



GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL MISSION AND STUDENT BODY PROFILE

Georgia Southwestern State University is a comprehensive university serving a diverse population of students, offering a range of strong undergraduate and graduate programs in a vibrant learning environment. The University is a collegial community that values collaboration and community engagement with an emphasis on faculty, staff, and student interactions. An active student body and state-of-the-art amenities enhance the learning experience on a visually appealing campus located in historic Americus, Georgia.

GSW's total enrollment in fall 2018 was 2,907. At that time, the gender distribution of the student population was 67.3% women and 32.7% men. The ethnicity of the fall 2018 student population was 64.7% White, 25.0% Black, 2.4% Asian and Pacific Islander, 5.0% Hispanic, 2.3% Multiracial, and less than 1.0% were Native American or Unknown. Approximately 39% of GSW undergraduates receive Pell Grants; 50% are First-Generation college students (no parent/guardian with bachelor degree or higher); 17% began college for the first time as adults (25 years old or older); and 22% are age 25 or older. The majority of our undergraduates (67.9%) are classified as full-time (taking 12 or more hours); 31% live on campus; 54% are enrolled in one or more online classes; and 25% are enrolled exclusively in online classes. These populations are also representative of our recent graduates. Out of the undergraduates who were awarded bachelor's degrees in FY19, 52% had received the Pell grant while enrolled at GSW, 52% were first-generation students, and 26% were 29 or older at the time of graduation.

MOMENTUM YEAR UPDATE

Georgia Southwestern State University focused its Momentum Year efforts during the 2018-2019 academic year in two primary areas: High Impact Strategies from our 2018 CCG report and Areas of Focus from our 2018-19 Momentum Plan.

High Impact Strategies

1. Hurricane Jumpstart Academy (eliminated) – Although the program seemed beneficial to some potentially at-risk students, the end of grant funding strained our already tight financial resources. In addition, the lower-income students who might have benefited most from the program were reluctant to forgo employment opportunities during the summer after High School graduation. Ultimately, the program was deemed unsustainable in 2018 due to little interest from students and to the financial strain the program posed on the University.

2. Gateways to Completion (G2C) Redesign of Additional Classes Beyond MATH 1111 College Algebra (in progress) – The MATH 1111 entered the third-year Act and Refine stage of the G2C process and has shown some signs of improving DFWI rates in College Algebra. Lessons learned during this process will continue to be implemented.

During 2018, three additional courses (ENGL 1101, POLS 1101, and SOCI 1101) began the first-year Analyze and Plan stage of the G2C process, where course-level committees and the G2C Steering Committee examined Key Performance Indicators and the results of the Student Learning Gains Survey. In fall 2019, these courses will begin the second-year Act and Monitor stage of the G2C process where strategies identified in the Analyze and Plan stage will be piloted.

3. Financial Literacy (in progress) – A financial literacy component was introduced to UNIV 1000 during fall 2018. Selected portions of the Foundations Digital module on Debt session were used in all sections of UNIV 1000 last year, and portions of the Budget module have been added this year. We expect that this exposure will entice some students to explore the complete Foundations in Personal Finance course, and will continue to move towards increased participation rates, so that all students will become more informed about the implications of taking on debt.

4. Academic Advising (in progress) – In the 2018 academic year, an ad hoc committee assessed our advising model and made initial recommendations for revising our model from relying almost totally on faculty advisors to a combination of professional and faculty advising. The committee also made recommendations regarding faculty advisor training.

This year, an Advising Task Force has been formed to review the 2018 recommendations and create an implementation plan to fit within GSW's staffing and financial constraints. This task force is a collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Engagement and Success, and will make recommendations to the Provost/VPAA and VPSES in early 2020. The task force, which is

co-chaired by the Dean of the College of Education and the Director of the Office of First Year Experience, will be informed by student advising surveys from 2017 and 2018, as well as a faculty advising survey from 2017.

During spring 2019, GSW implemented a just-in-time advisor training method. In past years, advisor training was largely conducted during planning week in August, but we have begun to have one-hour sessions at the beginning of term, at midterm, and at the end of term that cover issues specific to those parts of term. While each session contains tips on developing relationships with advisees, the transactional parts of the sessions are devoted to time-specific issues, such as drop/add at the beginning of term, or withdrawing at midterm.

5. Faculty and Staff Development (in progress) – As part of the Comprehensive Administrative Review in 2018-19, the Center for Teaching and Learning and our Office of International Programs were combined to form the Office of Experiential Learning to better support and develop faculty, staff, and students. The Director of Experiential Learning will oversee faculty and staff development as well as our internship program and the Windows to the World program supporting student development. We expect this new position will lead to the University making substantial progress in the development and presentation of new opportunities for faculty and staff development, in addition to fostering student exploration outside of the traditional classroom.

