

# Student Life

## Strategic Planning Committee Report

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### Committee Membership

Dr. Tom Miles, Chair, Department of Campus Life

Carlos Herrera, Department of Art

Jimmy Wilson, Athletics Department

Hance Patrick, Informational Technology

Maria Gordon, Department of Campus Life

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### **Introduction**

As institutions of higher education and their professional associations scan the environment surrounding higher education, they are finding demographic shifts, political changes, and social activism occurring. While there are many causes for these changes, technology is playing a significant role (Trends in Higher Education, 2015). With this knowledge in hand, the Student Life Committee (formerly known as Campus Life Committee) decided to gauge our current student life environment at Georgia College and to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The idea was to use this information to focus on two or three large goals that would contribute to Georgia College becoming a preeminent liberal arts university.

### Current Student Life Data

At a preeminent, residential liberal arts university, a high level of student engagement would be expected as noted below:

- 2104 students living in campus housing units
- 200 student-athletes and 11 teams
- Student-athletes average 15 hours per year of community service
- 200+ student organizations
- Over 2100 students participating in volunteer/service efforts (community engagement)
- Added 2 NCAA sports to engage more women
- Over 800 intramural sports teams per year involving 2500+ participants
- 21 club sports teams (teams that compete with other universities)
- Over 1850 student and community participants in Outdoor Education programs(over 700 student participants)
- 1832 students involved in 25 fraternities and sororities
- 70+ co-curricular cultural programs/activities presented per year

However, Georgia College has experienced difficulties getting students engaged in athletic events; visiting university museums; attending theatre productions, musical performances, and social justice programs; and other programs that are highly aligned with a liberal arts mission. After a lengthy discussion on student engagement, the committee decided to do a SWOT analysis to add another layer to this discussion.

Below are the outcomes of our SWOT analysis:

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity and number of programs</li> <li>• Willingness to work together</li> <li>• Active and engaged student body</li> <li>• Number of student organization and the passion associated with membership</li> <li>• Dedicated faculty/staff</li> <li>• High level of student services</li> <li>• Community service</li> <li>• Strong external programs (e.g., externships, study abroad)</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of responsibility given to student leaders</li> <li>• Lack of resources (money and space)</li> <li>• Willingness of some to work together</li> <li>• Communication on campus</li> <li>• Lack of money put into advertising events</li> <li>• Website</li> <li>• Student organization leadership development</li> <li>• No hook to get students to participate in co-curricular activities that are part of the liberal arts experience/learning</li> <li>• Maintaining student interest outside of the classroom and within the community</li> <li>• Diversity of student population</li> <li>• Marketing of events (not centralized)</li> <li>• Improvement of First-Year Programs</li> <li>• Transfer students not getting enough support</li> <li>• Students lack a deep attachment to the university (no deep relationship)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More cross collaboration (campus-wide efforts)</li> <li>• Open events</li> <li>• Bigger events</li> <li>• Combine events (multiple programs in one space)</li> <li>• Higher utilization of campus resources (Bobcat Vision, Frontpage, SGA)</li> <li>• Combined/centralized marketing of events</li> <li>• More/improved mentoring programs</li> <li>• Campus traditions can be improved by spreading out over the academic year</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of student interest</li> <li>• Online programs</li> <li>• Lack of funding/resources</li> <li>• Seeing our programs in silos – pushing forward without collaboration or consideration for others</li> <li>• Too much occurring at once/overwhelming amount of activity</li> <li>• Events with incentives (big RSO's)</li> <li>• Lack of communication</li> <li>• Various groups competing for the same students and resources</li> <li>• Campus culture is not always receptive to change</li> </ul>

The conclusions drawn from the SWOT analysis resulted in two priority goals as listed below. We set our goals by asking three important questions: Why do we want to have a preeminent student life experience, what do we need to do to maintain or develop a preeminent student life experience, and how will we know that the goal was accomplished?

The committee agreed that a preeminent university should excel at student engagement and ensure that students share in common experiences. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE Studies) shows that student success is directly linked to student involvement. NSSE measures student involvement in academic and co-curricular programs and activities, and the effect they have on students. NSSE and many other sources supports the following ideas utilized in the work of this committee:

- Engaged students are more successful academically, progress, and graduate more often
- Engaged students promote and recommend their university to others
- Engaged students are instrumental in creating the campus culture
- Engaged students feel like they are part of something important and hold a deeper sense of belonging to the institution
- Engaged students foster loyalty and pride in their institution, as well as academic achievement, and community involvement
- Engaged students are more likely to develop the skills, understandings, and attitudes essential to civic participation—and to exercise them

Utilizing data on current levels of engagement, the SWOT analysis, and supporting research, the committee proposed the following goals and objectives on becoming a preeminent liberal arts university.

## **Goals and Objectives**

### Why Do We Want to Have a Preeminent Student Life Experience?

Georgia College, in support of student success, seeks to create an engaged campus community and to enrich its students through common co-curricular experiences.

### What Do We Need to Do to Maintain or Develop a Preeminent Student Life Experience?

#### **Goal I. Institute a co-curricular experience that aligns with the liberal arts mission of Georgia College**

##### How Will We Know That the Goal Was Accomplished?

###### Measurable Objectives

1. Define the areas of exploration that would be the focus of the co-curricular experience
2. Create learning outcomes associated with co-curricular experience and how to effectively measure and assess learning outcomes
3. Develop an action plan for students, faculty, staff and alumni
4. Determine a tracking system for the co-curricular experience
5. Create an evaluation system to determine success or failure of co-curricular experiences

## **Goal II. Develop a deeper sense of pride in Georgia College among students, faculty, staff and alumni**

### How Will We Know That the Goal Was Accomplished?

#### Measurable Objectives

1. Establish what defines pride and tradition at Georgia College
2. Develop a committee that identifies current traditions and recognizes future ones (Traditions Council)
3. Implement activities that align with campus symbols through collaboration with campus partners
4. Assess and measure the level of engagement of students, faculty, staff and alumni in co-curricular activities and traditions

As chair of the Student Life Strategic Planning Committee, I agreed to include a goal of the President's Leadership Task Force. The work of this task force is highly applicable to the work of Student Life Strategic Planning Committee. It is easily aligned with our overarching goal of "Georgia College, in support of student success, seeks to create an engaged campus community and to enrich its students through common co-curricular experiences." In addition, it could be incorporated into Goal 1 above or maintained as a separate goal. I chose to keep this goal separate since the Student Life Strategic Planning Committee had concluded its work and had not discussed its inclusion.

#### **Leadership Task Force – Strategic Planning Goal**

GC students who experience *Transformational Leadership* are characterized by attributes such as: intentional personal development, self-awareness, purposeful reflection, emotional intelligence, integrity, humility, a focus on team and organizational goals instead of personal interests, self-motivation, the ability to articulate and pursue life-long goals, and a proactive attitude that takes responsibility for and ownership of life outcomes.

**Goal III.** By the year 2020 at least 25% of all undergraduates will be participating in a purposeful leadership development experience.

1. We will examine ways to enhance the capacity of and participation in existing leadership development experiences.
2. We will increase opportunities and incentives for GC undergraduate students to engage in purposeful leadership development experiences.
3. We will incorporate new leadership development experiences into student life using donor funds and redirection of existing resources.
4. Upon identifying a sustainable funding stream, we will administer a self-assessment during each student's second year at GC to gauge traits such as leadership interests and emotional intelligence.