention and graduation rates at GSW are not available. It is evident that a large number of incoming freshmen complete their first year with a GPA that is so low that they are no longer qualified for financial aid (approximately 23%). It is also evident that the retention rate for these students is very low (under 25%). Thus, many of the planned actions for improving retention and graduation address student academic success, especially during the freshman year. It is also clear that in order to improve retention and graduation, GSW will need to implement plans that are effective for first-generation and/or low-income students.

The Complete College Georgia plan for GSW is designed around the university's strategic plan (Moving Forward). All components of the CCG plan align with one or more of the institutions strategic goals:

**Goal 1: Cultivating Enrollment Growth** - The Southwest Georgia region requires both GSW graduates and the economic impact of the institution itself to build and maintain its prosperity.

However, increasing enrollment is only the beginning. Students must persist to graduation if we are to do our part for our region, our state, and the nation.

**Goal 2: Cultivating Excellence in Undergraduate Learning and Teaching** – This goal focuses the pursuit of excellence on learning and teaching rather than on academic programs. Learning and teaching take place in a variety of places on our campus both within and beyond the classroom, and between a variety of campus constituents in addition to faculty and students. Excellence in teaching and learning results from an environment where intellectual, personal, and social growth can take place for all campus constituents throughout their lives.

**Goal Three: Cultivating Community Partnerships** - Since its founding in 1906 when the city of Americus requested an institution of higher education be located here, GSW has been an important part of this community. The institution is also part of a community that remembers its past in order to work toward a better future. Cultivating partnerships within these community traditions will enable GSW to contribute to a better future both locally and globally.

## **Part II: Strategies and Objectives**

To ensure broad input regarding strategies to improve retention and graduation rates, faculty, staff, and administrators from across the campus were invited to join the five team members who attended the Complete College Georgia Summit to create a CCG Task Force. This Task Force discussed a wide range of possible avenues for improving retention and graduation rates. Subcommittees of the Task Force were charged with developing specific action plans in a number of areas. The suggested actions were reviewed by the full Task Force and selected tasks were developed into an integrated campus-wide plan. Because few data are available that provide specific reasons for low retention and graduation rates, this plan relies heavily on literature reports of strategies that have been shown to be effective at other institutions, especially institutions that, like GSW, enroll a substantial number of low-income and/or first generation college students.

All tasks and initiatives in GSW's CCG plan are designed to address one or more required elements:

**Element 1: Partnerships with K-12** – Student success in higher education is substantially affected by preparation and motivation developed before students arrive on a college campus. To

improve students' success in higher education, GSW is collaborating with South Georgia Technical College and local school districts to develop a college-bound culture among middle and high school students. This project will make substantial use of training materials developed by the USG and SREB for the Collaborative Counselor Training Initiative. By taking this training into local schools we will improve students' understanding of college expectations, assist students in choosing appropriate programs, and assist students in navigating the administrative tasks involved in enrolling in higher education. This initiative also directly addresses issues of access and success for traditionally under-represented groups.

**Element 2: Improving access and completion for students traditionally underserved –**

Because GSW enrolls a substantial number of low-income and/or first generation college students, any plan for improving students' success must consider the particular needs of these students. The literature shows that strategies improving communication with families, improving advising, enhancing the freshman year experience, and increasing student engagement help these students be more successful in higher education.

**Element 3: Shorten time to degree (or credits to degree) –** One of our goals in improving advising is to insure that students take fewer classes that do not fulfill degree requirements, a goal that will shorten time to degree for all GSW students, including traditionally underserved groups. In addition, we will work with the Student Government Association to implement and publicize strategies for shortening time. We will also solicit further ideas for shortening time to degree from faculty and students.

