

GCSU touts highest regional ranking in anniversary year

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GCSU President Cathy Cox speaks to the Milledgeville Rotary Club. (Natalie Davis Linder/Staff)



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Georgia College & State University entered the latest fall term with its highest-ever enrollment, in the same year that it marks its 30th anniversary as the state's flagship public liberal arts university.

It's been a notable fall semester for the Bobcats, as GCSU has also achieved its highest-ever regional ranking among public universities in the South. U.S. News & Report's recently released 2027 rankings place GCSU at No. 4 among public universities in 12 southern states. The list includes 152 schools spanning from Arkansas in the west to Virginia on the eastern coast.

GCSU is also ranked No. 1 in Georgia for "Best Value for In-State Students" among all public and private institutions in the state, and moved to No. 2 in the Best Undergraduate Teaching rankings.

Even with the advanced rankings, recent growth and enrollment demands, the university remains true to its liberal arts core, GCSU President Cathy Cox told the Milledgeville Rotary Club last week.

Fall enrollment at GCSU reached nearly 7,500 this year, yet it maintains one of the smallest student-faculty ratios for public universities. About 6,400 of those students are undergraduates.

Since 2022, applications to Georgia College have grown more than 75%, reaching a record high of more than 10,000 applications for the current academic year. The entering class of 2030 is also the largest in university history, at nearly 1,850 first-year students. Current enrollment sits at an all-time high of almost 7,500 undergraduate and graduate students.

"It is a little more expensive, but a much more personal level of instruction," said Cox.

The small student-to-faculty ratio, 17 to 1, allows the university to teach essential liberal arts skills such as communication, problem analysis and critical thinking that enhance student preparedness for the workforce.

"Experiential learning — learning by the experience — is embedded into everything that we teach on our campus," she said. "Again, you can do that when you have smaller classes."

The enrollment growth presents an issue for GCSU, as student housing is at capacity. GCSU freshmen are required to live on campus.

"We are maxed out in our residence halls," said Cox, GCSU's 12th college president. "We are over 100% capacity for housing."

She said the college has requested the University System Board of Regents for permission to build a new residence hall to alleviate the strain.

"If we had one other building of about 250 beds, that would probably be a sweet spot for us," said Cox of dormitory space.

The goal is not to expand the enrollment of the incoming class but to help with overcrowding for existing students.

Beyond dorm facilities, GCSU recently purchased the former Georgia State Patrol Post to utilize as its home base for public safety operations in partnership with the Baldwin County Sheriff's Office.

The new music rehearsal hall at the corner of Wilkinson and Montgomery streets opened last fall. Renovations are also underway at Herty Hall, which is slated to reopen in January, following the completion of a \$19 million renovation. Kilpatrick Hall, the college of education, has undergone internal renovations. Renovations are also set to begin later this fall on the Arts & Sciences building, with a summer 2027 completion date.

Ground will be broken on a project to completely renovate the baseball facilities in November.

Andalusia has also undergone some upgrades, with more prominent signage, landscaping and added parking space, Cox said.

As Baldwin County's largest employer and the state's flagship liberal arts university, Cox said the liberal arts approach and the college's selective admissions standards are reflected in GCSU's high graduation rate, significantly impacting how students are challenged and what they can do and achieve beyond graduation.

"We know that the students admitted here are the cream of the crop," said Cox. "It's not just what we teach at a liberal arts university; it's very much how we teach that's very distinctive."