

Addendum A: COVID-19 Context

A. Describe the impact of COVID-19 on the school to-date.

As part of a statewide response, the University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents stopped in-person instruction at all campuses across the state on March 16, 2020 and commenced remote student instruction for the remainder of AY2019-2020 including summer 2020. Georgia College (G)C refunded approximately \$5.9 million in housing, dining, and other fee payments to its students in Spring 2020 as part of a system-wide prorated repayment related to the cessation of in-person program delivery. As of June 30, 2020, we received approximately \$4 million in financial relief from the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (“CARES Act”) which has been allocated equally between direct student aid and expense reimbursement. In addition, the Board of Regents approved the internal transfer of educational and general funds to supplement auxiliary shortfalls across GC.

For fiscal year 2021, GC has identified and budgeted approximately \$4 million in expense reductions as required of all State agencies. GC received a second round of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding totaling \$6.1 million for FY 2021, of which \$2.6 million has been awarded to students in need and the remainder allocated to offset revenue declines for the fiscal year. Additionally, GC developed a plan for operations for the current academic year as part of a comprehensive system-wide planning initiative, which includes both in-person and remote instruction contingencies. We also recognized a 2% reduction in enrollment for FY 2021, totaling a decline of approximately \$1.2 million in tuition revenue for the academic year.

With so much uncertainty around COVID-19, the USG coupled robust planning with extreme flexibility in managing for the current 2020-2021 academic year. Institutions in the University System developed comprehensive plans to begin the fall 2020 semester on their campuses. The health and safety of the students, faculty, and staff was its top priority. With that priority in mind, the University System worked in tandem with the Georgia Governor’s office, the Governor’s COVID-19 Task Force, and the Georgia Department of Public Health to make public health-informed decisions.

A temporary hiring freeze went into effect. In order to receive permission to start a search for faculty, a critical hire justification form had to be completed. With these constraints in place, the CoB started and successfully completed searches for Chairs of Accounting and the Department of Management, Marketing, and Logistics, along with a lecturer position in Economics and an ongoing search for a lecturer in Business Communications. The critical hire process remains in place and will continue to inform prioritization as we submit requests to fill tenure-track positions and the Associate Dean leadership position.

The AOL cycle was completed as usual, but in some cases, assessments were not carried out in spring semester nor in AY20-21. For example, the ETS test was not given in Spring 2020, but has since returned in an online format.

B. Describe actions taken by the school to address current challenges related to COVID-19.

When the university pivoted to online learning in March of 2020, it was the Friday before spring break. Faculty were afforded time during the break and the subsequent week to pivot their classes to move completely online for the rest of the semester. As most classes in the CoB are online during the summer anyway, only a few Maymester classes were converted to online only before the May 11, 2020 start date.

Faculty and staff were sent home to work remotely the last half of spring semester. Staff/administrators were phased in to return to campus through the summer. With the December/ January surge, the CoB used a reduced density approach and limited the number of staff/administrators in the building from December 2020 to May 2021.

The faculty at GC were one of eight USG institutions to be the first to use the new USG electronic faculty contract distribution system (already scheduled for roll-out). This worked well during COVID, although kinks in the system delayed 21-22 contracts by about a month.

In the University's pivot to online learning, the drop date for spring 2020 was extended. A campus statement read: *"Recognizing the unique situation we are facing with COVID-19 and the abrupt shift to fully online classes, and after consulting with the University Senate, we have decided to extend the last day to drop with a W grade through Friday, April 24. Students will be notified of this option on Monday morning and will be able to drop through their PAWS account. Though not required, students will be strongly encouraged not to drop until they have spoken with their instructor and advisor. The Registrar will also inform instructors and advisors of any drops the following day. Georgia College joins other USG institutions who have also taken this step during these unprecedented times."*

The University bookstore published information from textbook publishers who arranged for free electronic books and for the remainder of spring semester. GC provided boxes for all students moving out of the dorms and provided prorated refunds for room and board for students in Spring 2020. All study abroad courses were canceled for the summer semester and full refunds were provided to students even though GC had paid non-refundable deposits on behalf of the participating students.