**Element 4: Restructuring Instructional Delivery –**Program assessment data shows that improvements can be made to GSW's distance education delivery, improvements that should not only lead to higher quality distance education programs, but increase graduation and retention in these programs. The School of Business, which houses GSW's largest distance education programs, will work to standardize its delivery of distance education courses to conform to best practice in this area of instructional delivery. School of Business practice will then become a model for creation and maintenance of distance education programs at GSW. We will also solicit further ideas on instructional delivery innovations from faculty, including hybrid and modular forms of instruction.

**Element 5: Transforming Remediation** - Developmental courses have been widely shown to constitute an enormous barrier to student success. Nationally very few students who enroll in developmental courses persist to graduation. Substantial success has been demonstrated with changes to traditional remediation including self-paced modular delivery and co-enrollment in developmental support courses. Research has shown that the administrative processes involved with enrolling and continuing in higher education (including application for financial aid) are barriers to the success of students from traditionally under-represented groups. GSW will engage in a campus-wide review of administrative processes that affect students to minimize this barrier to the extent possible.

In the chart tables below, the elements column is tied to the five elements described above. These tables indicate specific actions that we will take over the next three years in order to improve our retention and graduation rates:

**Action Plans**

Strategic Goal: Goal 1 – Cultivating enrollment growth.					
1.1: Objective: Improve communication with students’ family members in order to promote and increase family support for the students’ college success.			Desired Outcome: Increase retention and graduation, especially among under-represented groups owing to greater family support.		
Target: 2012: < 50 %; 2015: > 80 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
1.1.A: Improve communication of expectations and avenues for support. Provide additional information to parents of incoming students.	1.1.A.1: Develop informational materials to be delivered to parents during STORM Day	Noel-Levitz Assessment Instruments; multiple surveys	Student Affairs	In place	2
	1.1.A.2: Hold orientation sessions for parents at STORM Day that emphasize academic success and family support	Parents’ Survey reviewed after every STORM Session by STORM Committee	Student Affairs	In place	2
1.2: Objective: Promote student engagement by increasing participation in extra-curricular activities			Desired Outcome: Improved retention owing to greater student engagement.		
Target: 2012: < 20 %; 2015: > 30 %					

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Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
1.2.A: Initiate program to promote student participation in extra-curricular activities and track student participation	Institute tracking of student participation using QR codes and establish reward system for participation	Student participation in campus organizations and activities will be compared to previous years	Student Affairs, Athletics	Fall 2012	2
1.3: Objective: Increase awareness of existing strategies for shortening time to degree. Target: 2012: < 1%; 2015: > 3 %			Desired Outcome: Increase number of students receiving credit by examination, by prior learning assessment, etc., thus shortening time to degree for these students		
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
1.3.A: Making students and faculty more aware of credit by examination and prior learning assessment	Include credit by examination options and prior learning assessment in Master Advisor training. Educate students and faculty on CLEP options, AP and IB credits	Track number of students receiving credit by examination or by prior learning assessment annually, as well as the number of credit hours awarded	Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs	Spring 2013	1, 2, 3, 4
1.3.B: Making students more aware of credit by examination and prior learning assessment	Collaborate with the Student Government Association and other student groups to publicize credit by examination and prior learning assessment options	Track number of students receiving credit by examination or by prior learning assessment annually, as well as the number of credit hours awarded. Track number of students in PLA 2000	Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Student Affairs	Fall 2012	1, 2, 3, 4
1.4: Objective: Increase long range planning in student registration			Desired Outcome: reduce the number of students taking unnecessary classes and missing infrequently offered classes required for degrees, thereby		

