



**Annual Report on Our
Path to Preeminence:
The 2016 –2021 Georgia
College Strategic Plan**

*Report of
Accomplishments:
FY2021*

Introduction

The *Georgia College Strategic Plan 2016-2021: Our Path to Preeminence* has made considerable progress since its inception. The document, which is a living, breathing plan, provides a road map to guide the university in its quest for national preeminence. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the university to adjust many of its operations online to provide a safe environment for students, staff, and faculty. Due to this immediate transition and the challenges it caused, the committee proposed and the president approved for the 2016-2021 plan to be extended until 2022. In the meantime, the Strategic Plan Steering Committee has continued to steward and evaluate the current plan while transitioning into the planning phase for the next strategic plan.

The following report includes the evaluation of the progress made in FY21 of the current strategic plan. In Fall 2020, the co-chairs of the committee were changed because of Dr. Chavonda Mills' departure from Georgia College. Dr. Holley Roberts, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs remained as a co-chair and Dr. Diana Young, Associate Professor of Psychology, and Dr. Shawn Brooks, Vice President of Student Affairs were added as co-chairs.

This report will serve as the final report on the *Georgia College Strategic Plan 2016-2021 Strategic Plan*.

Process of Reporting

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee divided into sub-committees and reviewed the FY21 Champion responses on the progress of each goal, initiative, and action item. The evaluations of the sub-committees were analyzed for this report and include noteworthy progress and accomplishments, areas of concern, recommendations from the committee, and emerging strategic issues to consider in the next strategic plan. This report focuses only on the few action items which were considered on-going or unresolved at the beginning of FY2021. Annual reports for previous fiscal years can be found on the university's strategic planning website at www.gcsu.edu/strategic-planning.

Noteworthy Strategic Plan Progress and Accomplishments

Perhaps the most noteworthy accomplishment of the 2016-2021 strategic plan is that it was Georgia College's first strategic plan to be actively monitored by the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, documented through Watermark, and annually reported on to Executive Cabinet and the campus community. It was also a true "living" strategic plan, as the vast majority of action items were accomplished and marked as completed, while several others were modified as needed. Most exciting is that a number of new action items were created and added to the plan to match emerging institutional priorities. The original plan contained 87 action items, but three new action items were added in FY18 and another two action items were added in FY21, bringing the total number of action items to 92.

Thanks to the diligent work of the action item champions, out of 92 total strategic plan action items, 98% (or 90) have been completed, operationalized, or retired.

Overall performance measures:

- 92 Total Action Items (87 original + 3 added in FY18 + 2 added in FY21)
- 98% (or 90) Action Items
- 2% (or 2) Action Items ongoing

On a more micro level, in its review of the few remaining active action items, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee identified the following six as making noteworthy progress:

Merit and Need-Based Scholarships: The aim of **Goal 1, Initiative 1, Action Item 6** was to increase the number of merit and need-based institutional scholarships available to incoming students. For each of the past five years, the awards for merit and need-based scholarships have increased dramatically. The original goal of a 25% increase over five years has been more than exceeded. In FY17, 57 merit and need-based scholarships were awarded; by FY21, that number jumped to 113, a five-year increase of 98%. In FY17, 36 annual scholarships of \$393,981 and 182 endowed scholarships of \$776,737, an overall total of 218 scholarships of \$1,170,718 were awarded; by FY21, 50 annual scholarships of \$486,288, 231 endowed scholarships of \$857,970, and 49 matching endowed scholarships of \$21,369, an overall total of 330 scholarships of \$1,365,627 were awarded. This achievement is attributed to multiple endeavors, including the successful completion of a comprehensive campaign, the addition of donor engagement officers, new fundraising events, and increased alumni giving.

The awards for merit and need-based scholarships have increased dramatically...with a five-year increase of 98%!