Areas of Focus for 2018-2019

1. Deepening purposeful choices

a. Academic focus areas - During Storm Days in both 2018 and 2019, which take place during GSW'S summer orientation days, students who declared "undecided" on their applications were asked to watch a video on choosing a focus area and were then instructed to complete the Focus 2 career and interest exploration instrument. The goal was to have each student declare a focus area before Storm Day, or to provide better information for use in advising a student about a choice of focus for Storm Day. During both years, we were able to place all first-time full-time students in a focus area prior to the beginning of fall classes.

b. Common first-year courses - Each Storm Track (GSW's degree pathways) has three discipline-related courses designated for the first year, and the Storm Tracks are used to guide GSW's discipline-based block schedules for incoming first-year students. Placing students who are in the same major or focus area in three or more classes together can enable students to build a stronger sense of collaboration and community among each other for the term of their college career. Unfortunately, the increasing number of students coming in with substantial dual enrollment and Advanced Placement credits has made it increasingly more difficult to construct block schedules that are broadly applicable, even within a specific major. During preparation for summer 2020 scheduling and registration of new students, we will discuss strategies to maintain social integration among students within majors, while adjusting to the reality of GSW's changing population of incoming students.

2. Cultivating productive academic mindsets

a. Mindset Survey - We started assigning this survey to our UNIV 1000 students as a check-off activity in fall 2018, which resulted in a significant increase in response rates from that of 2017. We hope to build on our 2018 success in fall 2019 with even higher response rates. The challenge going forward will be identifying ways to effectively use the data obtained from the survey to further develop and improve our student support mechanisms.

b. Faculty and staff training on mindset and belonging - GSW held a "mindset day" during Southwestern Week 2018, our pre-planning week, where faculty and staff were invited to learn simple methods, such as wise feedback and the Expectancy-Value-Cost theory of motivation, that are proven to help students develop productive academic mindsets in students. Faculty and staff also participated in brainstorming sessions to develop and discuss the possibilities of new events and programs for both the campus and the community that would encourage new student engagement and help students develop a stronger sense of belonging. Activities on growth mindset, social belonging, and purpose and value have become established parts of UNIV 1000. The ongoing challenge is to infuse similar strategies throughout the curriculum in each major.

3. Increasing momentum along degree pathways

a. Storm Tracks Curricular program maps - We created initial versions of curriculum program maps two years ago and have been regularly revising them to ensure that our major classes follow a logical sequence within our two-year class schedules. One problem that we are experiencing now is that these maps are typically created within the "silos" of degree programs and do not take other programs' class scheduling patterns into consideration. As a result, students following these Storm Track sheets are unable to find seats in classes they need or have time conflicts with multiple required courses. This is true particularly for Core courses. The Course Scheduling Task Force, established during fall 2019, will discuss strategies for effective cross-discipline planning and scheduling.

b. Critical course and milestone indicators - Over the last year, we have made a concerted effort to include critical milestones in our Storm Tracks, such as Career Services engagement, internships, graduation requirements, and events related to the Windows to the World program. Each degree program has been tasked to examine their Storm Tracks during the 2019-20 academic year with a goal of including more holistic guidance to students on how to prepare for life after graduation. Programs will also be considering how to adapt their Storm Tracks for students who begin taking classes in spring or summer term, as well as considering off ramps for students who need to change majors.

c. Co-curricular programming - While this is still a priority area for our campus, the need of two new senior administrators to provide structure and functional efficiency to their areas of responsibility has resulted in slower growth in this area than we would like. One step that GSW has made towards improved co-curricular programming is to ensure that all task forces and ad hoc committees for the 2019-2020 academic year are well represented by both Academic Affairs and Student Engagement and Success. The design and implementation of a weeklong First-Year Orientation in fall 2019 was a collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Engagement and Success, and it laid the foundation for a future of additional co-curricular programming.

d. Improve social integration - Prior to fall 2019, our UNIV 1000 course contained one class period known as the “organization fair,” where students were able to talk and interact with representatives from a variety of clubs, fraternities / sororities, and other organizations. During the fair, students were required to get signatures from those individuals with whom they talked. We found that students rushed through the fair because they were anxious to get to their next class, and some of the benefits of the activity were lost. In fall 2019, three changes were made to address this concern. First, Student Engagement and Success developed “Welcome Week” activities to promote campus engagement among first-year students. Second, the organization fair became a longer event in the middle of the day during “Welcome Week” and was staged in an area where students could wander in and out at their convenience. Third, the social belonging activities in UNIV 1000 were redesigned to take advantage of Welcome Week and the revamped Organization Fair.