Target: 2012: < 5 %; 2015: 8 %			raising retention and graduation rates		
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
1.4.A: Institute formal degree planning for students	1.4.A.1: Revising and updating two-year course rotations of major classes, and suggested four-year degree plans for each degree program	Annual inventory of two-year course rotations and four-year degree plans conducted by Deans	Deans and Department Chairs	Fall 2012	2 & 3
	1.4.A.2: Create degree planning template to accompany curriculum sheets for each degree program	Monitor four-year and six-year graduation rates	Academic Affairs and Registrar	Fall 2012	2 & 3
	1.4.A.3: Introduce students to degree planning through advising and publicity campaign	Monitor four-year and six-year graduation rates	Academic Affairs, Enrollment Management	Spring 2013	2 & 3
	1.4.A.4: Train students, faculty, and staff on Degree Works	Development of graduation plans for all students	Enrollment Management	Fall 2013	2,3
1.5: Objective: Educate the entire campus community of the need to improve retention and graduate rates and share GSW's CCG plan.			Desired Outcome: Develop campus-wide buy-in for the CCG plan and develop an avenue for feedback on the plan.		
Target: 2012: < 75 %; 2015: > 99 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
1.5.A: Provide data on our retention and graduation rates to the entire	1.5.A.1: Presentation to campus community.	Numbers of faculty and staff attending	Academic Affairs	Spring Semester 2012, ff.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
	1.5.A.2: Usable data and action plans developed	Use of the data presented; action plans	Academic	Fall Semester	1, 2, 3, 4,

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community	during workshops	developed	Affairs	2012	5
1.5.B: Provide the CCG plan to the entire community	The final CCG plan will be disseminated as a follow-up to the Opening Assembly.	Engagement with the process	Academic Affairs	After the plan is approved	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
1.5.C: Launch professional development workshop series on best practices for teaching and advising	Decide on topics and presenters publicize to campus community	Development of topics and volunteers to present the topics	Academic Affairs, Institutional Effectiveness, Center for Teaching and Learning	2 in the fall and 2 in the spring	1-5

Strategic Goal: Goal 2--Cultivating excellence in undergraduate learning and teaching.					
2.1: Objective: Improve academic advising processes to promote student success and timely graduation.			Desired Outcome: Improved retention and graduation rates, especially among students from under-represented groups.		
Target: 2012: < 40 %; 2015: > 60 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.1.A: Improve advising for students who have not declared a major	Hire dedicated General Education Advisor	Retention figures of first year students by major	Academic Affairs	Fall 2012	2
2.1.B: Implement "Master Advisor" plan for academic departments with large enrollment	Designate and train Master Advisor for selected programs	Advising Survey	Academic Affairs	Spring 2013	2
2.1.C: Improve tracking of student progress	2.1.C.1: Implement mid-term and end of semester grade reporting to academic advisors	Retention Studies	Academic Affairs	Fall 2012	2
	2.1.C.2: Implement attendance tracking and referral to retention specialists	Retention Studies and Surveys	Enrollment Management Academic Affairs	Fall 2012	2
2.2: Objective: Identify administrative barriers to success of students, especially underserved populations.			Desired Outcome: Improve retention and graduation rates for underserved student populations		
Target: 2012: < 2 %; 2015: > 50 %					



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Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.2.A: Review satisfaction survey and other data to identify barriers to success of students	2.2.A.1: Review Parents Satisfaction Inventory (administered August 2012) responses for correlations with existing data sets, such as NSSE (last administered 2011) and the Adults Learner Inventory (administered 2009)	Monitor retention and graduation rates, especially for underserved populations	Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management	Fall 2012	2,3
	2.2.A.2: Review student complaint logs for patterns of dissatisfaction	Monitor retention and graduation rates, especially for underserved populations	Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, and Administrative Council	Summer 2013	2,3
2.2.B: Review administrative processes and procedures that impact students	Include professionalism review, client services review, "customer service" review as component of annual assessment of institutional effectiveness for all divisions and offices	Ongoing assessment and monitoring through institutional effectiveness process	Administrative Council and Institutional Effectiveness and Planning	Fall 2012	2, 3
2.3: Objective: Develop a First Year Experience program that promotes academic success, student engagement, and retention Target: 2012: 0 %; 2015: > 99 %			Desired Outcome: Improved student success and retention especially among students from under-represented groups		
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.3.A: Develop UNIV1000 to be a freshman seminar as key component in FYE	2.3.A.1: Create discipline-specific sections of UNIV1000 taught by faculty members in the discipline to promote academic engagement	Retention Surveys	Director Academic Skills Center	Fall 2012	2
	2.3.A.2: Implement use of College Persistence Questionnaire to	Referrals to Student Support Services and Academic Center for Excellence	Director Academic Skills Center	Fall 2012	2