Retention Efforts: The focus of **Goal 1, Initiative 2, Action Item 1** was to annually monitor the retention and graduation rates, analyzing aggregated and disaggregated data to monitor specific groups (race, gender, Pell recipients, first generation) for disparity in the outcomes. While Georgia College’s overall retention rate is currently down slightly (\approx 4.3 percentage points) from the previous year, the retention rate remains strong at nearly 78%, considerably above the national average of 73.9%. This is the third best retention rate in the University System of Georgia, behind only the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of Georgia, and significantly better than the averages of the comprehensive universities (70.4%) and state universities (66.7%).

Noteworthy efforts are being made to analyze and improve retention rates. In Spring 2020, former President Dorman charged a Retention Task Force that has been actively seeking ways to improve student retention. One recommendation made by the committee was to provide additional, desirable programming such as a summer cohort for nursing, a Bachelor of Science degree in Data Science (newly approved by the USG), and a new Bachelor of Science in Finance (which is currently awaiting approval by the USG). Data support these recommendations. For example, between the Fall 2014 and 2017 entering cohorts, 88 students reported leaving Georgia College to pursue a degree in Finance at another institution. Also, in researching and providing evidence of the need for a BS in Data Science, data strongly supported that data scientists are a “rare commodity” and in “high demand” within the state of Georgia and beyond. An additional nursing cohort—which will begin in Summer 2022—will serve a larger percentage of pre-nursing students who would otherwise be forced to transfer to receive their nursing degree. In addition to the expanded programming opportunities listed above, GC has added

various undergraduate certificates and concentrations which will give students more opportunities to explore new areas of expertise and obtain acknowledgement of that work on their transcripts.

In recognition of the important role parents and families play in student persistence, decision-making, and success, GC's Director of Parent and Family Programs oversaw the launch of a new software solution called *Campus ESP* in April 2021. The purpose and function of *Campus ESP* is to increase and improve communications with students' parents and families. The software is designed to periodically provide parents with general content created by *Campus ESP* and GC-specific content generated by the director. Users can choose to receive communications weekly, bi-weekly or monthly. To date, the program has 8,071 users with an email open rate of 48%. Since its launch, GC has sent approximately 246,000 emails across all users. On average, GC Parent and Family programs send approximately 27,000 emails per month.

An additional cohort of Nursing students will begin summer 2022, a BS in Data Science degree will begin Fall 2022, and the University System is currently reviewing a proposal for a BS in Finance.

In addition to the email distribution through *Campus ESP*, a new parent/family portal has been designed and implemented to further communicate with students' families. Content is posted daily to the portal which is easily accessed through the Georgia College website.

Lastly, Student Life has developed and implemented a webinar series for parents educating them about available campus resources provided through university units such as Student Health Services, Counseling Services, Public Safety, the Student Disability Resource Center, the International Education Center, and the Learning Center.

Improved Graduation Rate: The purpose of **Goal 1, Initiative 2, Action item 2** was to determine retention processes that are most predictive of student success from matriculation to timely completion of degrees. A very noteworthy accomplishment is that Georgia College's four-year graduation rate was over 50% for the first time in 2020 at 51.2%. Exceeding a 50% graduation rate has been a long-term goal for the university. Furthermore, this rate was maintained in 2021 with the 4-year graduation rate again exceeding the 50% mark (50.3% in 2021). This is even more impressive as these two years coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Worth noting is that these years of the highest 4-year graduation rates correlate to the first two years that Georgia College transitioned to the professional advising model (2016 and 2017). Hopefully this percentage will increase each year, particularly because this metric is valued so highly across all aspects of higher education.

Despite the pandemic, the university's four-year graduation rate was over 50% for the first time in 2020 and maintained this long-standing goal in 2021 at 50.3%.

Centralized Advising Model: Noteworthy achievement was highlighted in **Goal 1, Initiative 5, Action Item 1**, which focused on developing metrics and implementing reporting to demonstrate the impact and

effectiveness of the centralized advising model. This goal would then serve **Goal 1, Initiative 5, Action Item 3**, which called for continued assessment of student success and satisfaction. The Academic Advising Center has changed their philosophy and advising approach to an appreciative advising model based on the framework from the National Academic Advising Association, NACADA. This model focuses more on relationship building than information dissemination. The approach empowers students to seek out more connections and opportunities as part of their campus experience, challenging them to be more active in their advising experience. This approach, fully implemented in Fall 2021, is anticipated to lead to greater student investment in their academic experience. All of the academic advisors were trained in the new model, including best practices, and are provided on-going professional development.