f. Common reading - All sections of our UNIV 1000 course adopted *A Hope in the Unseen* as its common reading in fall 2018 and 2019. This book chronicles the experience of Cedric Jennings, who went from an underperforming inner-city high school in Southeast Washington DC to Brown University, and explores the challenges he faced both in believing that he could succeed academically and in becoming socially integrated with peers from dissimilar socio-economic backgrounds. Class periods were set aside for students to talk about what they were reading, how they could relate to his struggles, and what they were learning about how to adapt. Mr. Jennings came to campus on January 29, 2019 to talk with students and UNIV 1000 faculty members and he returned to GSW on October 9, 2019 to speak to the whole campus community. We are presently discussing whether to use this book for a third year in 2020, or to use a different one. Finding a text that engages student struggles, such as having a growth mindset or becoming socially integrated, will be the goal of these deliberations.

4. Heightening academic achievement

a. Internships and work-based learning - Many campus units have varying forms of internships and other work-based learning opportunities, such as student teaching, clinical experiences in local hospitals and physician offices, and internships with local and regional businesses. Nonetheless, GSW needs to improve the overall level of participation in experiential learning to better prepare our students for careers after graduation. The new Director of Experiential Learning has been charged with standardizing internship documentation, helping to cultivate and develop new internship sites, and promoting participation across the campus in all forms of experiential learning.

b. Undergraduate research - GSW held its first-ever Undergraduate Research Symposium in spring of 2018 and encouraged students to present research findings or prepare posters and other displays. In that first year, there were 17 presentations and 12 posters from a variety of disciplines, as well as three students from our dramatic arts program who displayed sound and set designs. At the second symposium in spring 2019, there were 15 presentations, 21 poster presentations, and one fine arts creative project. The third symposium will be held on May 1, 2020, and the program committee is working across campus to encourage students to engage in research for presentation next spring.

The most encouraging aspect of the symposium is that there has been participation by social science, humanities, and business students in addition to the STEM disciplines. This broad participation has been in both the oral and poster presentations.

5. Completing critical milestones

a. Three major courses in freshman year - Last year, each department was tasked with identifying three courses in their major programs to be used when doing block scheduling for freshmen, with the goal of enrolling each freshman in three courses in their major during their first year. There were some minor issues with registering students for the correct combinations, especially with

larger departments such as Business and Nursing, but the block scheduling helped us get the majority of freshmen in at least one major-related class in their first semester. Since we do not use block scheduling after the first semester, the necessity of getting each student into the remaining courses fell to the advisors. Unfortunately, some advisors did not remember to identify the missing classes for these students, and some students were not registered into those classes. We are trying to address this in the 2019-2020 academic year with periodic advising “booster classes” for faculty, which contain a reminder to look for these courses. We will continue to determine a more effective plan of action for this milestone.

b. 30 credit hours in the first year - Similar to the three-courses-in-the-first-year initiative, our block scheduling for first semester freshmen helped us get them off to a good start towards the “Fifteen to Finish” by giving them at least 15 credit hours to start. Obstacles to meeting the goal of thirty credits during the first year include students who withdrew from courses, dropping them below the 15, and varying levels of confidence by freshmen in attempting 15 or more hours the second semester after experiencing the struggles and distractions of their first semester of college. We are attempting to improve our 30-credit goal by making students more aware of the campus tutoring, labs, and supplemental instruction resources available to them that are designed to help them succeed, thus reducing the need to withdraw. We are also aggressively advising them towards 15 hours in spring registration, we have created a new “Winter term” during the month-long break between Fall and Spring where a student can pick up three credits, and we are stressing May term and Summer term, where they can make up for missing credits.

OTHER INSTITUTIONAL HIGH-IMPACT STRATEGIES, ACTIVITIES, AND OUTCOMES

A. Meetings between FYE and students – In fall 2018, the Office of First-Year Experience (FYE) began having check-in meetings with all first-year students during weeks three through seven of the semester. These individual, face-to-face meetings were intended to see how well the students were transitioning into the university and were informed by each student’s results on the Student Strengths Inventory that measures non-cognitive factors in student success. These discussions focus on the student’s overall experience thus far, how their classes are going, their thoughts about their chosen major, and if they are engaging in activities outside the classroom. The 2019 check-in meetings are just now winding down.