	identify freshmen at risk of dropping out				
	2.3.A.3: Pilot use of SCORE resiliency training to improve student retention	Pilot various assessment mechanisms	Director Academic Skills Center, Business Office, Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Administrative Council	Fall 2012	2
	2.3.A.4: Assign peer mentors to sections of UNIV1000 (FY Ambassadors)	Success rate of graduates from UNIV 1000	Director Academic Skills Center	Fall 2013	2
2.4: Objective: Improve success of Learning Support students by redesign of Learning Support Courses			Desired Outcome: Improve success rate in LS courses and retention of LS students		
Target: 2012: < 10 %; 2015: > 15 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.4.A: Convert all LS courses to self-paced, modular delivery	Implement individualized instruction using Pearson software	Track success and retention of LS students. Also number of students passing COMPASS	Coordinator of Learning Support	Fall 2012	5
2.5: Objective: Improve delivery of distance education courses and programs			Desired Outcome: Rate of success in on-line courses should be comparable to that of face-to-face courses		
Target: 2012: < 35 %; 2015: > 75 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.5.A: Develop Distance Education Manual for	2.5.A.1: Compose Manual	Monitor annual assessment summaries for improvement in outcome attainment for distance	Academic Affairs	In progress	3 & 4

distribution to faculty and students via institutional website		education courses and programs			
	2.5.A.2: Create website to disseminate manual	Monitor annual assessment summaries for improvement in outcome attainment for distance education courses and programs	Academic Affairs, and Development and University Relations	Fall 2012	3 & 4
2.6: Objective: Improve delivery for distance education program in Business			Desired Outcome: Improve assessment outcomes for BBA Program, and provide model for improvement and development of other distance education programs		
Target: 2012: 20 %; 2015: 100 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
2.6.A: Formalize ways of encouraging faculty-student and student-student interactions in distance education courses and programs	2.6.A.1: Institute a Memorandum of Understanding between School of Business and distance education faculty that emphasizes the necessity faculty-student and student-student interactions in distance education instruction	Monitor BBS annual assessment summaries for improvement in outcome attainment for distance education programs	School of Business	Fall 2012	3 & 4
	2.6.A.2: Institute specific program of annual evaluation of distance education instruction that specifically evaluates quality of student-faculty interactions in distance education courses.	Monitor BBS annual assessment summaries for improvement in outcome attainment for distance education programs	School of Business	Fall 2012	3 & 4
Strategic Goal 3 – Cultivating Community Partnerships					

3.1: Objective: Develop a collaborative program to create a college-bound culture among students in area schools.			Desired Outcome: Improved access and student success, especially among students from under-represented groups. Create an environment in which students are ready and able to succeed in college.		
Target: 2012: < 20 %; 2015: > 60 %					
Strategy	Action Steps	Assessment	Division Responsible	Start Date	Element
3.1.A: Provide assistance and mentoring for public school students promoting participation in higher education using CCTI training materials.	3.1.A.1: Meet with administrators from local schools and USG personnel to discuss available training materials.	Participation in meeting	Deans, Arts and Sciences and Education	Fall 2012	1,2
	3.1.A.2: Train appropriate personnel at all institutions.	Assessment of understanding of materials	Deans, Arts and Sciences and Education	Fall 2012	1,2
	3.1.A.3: Conduct jointly sponsored "College Readiness" workshops	Participation in workshops, number of HS students applying to college	Deans, Arts and Sciences and Education	Spring 2013	1,2
	3.1.A.4: Develop program using college students as mentors to promote college participation	Participation in program	Deans, Arts and Sciences and Education	Planning Spring 2013 Start Fall 2013	1,2
	3.1.A.5: Staff and maintain "College Bound" resource room at appropriate K12 campuses	Track use of resource room(s) by students	Dean, A&S	Fall 2013	1,2
3.1.B: Develop High School Counselor Awareness and engage Graduation Coaches	Make use of SREB materials	Track number of college ready students coming out of targeted high schools	Enrollment Management	Fall 2012	1,2
Sumter County Mentor Partnership	Use DHR funding and governing from LEAP (Learning for Everyone ... Avenue to Progress) to continue the program	Numbers of students in the program	Student Affairs	Fall 2012	1, 2