The Academic Advising Center changed its approach to an appreciative advising model which focuses more on relationship building and student empowerment than information dissemination.

The Academic Advising Center continues to assess student success, but they are moving from assessing satisfaction to the impact of the advising process and students' resulting experience. It is important that students are satisfied, and because it can be gauged in other ways, the primary assessment is now focused on students' thoughtful reflection of the advising process. This new assessment includes asking students questions such as, "Did you get the information you needed from your advisor?" and "Are you prepared to move forward with your plan for academic success?" This shift will allow Advising Center staff to make changes based on the students' reported experiences rather than just satisfaction reported by a Likert scale type assessment.

GC Journeys/High Impact Practices: Goal 2, Initiative 3, Action Item 5 was added to evaluate the overall effectiveness of *GC Journeys* in meeting its intended goals. The Associate Provost for Transformative Learning Experiences worked with the Faculty Director of *GC Journeys*, the Director of Institutional Effectiveness, and an external expert from Indiana University to create a pilot instrument to assess the *GC Journeys* program. In Fall 2021, *GC Journeys* successfully published the results, which demonstrate that more than 96% of students find the program transformative.

A significant and noteworthy accomplishment was the selection of Georgia College as the recipient of the 2020 Campus-wide Award for Undergraduate Research Accomplishments (AURA) by the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). This annual award recognizes institutions with exemplary programs that provide high-quality research experiences for undergraduates. Georgia College was the first university in the state of Georgia, the University System of Georgia, and COPLAC to win the award. In addition, *GC Journeys* also won the 2021 Regents' Momentum Year Award for Excellence in Teaching and Curricular Innovation. The award is "designed to honor teaching and instruction that promotes student achievement, promotes a purposeful program and career choice, and creates an environment where positive academic mindsets thrive, catapulting students toward degree completion."

The GC Journeys program won awards for undergraduate research accomplishments and for excellence in teaching and curricular innovation.

Additionally, **Goal 2, Initiative 3, Action Item 1** called for the redesign of the first-year seminar. First-year experience concerns by the University Retention Committee have been addressed by piloting the TREK program (30 unique faculty-led sections) to enable students to interact more closely with faculty in their major as early as their first semester. Based on data from the focus groups, the First-Year Academic Seminar Committee recommended continuing the opt-in model with faculty but noted that the seminars should be more structured for continuity. Additionally, the committee recommended, based on feedback from participating faculty and students, that TREK and other first-year seminars include modules on ways to address student mental health and stress and to disseminate other institutional information that should be shared with first-year students to best prepare them for their curricular and co-curricular experiences.

Concerns and Recommendations

Though impressive progress was made during the life of the strategic plan, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee identified the following six areas of concern:

Mental Health of Students: Goal 1, Initiative 2, Action Item 2 focused on programming to improve retention. Though it was not one of the original strategic plan action items, the mental health of students was highlighted during the pandemic as a significant factor related to retention.

Mental health in college students has been a concern for many years, but COVID-19 appears to have exacerbated these challenges. Results from the 2021 GC National Collegiate Health Assessment suggest that significant numbers of GC students reported experiencing moderate or high levels of stress or psychological distress; lacking companionship; or feeling isolated. Many students reported that their emotional or mental difficulties have hurt their academic performance. The situation with LGBTQ+ students is even more concerning, as they responded affirmatively to the item “*attempted suicide*” at six times the level of students who did not identify as LGBTQ+. More than a third of LGBTQ+ students responded to the item “*seriously considered suicide*” in the last year. Also concerning is that LGBTQ+ students were more than four times as likely to have “*intentionally cut, burned, bruised or otherwise injured*” themselves than those who did not identify as LGBTQ+. Additionally, LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely to have had “*roommate difficulties,*” felt “*overwhelming anxiety,*” “*been too depressed to function,*” and experienced “*tremendous stress*” within the last 12 months. These significant differences point to a very different and, at times, exceedingly difficult climate for the university’s LGBTQ+ students. Given the gravity of these data, it is of great concern that the availability of counseling and psychiatric services in Milledgeville is extremely limited.