B. FYE workshop series – The FYE began offering a monthly workshop series during the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters targeted to first-year students. Many sessions were held in the freshmen residence halls and included topics on advisement, improving grades, tutoring opportunities, getting to know your professors, campus involvement, and the Americus community. FYE is continuing the workshops in fall 2019 with a recent workshop on Procrastination and Anxiety, with more to follow.

C. Improved interaction with Career Services - Degree programs that have not already done so have been tasked in fall 2019 with identifying one class (among the nine hours of discipline-specific courses required in the first year) where it would be possible to schedule one class period for a talk with the Director of Career Services. In the future, this effort will be expanded to include Career Services engagement in capstone courses where appropriate and feasible.

OBSERVATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As one of the smaller units in the USG, we have found that trying to implement too many initiatives strains our limited human, economic, and physical resources. While GSW does not lack interest in or enthusiasm for student success, adding more and more demands on our limited resources will compromise the success of what we are trying to accomplish. The most fruitful approach for GSW will be to limit the approaches we take to a few promising initiatives and to take advantage of the collegiality between faculty and staff and across units to collaborate effectively on implementing our selected strategies.

What we have found to be most successful over the last two years are the strategies that involve one-on-one contact between students, and faculty and staff. The better we become at helping students build supportive relationships, the greater our likelihood is of helping them progress to graduation. The least effective strategy has been to try to do too many things and thereby put too much pressure on faculty and staff, who are our most important resources in the assurance of student success.

In general, GSW has achieved modest success with the resources that we can afford to allocate, especially when our strategies put those resources to work improving critically important areas such as advising, student support, teaching, and research. Items that will be implemented during the 2019-2020 academic year include those listed below, some of which have already been touched upon in the narrative above. These are the items that we will touch on in the greatest depth when we submit update reports in the future.

A. Extended orientation for freshmen – New student orientation was expanded for fall 2019 from a one-day program to a five-day program. The extended orientation provided students with a better and more in-depth introduction to the University. New student orientation was extended to help ease the academic and social transition of students into the institution and provide students with the opportunity to become familiar with the campus, resources and services, and to meet other first-year students. The extended

orientation sessions included information sessions on Productive Academic Mindset, Time Management, Strengths Discovery, Interpersonal and Sexual Relationships, Career Planning, Budget Planning, Academic Support, and Storm Tracks. These aspects of the transition to college are also significant components of UNIV 1000. Participants in these orientation sessions were surveyed on each individual information session as well as on the week as a whole. These data will be used to refine plans going forward. The first week of school, known as Welcome Week, was also redesigned with intentional emphasis on student engagement for first-year students.

The extended orientation program will continue for fall 2020. In addition, we will be piloting a three-day, two-night camp during summer 2020 for first-year students who have committed to start GSW in the fall 2020 semester. The camp will focus on building connections with students, student leadership, student engagement, and campus traditions.

B. FYE / Career Services majors fair – The FYE and the Office of Career Services are collaborating to host an academic majors fair during the fall 2019 semester. The fair will provide an opportunity for students to explore different academic areas and have conversations with faculty members from different academic units across campus.

C. Identification of three catapult courses in each major - In addition to exploring ways to improve pass rates in the “Gateway” courses discussed earlier, we will be challenging departments across campus this academic year to look at the foundation courses in their programs which can either serve as a springboard into the larger program, or serve as a bottleneck. We will ask our G2C champions across campus to work with faculty to engage the processes utilized with the G2C initiative with these catapult courses (typically ones which serve as prerequisites to other courses and which have higher-than-normal DFWI rates) in an effort to find ways to help students succeed. In addition, we will ask programs to find positive ways of stressing the importance of the identified courses as academic milestones on program Storm Tracks.

D. Increase Career Services interaction with more upper-level courses - This has been initially addressed in item III.C. (Improved Interaction with Career Services) above as we have already started to implement a plan to do this. It is a goal for this academic year to increase the number of classes where initial engagement with Career Services occurs and to encourage programs to include engagement with Career Services as part of their capstone courses.

E. Improve the process of changing majors - The process of changing majors is one that is difficult for students and one that may be made more difficult, either intentionally or unintentionally, by advisors who are aware of the need for program productivity. One way that we can improve the process is to make it possible for students who are reevaluating their choice of major to explore other possibilities using the same Focus2 tool that we use to assist incoming students who have not decided on a major to choose a focus area. We envision that when students approach their advisors about changing majors, they will be referred to Career Services for assistance with exploring potential majors and careers that line up with their passions and interests. Career Services would then refer the student to the appropriate department to discuss possible majors with an advisor. Creating a culture where we explore the students’ passions when determining a major will help to improve student success in progressing to graduation.