### **Part III: Implementation**

While the directors of the respective areas assigned tasks/strategies will be responsible for implementation of them, success of the overall plan will depend on buy-in from across campus and input on how we can continue to improve our plans. In order to establish buy-in from all constituencies, the Office of Academic Affairs will launch a series of workshops for faculty and staff to ensure the entire community understands the importance of retention and progression and knows how each area contributes to the successful progression of our students. The Vice President of Academic Affairs has laid the groundwork for this series with several addresses to the campus, starting in April 2012, where he has presented data on GSW's retention and completion rates to the entire campus community and emphasized the importance of working together to address barriers to student success. The Office of Academic Affairs will follow up with a series of professional development workshops that will focus on improving retention and graduation. Workshops will not only allow communication of university plans to a wide constituency, but will provide an avenue for feedback on how well our strategies are working and what else we could do to improve retention and completion. Although some of the tasks in GSW's CCG plan involve only a single office or division, success of the overall plan will require participation and support across the campus. Directors will be charged with ensuring implementation of plans within their divisions, as indicated in the above action charts.

### **Part IV: Ongoing Evaluation**

The Office of Institutional Research will provide the following data for the CCG committee to use in continuous evaluation of institutional progress towards goals.

#### Retention Rates

One-year retention rates for the first-time full-time cohort. These rates are provided separately by race/ethnicity, sex, and for traditional and non-traditional aged students, students initially enrolled in learning support courses, commuting and residential students, Pell Grant recipients, and first-generation college students. Based on the data in the chart below, our target

for improvement in retention rates is to have a sustained 3 per cent improvement over the next three years:

**Institutional-specific One-year Retention Rates**

<u>Fall Cohort Year</u>	<u>First-time, Full-time Freshmen</u>	<u>One-Year Retention Rates</u>
2001	266	71.80
2002	331	65.56
2003	326	65.64
2004	360	70.28
2005	357	64.71
2006	399	63.91
2007	388	76.03
2008	418	68.90
2009	435	66.44
2010	474	64.77

Graduation Rates

Overall 4-, 6-, and 8-year graduation rates for the first-time full-time cohort. Six-year rates are provided separately by race/ethnicity, sex, and for traditional and non-traditional aged students, students initially enrolled in learning support courses, commuting and residential students, Pell Grant recipients, and first-generation college students. Based on the data in the chart below, our target for improvement in number of bachelor’s degrees granted is to have a sustained 3 per cent improvement over the next three years.:

**Institutional-specific Graduation Rates**

Cohort Year	# in Bachelor's Degree-seeking Cohort	Graduated in: 4 Years		Graduated in: 5 Years		Graduated in: 6 Years		Graduated in: 7 Years		Graduated in: 8 Years	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2000	306	44	14.38	94	30.72	114	37.25	125	40.85	129	42.16
2001	266	31	11.65	79	29.7	93	34.96	99	37.22	101	37.97
2002	330	45	13.64	85	25.76	108	32.73	117	35.45	120	36.36
2003	323	48	14.86	98	30.34	113	34.98	121	37.46	126	39.01
2004	352	40	11.36	92	26.14	108	30.68	113	32.1		
2005	356	37	10.39	89	25	107	30.06				
2006	399	52	13.03	107	26.82						
2007	388	59	15.21								

### Degrees Conferred

The number of Bachelor's degrees awarded in an academic year (summer, fall, and spring). These numbers are provided separately by major, race/ethnicity, sex, age, for Pell Grant recipients, and first-generation college students.

