Narrowing the Gap: UGA takes steps to improve retention and graduation rates

Degree completion has been a long-standing priority for the University of Georgia, but now the bar on the number of students earning a college degree is being raised. UGA released its Complete College Georgia (CCG) plan last fall as part of a statewide project coordinated by the University System of Georgia to improve student access to college and increase retention and graduation rates among the system’s institutions over the next eight years.

UGA’s goals include increasing graduation rates to the mean of aspirational peer institutions; increasing scholarship funding for student financial support; and supporting college readiness. UGA is in a strong position to meet its goals, having been engaged for the last decade in several initiatives focused on student success, increasing access to college and improving retention and graduation rates.

Established programs that are part of UGA’s CCG plan include the First-Year Odyssey Seminar Program, undergraduate STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) initiatives, and numerous K-12 partnerships. These programs engage and prepare students for college, as well as provide them with the tools needed to be successful once they step onto campus. The university also created a Retention, Progression and Graduation (RPG) Partnership, comprised of senior administrators, faculty and staff appointed by the president and the provost, which serves as a campus-wide coordination and communication system making recommendations regarding current or potential programs and services that may increase UGA’s graduate and retention rates.

Due to the impact of these programs, UGA’s retention rate for first-year students has been at least 93% for the past ten years; it is currently 94%. The six-year retention and graduation rates are the highest of among system institutions in Georgia and among the highest of UGA’s comparator peer institutions. A major goal of the UGA CCG plan outlines steps to narrow the gap between the

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The Office of Online Learning is working with University of Georgia faculty to plan and implement a new, more consistent online format for high-demand undergraduate courses. Instructional designers in the Office of Online Learning, as well as instructional designers based in UGA’s schools and colleges, are partnering with the Center for Teaching and Learning to assist 36 faculty during the spring semester to have 34 new online courses available in the summer.

Online courses across numerous disciplines have been offered to UGA students for the last decade through OASIS, the Online Access to Student Information Systems. These courses, which include number of graduate courses, have been developed independently by faculty members to provide an alternative format outside of the traditional classroom setting. Until now, there has not been a single source of support for faculty who wish to provide an online course.

Recognizing changing technology trends and the way in which today’s students learn, the university has made increasing student access to courses through online education a top priority, as outlined in the UGA 2020 Strategic Plan and in UGA’s 2012 Complete College Georgia Plan in partnership with the University System of Georgia Board of Regents. With the establishment of the Office of Online Learning in July 2012, the university has taken giant steps in providing a comprehensive resource for support and assistance for faculty who want to offer courses online for students.

The high-demand undergraduate courses will include a variety of subject areas, including English; Romance languages; mathematics; biology, geography, poultry science; education; and several courses in business and family and consumer sciences.

“Our goal is to provide access to students who want to continue their education while they are away from campus on an internship, traveling with a study abroad course, or on summer break. In addition to providing an alternative to courses in heavy student demand that fill up quickly, or for students who need to work an additional class into their schedules, online access also may allow us to reach new student populations,” said said Kris Biesinger, interim director of the Office of Online Learning.

Training for faculty began on Dec. 5 with an orientation workshop outlined expectations and goals of online learning. The training staff emphasized the importance of consistency of organizational structure within the online classes to allow a more seamless learning experience.

Faculty also are trained to adhere to accessibility guidelines, making sure to give the classes a similar online style and provide text for any video or audio used.

Faculty will be able to utilize video and audio options provided within the eLearningCommons, and other tools like Wimba and podcasts, to create an interactive format to aid faculty-student communication throughout the course.

Faculty will still have office hours. Faculty and students may choose to set up Skype or online chat sessions, while others may opt for telephone or face-to-face meetings for local students.

The 36 participating faculty—who include teaching award recipients—have online teaching experience from one semester to 11 years. They participated in the inaugural formal training for a number of reasons including wanting to learn new teaching methods and wanting to be
more responsive to student issues.

The Office of Online Learning will continue to work with faculty over the spring semester to provide workshops, consultations and training support, as well as to guide faculty through the development and teaching process using instructional design. This semester the focus is on high-demand undergraduate classes. Beginning this summer, training will become available to any faculty member interested in developing an online course—undergraduate or graduate.

More information about the Office of Online Learning may be found at http://ugaonline.uga.edu/.