F. New recommendations from advising task force - The content and quality of advising across campus varies based on the departmental procedures and the passions of advisors for advising. Admittedly, the current expectations placed on faculty advisors may be too great given the other teaching, service, and scholarship expectations placed on them. This situation may be eased somewhat by the establishment of work profiles for each academic unit that is currently underway and will identify clear expectations in all areas of expectation for faculty. We will also need to be aware of the reluctance of some faculty advisors to turn over even part of their advising responsibilities to professional advisors. These issues and many others will be addressed by the advising task force discussed above.

G. Changes to the Windows to the World program - For the past five years, the Windows to the World (W2W) program has been GSW’s SACSCOC-mandated Quality Enhancement Plan designed to help our rural Georgia students become more aware of the larger global world outside southwest Georgia and to become more adept at intercultural understanding and communication. During summer 2019, the results of the program so far were analyzed, and it was decided to continue the program with a couple of changes. While students will still be required to attend six W2W events during their time at GSW, the requirements for verifying attendance and for completing the requirement have been simplified. The program has also been re-conceptualized to place an emphasis on the intercultural knowledge and communication piece of the program and to broaden the understanding of “intercultural” to include the diversity of US culture as well as global cultures. This will also encompass issues related to equity and inclusion.

H. Hiring of an Academic Success Coach in Nursing - Due to the need to produce a larger number of qualified nursing graduates to help stem the shortage of nurses in rural areas like Southwest Georgia, GSW’s nursing program has begun to accept more candidates for its program, some of whom will be marginally less qualified than those previously accepted. Thus, the role of Academic Success Coach has been created to determine and implement strategies to support the success of the somewhat less-qualified students.

I. Residential Living services and programs – The Office of Residential Living (formerly Residence Life) underwent a restructuring during the 2018-2019 academic year to re-focus their services on promoting student success and retention. In addition to changing the name of the department, the Resident Assistants have changed their name to Residential Leaders. Beginning with the fall 2019 semester, the department is focusing on more intentional engagement with freshmen through weekly programming in the residence halls, a focus on community building with learning communities for the President Jimmy Carter Leadership recipients and the nursing students who are part of the Guaranteed Acceptance Program (GAP), and student leaders serving as peer mentors to the first-year students. Tutoring has also begun in all residence halls on campus. Some of the goals of the Office of Residential Living are to increase grade point averages (GPAs) and retention of residential students, and to expand learning communities by offering a STEM learning community in fall 2020.

J. Increase intercultural and international opportunities – This will include facilitating the study abroad process for faculty (faculty mentor program, streamlined online application process, established deadlines) and for students (more information sessions, streamlined online application process, heightened visibility of financial support, including scholarships and grants). Students will be surveyed about study abroad perceptions, including perceived benefits and costs. Opportunities for study away programs will also be identified among faculty, and the Office of Experiential Learning will help facilitate and promote these programs. These activities are in line with our W2W program mission.

K. Promote internships opportunities – The Office of Experiential Learning will partner with other offices, including Alumni Affairs, Career Services, and the Office of Student Engagement and Success on programming an internship workshop series and internship fair. Successful models and best practices will be applied to encourage students to participate in this important experiential learning opportunity. Informational workshops and sessions will include information about finding, securing, and succeeding in internship roles, and connect students with potential internship sites.

STUDENT SUCCESS AND COMPLETION TEAM

As noted in item IV, we are approaching the 2019-2020 academic year with an expanded team approach, so the depth of our team has increased.

Working primarily on guiding the Momentum Year activities during the 2018-2019 academic year were these people (listed alphabetically by last name):

Laura Boren, Ph.D., *Vice President for Student Engagement and Success*

Bryan Davis, Ph.D., *Associate Vice-President of Academic Affairs*

Suzanne Smith, Ph.D., *Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs*

Joining that team for the 2019-2020 academic year are these people, along with their specific roles and contributions to the initiative (also listed alphabetically by last name):

Rachel Abbott, Ph.D., *Dean of the College of Education and Chair of UNIV 1000 (GSW Experience) Steering Committee*

Mark Grimes, D.B.A., *Associate Professor of HR and Management and Chair of Momentum Approach and Complete College Georgia Steering Committees*

Judy Orton Grissett, Ph.D., *Associate Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning*

Chadwick Gugg, Ph.D., *Associate Professor of Mathematics and Chair of Gateway to Completion Steering Committee*

David Jenkins, Ed. D., *Director of First-Year Experience*

Brittany Mellinger, MSN, RN, *Nursing Transitional Program Success Coordinator and Academic Success Coach*