### Student Characteristics

Fall enrollment by race/ethnicity, sex, age, full- or part-time status, number of credit hours taken by each student, first-generation students, and Pell Grant recipients.

### Grade Distributions

Grade distributions for all classes are provided for each fall and spring terms. Grade distributions are also provided separately for the first-time freshmen cohort fall courses and courses with the highest and lowest percentage of As, Bs, and Cs are identified.

### Exit Rates from Learning Support Classes

Exit rates and number of attempts are provided separately for traditional and non-traditional aged learning support students. Grades in the first English composition and math courses for students who exit from learning support are also provided.

### Advisement Survey

Locally-developed survey administered annually to all GSW students. Questions pertain to the frequency of advising, accuracy of advising, extent student found advice and advisor to be helpful, and overall quality of academic advising.

Since every academic program, and student or administrative support program submits an annual report, the units responsible for the specific tasks associated with this plan will begin reporting on results associated with their tasks in their 2012-13 annual reports, due no later than

October 2013. Each unit will report its results as part of its “Progress Towards Strategic Goals” summary, which is a section of its annual report. The progress sections are compiled by the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning, who receives copies of all annual reports, and forwarded to the Strategic Planning and Assessment subcommittee of GSW’s Institutional Effectiveness Committee for review and analysis. Beginning next year, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning will compile also the strategic progress summaries from the units responsible for the specific tasks associated with this plan, and forward the compiled summaries to the Complete College Georgia committee for analysis and proposed actions based on the committee’s analysis of results.



## APPENDIX

### **Engagement:**

1. Research has shown that involvement in the university is a key factor in student persistence (Astin, 1982; Tinto, 1987). Astin (1984) reported that the more students are involved on campus, the higher their likelihood is to remain and have positive feelings about their campus experience. Coupled with student involvement, Astin also noted that the number one factor which influences students to remain at their institution is their peers. He argues that “the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years are student peer groups (Astin, 1993, p. 398). He further espoused that this interaction among student peers “had far-reaching effects on nearly all areas of student learning and development” (p. 398).
2. Peer mentoring or peer counseling as it has come to be known, has been used as a way of increasing student retention (Brawer, 1996; Good, Haplin, & Haplin, 2000; Highsmith, Denes & Pierre, 1998) and is considered a “critical factor in the success of black freshmen” (Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989, p. 120). The major focus behind peer counseling is to help other students successfully adjust to the social and academic environment of an institution of higher learning. This concept involves training acclimated students to assist new students in making the transition from home, high school, or community college to their new found environment. Freeman (1999) found that mentoring is important for students who find themselves in environments that are culturally unique from those they left. Further, Villalpando (2003) determined that for students of color peer groups are essential as “peer groups empower and nourish academic success and foster the development of a critical cultural consciousness by understanding the member’s condition as radicalized students within the academy” (p. 633). Additionally, peer mentoring in higher education may focus on social, academic, and cultural skills that can assist students in their matriculation and in many instances targets ethnic minorities and women.
3. Within the academic realm, “the virtues of mentoring have withstood the test of time and have been found applicable to a variety of situations, including the undergraduate experience” (Scott and Homant, 2007, p. 62). It has become “known as a method used within colleges and universities as a means for meeting the diverse needs of various groups of students as they begin the college adjustment process” (Correll, 2005, p 2).