Narrowing the Gap cont’d

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six-year completion rate (83.3%) and the five-year (79.4%) and four-year (57.7%) rates, respectively. UGA’s retention and graduation rates also are ranked high among aspirational peer institutions, including Cornell University, UC-Berkley, Penn State and UNC.

Under the direction of the Office of the Vice President for Instruction, several new initiatives were launched in 2012 that support UGA’s CCG goals, including the ConnectUGA Project, which will bring student information into one system and enhance data analytics and reporting to inform our CCG goals; DegreeWorks, a web-based tool to help students and advisors monitor progress toward degree completion; the Gateway to Scholarship Program, meet the increasing need of students who are academically qualified but have financial circumstances that might otherwise prevent them from pursuing a UGA degree; and a new Office of Online Learning, to help faculty develop online courses and improve student access.

Details about each of these initiatives are provided in the following pages. The ultimate goal of CCG and the University of Georgia is to ensure that more students are given the tools to make a degree possible by providing the necessary financial and academic resources. To view UGA’s CCG plan, go to https://www.usg.edu/usgweb/complete_college/.
The University of Georgia is making dramatic changes to the institution’s database infrastructure by implementing a new, integrated student information system over the next two years. The new system will replace the current multiple, 30-year-old database systems that students, faculty and staff use to access student information. ConnectUGA, the project name given to implement the Banner software for the new student information system, kicked off prior to the start of fall semester with training for staff charged with integrating the new system throughout several divisions across campus.

The Banner software, a product of Ellucian (formerly Datatel + SGHE), will bring student information under one inclusive system and will improve the way UGA conducts business with students with processes that fall under admissions, financial aid, registration, student accounts, advising, curriculum planning and grade reporting. Staff from within each of these units, including technical staff from EITS, are working closely with the Ellucian technical team to begin the rollout of the system in fall 2013, first with prospective students applying for fall 2014 undergraduate admission, then with the other phases rolling out over the following months through 2014. Completion of the ConnectUGA project and full implementation of the new student information system will be secured by 2015.

The integration of multiple systems will provide a single, authoritative source for information reporting; improve institutional planning and decision-making capabilities; and improve and expand services for students while at the same time providing a greater level of flexibility and ability to adapt quickly to future needs.

The most visible change will come with the replacement of the Online Access to Student Information System (OASIS). The new user friendly system will feature a web-based log-in using a UGA MyID in which students will be able to easily access their academic and financial aid records, access the course bulletin, register for classes and plan their college courses in one inclusive dashboard.

“UGA’s new student information system will bring together people, processes and technology into one integrated framework,” said Laura Jolly, vice president for instruction. “In addition to providing improved service for our students, it will also improve the process for data collection, which aids in our institutional reporting, planning, goal setting and decision-making.”

Jolly serves on the ConnectUGA project leadership team, along with Holley Schramski, associate vice president and controller in Finance and Administration; Chris Miller, associate provost for academic fiscal affairs; and Timothy Chester, chief project officer and vice president for information technology.

“Timely and accurate data has never been more important to us here at the University of Georgia,” said Chester. “When you look at the challenges we face, responding to them requires that all of our decision-makers have the most relevant, the most timely, and the most authoritative data available to them to inform their decision-making. The ConnectUGA project, at its core, is really about building better capacity for authoritative data. More importantly, it is about a system that will better serve our students, faculty and staff.”

For more information on the ConnectUGA project and the implementation of the new student information system, go to http://connectuga.uga.edu.
DegreeWorks helps students monitor progress toward graduation

DegreeWorks, a web-based tool to help students and advisors monitor a student’s progress toward degree completion, is fully implemented in all 14 schools and colleges that provide courses in undergraduate programs.

DegreeWorks, which replaces the Degree Audit Reporting System (DARS), combines the UGA degree requirements and the coursework completed into an easy-to-read worksheet that helps see how courses completed count toward degree requirements.

“The worksheet acts much like a check list so that when requirements are completed, they are checked off the list,” said Jan Hathcote, university registrar. “It helps the advisor and the student see what courses and requirements still need to be completed. It’s a satisfying experience since the list shortens as the student fulfills requirements and creates a sense of accomplishment.”

Hathcote adds that the system is designed to aid and facilitate academic advising, but is not intended to replace face-to-face advising sessions.

DegreeWorks first became available to students in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences in 2010, and since then each school and college has been phased out of DARS and into the DegreeWorks program. Users in Franklin College of Arts and Sciences, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Odum School of Ecology, Terry College of Business, College of Environment and Design, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, School of Social Work and Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources will not be able to use DARS as of Tuesday, August 28, 2012.