Results from the National Collegiate Health Assessment demonstrate some concerning trends regarding the mental health and well-being of our students. Hindering efforts to address the mental health of our students is the extremely limited availability of counseling and psychiatric services in Milledgeville.

There are a number of initiatives to improve the mental health of Georgia College students including the creation and development of a four-year strategic plan for mental health; the use of grant funding to help establish innovative technology resources, increase campus programming, and improve counselor

education and training; and the purchase of several mental health training software packages. In addition, the USG has contracted with a 3rd party agency called Christie Campus Health to provide telephonic psychiatric care and clinical counseling services for all students.

While these initiatives are a step in the right direction, they cannot replace the positive impact of face-to-face interaction between students and the university's on-site counselors. It is troubling that Counseling Services currently is operating with only three fulltime and one part-time mental health professionals, having had two staff members resign and a third position frozen at the beginning of the pandemic. The department's staffing is down 50% from the pre-pandemic staffing level of seven full-time mental health professionals, requiring each full-time counselor to manage an overwhelming caseload of 59 students, far above capacity. Help should be on the way, however, as Counseling Services currently is recruiting for two positions. The Strategic Planning Steering Committee recommends that consideration be given to allowing Counseling Services to fill the one frozen position, as this would bring the department's counselor-to-student ratio into compliance with the level recommended by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH) and the International Accreditation of Counseling Services. In the future, additional counselor positions may be needed should student mental health needs increase. Effectively addressing the mental health needs of students could provide the benefit of ensuring that more students stay in college and graduate in a timely manner.

The university needs to find ways to provide students with the programs and resources necessary to address the growing campus mental health crisis. Counseling Center staffing should be returned at least to its pre-pandemic level, if not increased beyond that level.

Retention: First-year retention has remained between 83.11% and 85.9% for the past ten years. Despite having a strong, 85.69% first-year retention rate with the Fall 2018 first-time freshman cohort, Georgia College's first-year retention rate for the Fall 2019 cohort decreased to 82.33%. Retention for Fall 2020 was 77.98%. The first-year retention rate for Black or African American students, Hispanic and Latino students, and first-generation college students also dropped below previous levels, which were often higher than the institution's overall first-year retention rate. On the positive side, the overall retention rates for second, third, and fourth-year students, as measured in Fall 2020, all increased.

Retention rates fell in 2019 and 2020. The Retention Committee reports that this is very likely related to the Covid-19 pandemic and cites a lack of reliable, honest feedback from students who choose to leave GC.

The Retention Committee suggests that the Covid-19 pandemic may be an important reason for the drop in the first-year retention rate from 2019 to 2020. During this same period, first year retention rates among USG institutions in the state university sector experienced a decline of 6.7%, which is 2.35 points more than the GC rate. The committee reported that freshmen were less engaged in campus activities, organizations, and student life in general, leading to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and a

desire to return home. The committee is exploring these factors, along with representatives from Student Life.

Student feedback regarding reasons for leaving Georgia College is critical in understanding retention issues. However, according to the Retention Committee, it is difficult to obtain the needed student feedback. While the institution is dependent on the information that students are willing to share regarding their reasons for leaving, students may be anxious or worried that they will offend someone, leading them to not provide as much feedback as they could potentially share. This information is currently requested when students request transcripts, but the Retention Committee recommends hiring an outside firm to conduct focus groups with students who have left to obtain a more comprehensive picture of this issue.

Diversity and Inclusive Excellence: The aim of **Goal 1, Initiative 3** is to execute the Diversity Action Plan to meet associated benchmarks. Four action items identify these benchmarks: Expand potential pathway programs to enroll more students from Early College, the High Achievers Program, Rising MiSTERS, and Minority Youth in Business in order to enhance first-generation, underrepresented student enrollment; improve retention and graduation rates of participants in SOAR (no longer active), AAMI, and Call Me MiSTER programs; expand the Diversity Peer Educator program to provide peer training for all first-year seminars and Week of Welcome activities; and increase the number of participants and provide a stable funding source for the Call Me MiSTER program. While some of these action items have found success, progress on others has been mixed.