### **Improving the First Year Experience Support Structure:**

1. Our First Year Experience currently consists primarily of programs aimed at students’ first term. These include: 1) An orientation weekend, 2) UNIV 1000 – an orientation class, 3) “learning communities” which consist primarily of a block schedule of classes, and 4) residence life programming. There is one program that occurs in the spring term, which is UNIV 1001 – a course that freshmen on Academic Warning are required to take.
  - a. In order to strengthen the first year experience, we are proposing: Revisions to the UNIV 1000 course.
  - b. Introduction of “discipline-specific” sections of the course. These sections will be taught by faculty within the discipline and limited to students who are majors in that area. Although all sections of UNIV 1000 are organized around specific majors and are often taught by faculty within the discipline, these new sections will differ in the course content. These sections will still cover the standard orientation material during the first half of the term, but will emphasize improving students’ study skills through the introduction of discipline-specific readings during the second half of the term.
  - c. Because these are existing courses, there should be no or minimal cost (possibly stipends for one or two additional sections of UNIV 1000).

- d. Evaluation of the success of these course sections will occur by comparing course grades, first term GPAs, and one-year retention rates for students in these sections to students from other UNIV 1000 sections.
  2. Implementation of a Peer Leadership program by assigning peer leaders to sections of UNIV 1000. New students may perceive peer leaders to be more approachable than faculty/staff because of the peers' recent and relevant experiences as a student at GSW. As a result, they can become a trusted resource for new students who may not feel comfortable seeking help from faculty or staff.
    - a. The costs involved for implementing a peer leadership program primarily involve pay for the peers. A proposal has been made for paying a \$100.00 stipend for peer leaders for 25 sections of UNIV 1000, which would be a total cost of \$2500.00. It has also been suggested that instead of cash, the students could be given a book store voucher. Upon further discussion, we believe that the compensation for peers should be at least \$200.00 because we need to attract solid students who will be expected to spend significant time and energy to serve as peer leaders. During the initial year of implementation (fall 2012), peers could be assigned to 10-12 sections of UNIV 1000. This would allow us to evaluate the program by comparing the performance/retention of the students in the sections with the peer leaders to sections without the peer leaders. As the program is further developed, peer leaders would be assigned to all sections of UNIV 1000. In addition, the peers could be required to attend a course specifically developed for peer leaders or one of the current LEAD courses (if applicable), which would create some tuition revenue to help support the peer leader program.
    - b. The costs involved in implementing this program would be the additional hourly pay for the tutors. This may vary depending upon how many hours the tutors may be expected to participate in the class. If the tutors were expected to attend each class, the cost would be approximately \$166.75 (\$7.25 hr. for 23 classes) for each tutor/section.
    - c. Evaluation of the success of these course sections will occur by comparing course grades, first term GPAs, and one-year retention rates for students in these sections to students from other UNIV 1000 sections.
    - d. Assign tutors to sections of UNIV 1000. Tutors could assist the classes by providing the students with general studies skills or targeting specific classes in the students' learning communities. New students will become familiar with tutors and will hopefully be more comfortable seeking tutoring on their own. Alternatively, the tutor could attend a few of the regular UNIV 1000 class sessions early in the term and then lead weekly study sessions with the students outside of class.
    - e. The program could initially be implemented in 5-6 sections of UNIV 1000 so that the performance/retention of the students in the sections with the embedded tutors could be compared to other sections. Sections of UNIV 1000 where students are enrolled in known "choke point" courses (such as BIOL 1107, BIOL 2107, SOCI 1101, MATH 1111, HIST 1111/1112, or POLS 1101) would be the logical choices for the placement of tutors into UNIV 1000 classes.
    - f. Evaluation of the success of these course sections will occur by comparing course grades, first term GPAs, and one-year retention rates for students in these sections to students from other UNIV 1000 sections.
  3. Develop a year-long theme to create a unified first year experience. Programming in Residence Life, UNIV 1000, and additional activities for first-year freshmen would focus on the chosen theme and encourage students to become more engaged on campus and with other freshmen outside of their classes.