The University developed and maintained the following sites to assist with the conversion to online classes and the many questions that faculty/staff, students, and parents had.

- **GC Keeps Learning:** To help students adapt to the changing learning environment, Georgia College has developed a website of resources, tips, virtual tools, and access to help. Included in this site are tutorials for GeorgiaVIEW, area access to Wi-Fi, academic support tools, and tips for online learning (<https://www.gcsu.edu/gckeepslearning>).
- **GC's Campus Reopening Website:** The Campus Reopening website (<https://www.gcsu.edu/return/reopening-faqs>) will provide the latest information about our response to COVID-19. Check here for messages from President Dorman, as well as changes to the academic calendar, information about orientation, dining and residential life, important phone numbers, and the latest message sent to students, faculty, and staff. (<https://www.gcsu.edu/return>).

Students, who fell into the CDC categories for being at higher risk for severe illness due to COVID-19, were given access to a process to request Alternative Educational Arrangements. This process allowed students to apply for additional mitigation resources or receive online classes to continue their programs while protecting their health.

Students completed the application for Alternative Educational Arrangements, housed on the Disability Resource Center's website, where it was first reviewed by the Director of Student Health Services and then sent forward to the COVID-19 Response Team. The COVID-19 Response Team was made up of all the Associate/Assistant Deans from each college, Director of Student Health Services, Director of the Disability Resource Center, Interim Associate Provost for Academic Affairs, Vice President of Student Affairs, and other student affairs staff members. Based on the response team's recommendation, the Associate/Assistant dean from the college would check the students' schedules and worked with impacted faculty to approve or adjust each student's schedule to provide a safer learning environment.

Classrooms were socially distanced for fall face-to-face classes. The Registrar's office worked hard rescheduling classes into rooms that would fit the full class size. When a class could not fit, it was either moved to a different day/time or staggered. Staggered classes met ½ the class one day while the other ½ was simultaneously online (1/3 each for MWF classes). All classes requiring special equipment (i.e., Atkinson computer lab classrooms) were set up with staggered classes.

The Facilities Department worked diligently in Summer 2020 installing automatic hand sanitizers on every floor in every building, adding plexiglass to offices where social distance was not possible, adding plexiglass to teacher stations in all classrooms, socially distancing all classrooms, converting non-classroom space (i.e., Magnolia Ballroom, Centennial Center side courts) to large classrooms, adding signs to limit elevators to one-person, mark 6' distancing in various areas of campus (i.e., lobbies, Chick-fil-A, cafeteria). The Information Technology Department added technology to every classroom so that classes could be broadcast to those simultaneously online or recorded for later use.

Our engagement with external stakeholders also shifted to a virtual setting after July 1, 2020. While we halted all engagement activities between March and June 2020, the new Dean engaged the CoB Board in multiple virtual sessions both for introduction purposes and to move to advance the work of the Board and CoB. This was also the case with alumni engagement events such as "Thirsty Thursdays" and other outreach that required us to shift online. Additionally, we held numerous listening sessions with various groups and the CoB hosted various virtual workshops, student leadership meetings, and even our annual scholarship and awards banquet in Spring 2021 (hybrid) after it was cancelled in Spring 2020. Lastly, and as referenced in greater detail in the CIR Report (Section B5) and in an AACSB Insights article¹, we collaborated with the local Chamber of Commerce to develop a number of recorded and live training sessions/workshops designed and delivered for the faculty to support local businesses on a variety of emergent topics to help them cope with the pandemic-related effects on commerce and labor.

C. Explain how the school is supporting students and faculty.

GC offered many training sessions through its Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). CTL has a special section of its website devoted to Resources for Going Online². This site includes all types of information and resource links, even a link to an Advice Column on "How to Make Your Online Pivot Less Brutal". As referenced in the CIR Report (Section B4), we also introduced a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) and moved our COBRA faculty research meeting to virtual format. This helped us sustain faculty development with virtual space and resources even during the pandemic.