Recent administrative vacancies and interim placements among these programs (including the Director of the Call Me MiSTER program and the Chief Diversity Officer) further hamper the fulfillment of these initiatives. The new Chief Diversity Officer will develop and implement the new Diversity Action Plan, using the previously created Diversity Action Plan draft in Fall 2021 (designed for 2022-2024) as a guide. The Steering Committee recommends improved communication with the incoming Chief Diversity Officer, Enrollment Management, and other administrators of these programs to better meet strategic goals moving forward.

The focus of **Goal 1, Initiative 3, Action Item 1** was to expand pathways and programs for underrepresented students, thus increasing enrollment of these populations of students in the university. Potential pathway programs include Georgia College Early College (GCEC), High Achievers, Rising MiSTERS, and Minority Youth in Business (MYB). Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of reliable metrics to inform the institution about the number of participants in these programs who go on to enroll and graduate from Georgia College, and it is unclear if students from these programs are being actively recruited by the university. It is believed that many of the participants in these programs do go on to college, though they may not necessarily enroll at GC. For example, since GC Early College was started 15 years ago, the college acceptance rate of GCEC students has been 100%. Though GCEC graduates might choose to make other decisions regarding postsecondary options, the fact remains that the program has been highly successful with 100% of its graduates annually accepted at an institution of higher education.

It is clearly important for further investigation to determine if metrics and data do not exist, or if they just have not been collected and/or consistently communicated with campus constituents. Moving forward, it is apparent that all of the potential pathway programs should be further explored and more understood in terms of their ability to increase underrepresented student enrollment, retention, and

graduation. Further, actively recruiting from these programs could result in increasing numbers of program participants enrolling at Georgia College.

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As the potential pathway programs are examined and explored, there is a strong recommendation to fully include the Early College Principal, the directors of the other potential pathway programs, and the Senior AVP for Enrollment Management and/or Director of Admissions in these discussions. The Senior AVP for Enrollment Management and the Chief Diversity Officer should serve as co-champions for this initiative. Ultimately, the goal should be to determine what resources are necessary and available to enhance programming, outcomes, and success in recruiting and enrolling underrepresented students.

Goal 1, Initiative 3, Action Item 4 aimed to increase the number of participants in and provide a stable funding source for the College of Education's Call Me MiSTER initiative. The program currently has an average of six MiSTERS per year, but the target goal for the program is to have at least 20 MiSTERS enrolled each academic year. To get nearer to or reach this target, additional resources are needed to maximize the program's scope and potential impact statewide. For example, more aggressive recruiting is necessary, and more scholarships are needed. Before leaving GC, the former director developed a five-year strategic plan that focused on pipeline recruitment efforts, marketing, alumni engagement, fundraising, and MiSTER retention. Implementation of this strategic plan and the program's success will require significant investment and collaboration from all stakeholders.

The Steering Committee recommends that the university continue to assess the climate for underrepresented students in the next strategic plan. Additionally, the specific mechanisms by which this is accomplished should be under the purview of the next Chief Diversity Officer and the leaders of Early College, High Achievers, Rising MiSTERS, and Minority Youth in Business (MYB).

Centralized Advising/Civitas: The focus of **Goal 1, Initiative 5, Action Item 1** was to develop metrics and implement assessments to demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of the centralized advising model.

In summer 2021, Georgia College began implementation of the Civitas Advising and Retention platform within the Academic Advising Center in place of EAB (discontinued in 2020-2021). Civitas is proving to be a very worthy product with expanded capabilities and functionality. Civitas will allow the university to better track contacts, the completion of advising learning outcomes, and student impact. It is already improving communication with students, and this capability will be expanded to many offices and departments (University Learning Center, Writing Center, and Career Center) across the university. Additionally, Civitas offers an easier early alert for faculty, strong integration with D2L, and predictive analytics that our campus values. Civitas will become the main communication platform used with students. Finally, Civitas supports initiatives such as the Career Planning Milestones and *GC Journeys*. A full launch across all stakeholders will take place in Spring and Summer 2022. The Steering Committee recommends continued support for the implementation and reporting of student advising metrics in Civitas to assess and improve both student success and student-advisor relationships.