- a. Evaluation of the success of the theme-based programming will occur by examining participation rates in the programming, student satisfaction with the activities through the UNIV 1000 course evaluations, and one-year retention rates.
4. Supplement UNIV 1000 by creating “for freshmen only” activities that take place during the convocation hour. These activities could include a freshman convocation, team building activities such as the “Play Fair” that occurs during the orientation weekend, a common reading, and other theme-related activities. The theme based programming would be a collaboration between the First Year Advocate, the Residence Life Coordinator for the Freshmen Residence Halls, and the Director of Campus Life.
  - a. The costs for this programming may initially require funding by the university. We plan to find out if we can obtain funding from the money provided by student activities fees and we also need to get some estimates for the costs of funding at least one special activity a month. We have discussed the possibility of requesting a special fee that would be associated with taking UNIV 1000. The funds generated by the fee would then be used for the additional course programming. In the past, we have used text books that have ranged in price from 10.00 to 45.00, but we do not currently utilize a text book for the course. So a lab fee for the course would not be an undue cost to the students. A fee as low as 10.00 per UNIV 1000 participant could generate approximately \$4,500.00 to \$5,000.00 depending upon the size of the incoming freshmen class. Kennesaw currently charges a \$100.00 fee per student. Although it is too late to implement the fee for this incoming fall, we can begin to talk to Amber DeBaise and Cody King about proposing the fee for the fall 2013 class.
5. Create areas for students to congregate on campus. We currently do not have good places on campus for students to meet and socialize. If we want students to feel connected to the campus and to each other, they need some places to gather on campus. It is also difficult to find places to schedule additional out of class activities, as the SSC conference rooms are often booked.
6. Create a Special Topics for Freshmen course or Freshmen Seminar for first-year students to take in the spring term. This 2 hour credit course will be designed primarily as an interdisciplinary “Perspectives” course which will be team-taught by faculty from different disciplines but on a common topic – hopefully one that is related to the first-year theme. This course will provide additional contact between faculty and new freshmen during the spring term, extending the first year experience to a full first year. This course will be designed to help students develop their critical thinking skills and enhance their understanding of the general education curriculum through the exploration of a topic from different approaches. A course outline template will be developed and submitted to the Academic Affairs committee so that the course can be offered starting in Spring 2013.
  - a. We have previously discussed developing a similar course which could be submitted for approval for credit in Area B. We still think that this may ultimately be a good option, however, it also appears to be somewhat of a barrier in that approval by the BOR for Area B would take more than a year to obtain and might not be possible at all, since PLA 2000 was not approved because Area B courses must be open to all students. Alternatively, there are many schools that require completion of a freshmen seminar as a graduation requirement, similar to the way in which we require completion of UNIV 1000.
  - b. We think that there will be a sufficient number of first year freshmen who will be interested in taking a course on a unique special topic and will need a 2 credit hour course to complete a 12-15 hour schedule, even if the course is counted as elective hours. We therefore plan to begin to offer the course before pursuing approval for Area B or making

the course a graduation requirement. Hopefully, there will be enough faculty interested in teaching the course to offer 5-6 sections of the course in Spring 2013.

- c. This is a course which will most likely be taught as an overload by faculty, who will therefore be paid the appropriate overload pay. The tuition generated by the course should be sufficient to pay the faculty the overload pay, and If necessary, a minimum enrollment number, for example 10, could be required to insure sufficient revenue. The ideal enrollment size for the course should be limited to 15-20 students per section.
- d. Evaluation of the success of the implementation of a freshmen special topics course or seminar will occur by examining course evaluations and one-year retention rates for students who take the seminars compared to those who do not.

**Additional Partnerships with K-12:**

1. Department of Mathematics
  - a. Certificate for Two-Year College Mathematics Teachers
  - b. Certificate Program for K-8 Mathematics Teachers
2. School of Mathematics and Computer Sciences
  - a. Grant applications, the purpose of which is to boost students' creativity and problems solving skills. The School faculty will be working with the middle and high school students over the Internet and use Moodle – free learning management system. Such a setting will allow us to reach students in rural Southwest Georgia, who are traditionally underserved.