For the fall semester, a common syllabus statement was prepared by the Provost's Office to be used on all syllabi during the 20-21 AY. CTL worked hard over the summer to assist faculty who needed to take all their courses online for the 20-21 AY.

The USG created an approval system for high-risk individuals to submit paperwork to their institution's HR department. Once approval was granted, these faculty were allowed to teach all their classes online fall semester. Additional paperwork was submitted in November/December for approval for spring semester. Approximately 35% of CoB faculty were approved to teach synchronously online through this process.

Additionally, the CoB faculty continued a commitment to high impact practices and engaged learning with the business community during AY20-21. For instance, over 90% of all embedded course activities that involved practitioners (e.g., guest speakers, consulting projects, community-based learning, panels, etc.) were done virtually – even when the courses were taught f2f. 121 organizations including Bojangles, McKesson, TTi, Habitat for Humanity, Georgia Power, and Frazier Deeter, to name a few, engaged our students remotely in highly interactive virtual sessions. We also continued exposing our students to global interactions with practitioners and partners through a Border-Free initiative whereby students and faculty leverage online platforms to extend international learning across the globe. For example, undergraduate and graduate students in MIS partnered with students at West Georgia University and the University of Muenster (Germany) using Zoom and Oculus Quest in Spatial on a design-thinking training and exercise for a case problem on improving customer satisfaction and retention designed by Provinzial, a German insurance company. The students met virtually to construct a problem solution and present the recommendations to their faculty and

¹ <https://www.aacsb.edu/insights/2021/january/bringing-balance-to-the-local-community>

² <https://www.gcsu.edu/ctl/resources-going-online>

representatives from Provinzial. Their experience is showcased in a student-authored blog³, a tool for the teams used to reflect as they went through each step.

The Dean's Student Advisory Board (DSAB) for the Bunting College of Business conducted a survey of fellow students to better understand their experiences (**Addendum M2**). Questions in the survey related to engagement with faculty, high impact practices, learning aids, enrollment, the impacts of COVID and virtual learning and intentions for graduate school. The survey results highlight a lack of engagement from the students and faculty over the past year, but a desire for students to become more engaged and interact with their professors, peers and high impact practices. Students were frustrated with online learning and felt it negatively impacted their academic experience with some indicating that they had to teach themselves the material and the that their connections to their peers and the university diminished. Students would like to see more personal and in person events and activities from the Bunting College of Business. Additionally, students indicated they were interested in graduate programs, but not necessarily at Georgia College.

D. Describe whether COVID-19 has impacted the school's ability to align with accreditation standards.

In summary, the primary distraction and impact was felt in the area of faculty resources and scholarly activity (Standard 3). Faculty who taught online or HyFlex in AY2020-2021 had to spend most or all summer preparing their classes to accommodate these changes. This affected time devoted to scholarship as typically the summer is the most productive time for many faculty members. Research productivity was lower not only because of all the extra issues COVID caused for personnel, but also because conferences were cancelled or greatly scaled back in the virtual venue. This made it difficult for faculty to get feedback on initial presentations of research. Because conferences were cancelled, some journals that are attached to conferences are running behind on publishing as well. That said, the faculty persisted and remained resilient in finding pockets of time to continue their respective research agendas. Those who were a bit further behind on meeting their SA status prior to the pandemic were undoubtedly put even further behind, but Chairs and colleagues did whatever was possible to support them (e.g., coaching them away from heavy service responsibilities, considerations for course preps, etc.). In a few cases, and understandably so, the pandemic presented personal and medical emergencies that demanded their attention. In the Accounting Department, for instance, pandemic-related staffing shortages stretched faculty with course overloads and contributed to reduced scholarly productivity (i.e., falling just short of the 90% expectation for SA+PA+SP+IP qualifications).

³ <https://www.dt-seminar.net/content/timeline/journey-of-the-entire-team/reflection-of-the-whole-module-from-a-german-perspective/>