The university should provide continued support for the implementation and reporting of student advising metrics in Civitas to assess and improve both student success and student-advisor relationships.

Though continuity of staffing is critical to the success of the centralized advising model, the Academic Advising Center has a history of staff turnover. A few of the most recent vacancies have been directly related to COVID-19 and the unwillingness of staff to work face-to-face with students. Staff turnover is an impediment to the overall goal of building relationships with students, thus negatively impacting the implementation of the appreciative advising model. The Advising Center is working to improve hiring practices and staff training and is doing much more on the front-end during the interview process to make sure potential new hires fully understand expectations and the work environment. Academic Advising leaders are offering more information to new staff members during training to help them understand their expected case load, typical and atypical interactions with students, and expected student relations. They are also integrating new advisors more quickly into their advising teams (formerly ‘clusters’) to help them build a stronger sense of community. The Steering Committee applauds the diligent efforts of Enrollment Management to improve this situation.

There is a strong focus on reducing staff turnover in the Academic Advising Center. A stable staff will help build relationships with students and positively impact the implementation of the appreciative advising model.

Recruitment and Enrollment in Graduate Education: Goal 3, Initiative 1, Action Item 4 was a new action item added in FY21, and seeks to develop, market, and deliver online, graduate-level credit and non-credit certificate programs in collaboration with the School of Continuing and Professional Studies and The Graduate School. Four new graduate certificates have been approved, and the university now offers 12 online credit-bearing certificates. The Graduate School has partnered with the new School of Continuing and Professional Studies to market online graduate certificates for working professionals and partners. These efforts have resulted in a slight increase in enrollment for the Computer Science for Teachers Certificate, Dyslexia Certificate, Web Developer Certificate, and Nursing Certificates. Efforts to promote and market online graduate certificates through Continuing and Professional Studies are ongoing. While some progress has been made in online certificates, graduate enrollment decreased in Fall 2021 by 7%. This decrease is concerning and suggests that more centralized efforts in recruitment, admissions, and enrollment be a focus to best leverage the potential of the high-quality graduate programs offered at the university.

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Recommendations for the Upcoming Strategic Planning Cycle

As the university community and leadership develop the process and consider new strategic priorities for the next strategic plan, the university should be mindful of challenges that emerged during the implementation of the current plan. Specifically, timely reporting by Champions proved especially difficult and should be addressed in the planning and implementation of the next strategic plan. The Steering Committee will consult with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to create a more streamlined reporting mechanism potentially by utilizing current assessment processes such as the Progress and Planning Report (PPR) and the Administrative Planning Report (APR). Another important consideration in evaluating the goals within the next plan should include identifying and aligning critical university metrics (i.e., US News and World Report rankings) with overarching goals of the next plan rather than very intricate metrics that assess individual job responsibilities or specific program goals that are evaluated elsewhere. To make the next strategic plan both more impactful and manageable, the 2023-2028 plan should be limited to a much smaller number of very high-level strategic goals.

During the year, a number of strategic issues emerged and should be explored further. The strategic issues below should be considered and addressed during the development of the new strategic plan in the coming year.

- Continue expanding funding for need-based and merit scholarships (ex. Promise Scholars).
- Improve retention (students, faculty, staff) and graduation rates, specifically for underrepresented students.
- Increase comprehensive and accessible mental health support for students, staff, and faculty.
- Expand and facilitate programming for underrepresented students and pathways with clear metrics to evaluate effectiveness.
- Centralize graduate recruitment and enrollment management and elevate graduate programming.
- Increase awareness and recognition of on-going student and faculty research and innovation and provide structures of support.
- Recognize and support the new Quality Enhancement Plan.

Another noteworthy suggestion for the next strategic plan is to establish formal mechanisms to provide initial and ongoing input for broader representation from the university community, specifically from students, faculty, staff, and the five colleges and library. This representation should include initiatives that support student life and promote areas within Academic Affairs. This formal mechanism may include reconsidering the roles and composition of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee or requiring separate sub-committees. It was recognized in the FY19 and FY20 Strategic Planning report that a similar mechanism was needed to gather continual input from the President's Executive Cabinet. In 2021, the Vice President for Student Life began serving as a Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee to provide the critical connection to the Executive Cabinet's vision for the university and its allocation of resources. The Vice President for Finance and Administration also serves on the Steering Committee, representing both Finance and Administration and, on an interim basis, University Advancement.

Summary and the Path Forward

The 2021 Annual Report on the Implementation Plan, highlighted in this report and presented to Executive Cabinet, illustrates the identified goals, initiatives and action items, performance outcomes, successes, and work still active and in-progress. This document serves as the final report on Our Path to Preeminence: The 2016 –2021 Georgia College Strategic Plan.

Though Our Path to Preeminence was not a perfect plan, it definitely got many things right, and it took Georgia College’s strategic planning to a whole new level. The plan satisfied most of the goals set at the beginning of the planning process in 2015. The plan’s development was inclusive and encompassing of all aspects of the university; the action items were actionable, doable, challenging, and—for the most part—measurable; and the plan was guided by a permanent and deeply committed Strategic Planning Steering Committee that met regularly and developed processes and a timeline to guide its annual activities. Progress toward action item accomplishment was measured on an annual basis, and changes and additions to action items were annually recommended to Executive Cabinet. The plan evolved over the course of its lifespan, and truly was the university’s first living strategic plan.

Though some of the action items ultimately proved to be more operational than strategic, the plan did set as a goal an institutional-level requirement for student participation in transformative experiences that broadly support student development and individual growth. From this one recommendation developed the university’s award-winning GC Journeys Program. Many other action items also had a significant positive impact and helped move Georgia College toward preeminence.

The Steering Committee that guided the creation of the 2016-2021 plan will stay in place during the development and implementation of the new strategic plan. The lessons learned through the lifespan of the 2016-2021 plan should help ensure the crafting of an even stronger and more impactful strategic plan for 2023-2028. With a dynamic new university president, a focused and seasoned Strategic Planning Steering Committee, and the active involvement of the campus community, the next five years undoubtedly will bring tremendous progress toward the university’s important quest for preeminence as a public liberal arts university!

Fall 2021 Members of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee:

Co-Chairs – Dr. Diana Young, Dr. Shawn Brooks and Dr. Holley Roberts

Dr. Hedwig Fraunhofer- College of Arts & Sciences (1 representative)

Dr. Bill Donoher- College of Business (1 representative)

Dr. Nicole DeClouette - College of Education (1 representative)

Dr. Liz Speelman - College of Health Sciences (1 representative)

Dr. Brian Newsome - Honors College (1 representative)

Lamonica Sanford - Library (1 representative)

Joel Robinson- Enrollment Management (1 representative, either the AVP or Director of Admissions)

Dr. Chris Ferland - AVP for Institutional Research (permanent member)

Dr. Mark Pelton - AVP for Strategic Initiatives

Dr. Jordan Cofer - Associate Provost for Transformative Learning Experiences

Dr. Holley Roberts - Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Director of The Graduate School

Dr. Shawn Brooks - Student Affairs (1 representative)

Lee Fruitticher - Finance and Administration (1 representative)

Lee Fruitticher, TBD - University Advancement (2 representatives)

Dr. Diana Young - University Senate (1 representative)

Dr. Cara Smith - Watermark/Assessment/Institutional Effectiveness (1 representative)

Dr. Carolyn Denard - Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence and Chief Diversity Officer (1 representative)

Susan Kerr - Information Technology (1 representative)

James Robertson- SGA (1 representative)

Omar Odeh - University Communications (1 representative)

Number of Steering Committee members: 21