The remaining six schools and colleges that recently implemented DegreeWorks—College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, College of Engineering, College of Education, College of Public Health, School of Public and International Affairs and College of Pharmacy—will continue to have access to DARS until January 2013. The next phase of DegreeWorks will include implementation of two additional features within the system, including the Academic Planner and the Athlete Certification Audits, as well as a customized Generic Average Calculator.

“This is the best-fit model,” said Hathcote. “DARS is a static program written in the 1970s, which required advisors to physically make adjustments in the system and move courses; DegreeWorks is more robust and makes automatic adjustments. Because it’s web-based, it’s also easier to read and has more information available for the students.”

UGA is in the process of implementing a new student information system (the ConnectUGA Project) based on Banner software licensed by Ellucian, of which DegreeWorks is a component. UGA is one of the few institutions to implement DegreeWorks as a standalone system prior to a Banner implementation.

More information about DegreeWorks may be found at http://reg.uga.edu/degreeworks.
Cerverero named associate vice president for instruction

Ronald Cervero, a veteran administrator in the College of Education at the University of Georgia, has been named associate vice president for instruction. The appointment is effective March 1.

Cervero has served as associate dean for outreach and engagement in the College of Education since 2009 and has been a faculty member of the college for the last 27 years.

“Dr. Cervero has a proven record of academic leadership and administration,” said Laura Jolly, vice president for instruction, in announcing the appointment. “He is passionate about the instructional mission and brings a wealth of knowledge and university experience to the position. I am confident that Dr. Cervero will provide outstanding leadership for the Office of the Vice President for Instruction.”

“Having worked closely with Dr. Ronald Cervero for many years, I am pleased to welcome him to his new role as associate vice president,” Jolly said. “It is an honor to work alongside him as we continue to advance the instructional mission of the University of Georgia.”

Since Cervero came to UGA in 1986 as an associate professor of adult education, he has acquired a broad knowledge of UGA and instructional excellence, and has established working relationships with several of the offices and programs reporting to the vice president for instruction through his administrative functions. Cervero served as the department head of adult education and of lifelong education, administration and policy, as well as associate dean and co-director of UGA’s Institute for Evidence-Based Health Professions Education.

As associate vice president for instruction, Cervero will work with key units and programs within OVPI, providing leadership to improve the levels of support for students. The associate vice president reports directly to the vice president for instruction.

New director for the Center for Teaching and Learning

Following a national search, C. Edward (Eddie) Watson was named director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). Watson began his new position on Sept. 17, following Nelson Hilton, who stepped down after six years of outstanding accomplishments to return to teaching and research.

Since his arrival, Watson has been looking at ways to improve support provided by the CTL to faculty. These include addressing ongoing challenges in today’s classroom regarding effective teaching practices, teaching with technology, teaching large classes and online learning; developing easier access to the CTL staff for instructional guidance, collaboration and consulting; and developing and implementing strategies to increase the understanding of the CTL’s mission, purpose, and programming on campus and adoption of its services.

“I see the Center for Teaching and Learning at UGA as the key institutional mechanism for fostering a culture of teaching excellence and innovation in the service of student learning. Building upon what research tells us about teaching and learning; effective CTL practices; and institutional change, a central goal for the CTL will be to elevate and extend discourse regarding effective pedagogy,” said Watson.

Watson has been in teaching and administrative at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) since 1997, most recently serving as the associate director of the Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research (CIDER).

In this role, Watson focused on the university’s teaching and learning mission, providing consultations and formative mid-semester evaluations, collaborating with faculty engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), and creating university publications that highlighted exemplary teaching practices.

Watson is a four-time alumnus of Virginia Teach, earning a bachelor degree in statistics, bachelor’s and master’s degrees in English, and a doctorate in curriculum
and instruction. He was elected to the Association for Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning (AAEEBL) Board of Directors in 2011. He has presented at numerous conferences and published a multitude of articles, papers and book chapters—and a book—on faculty development and educational technology.

The CTL serves faculty, administrators and graduate teaching assistants (TAs) in each of the university’s schools and colleges by coordinating a wide variety of programs and activities aimed at supporting and promoting excellence in teaching and learning. More information about the Center for Teaching and Learning may be found at http://ctl.uga.edu.

Gateway to Georgia Scholarship Program: Addressing needs of students

The University of Georgia launched the Gateway to Georgia Scholarship Program last fall in an effort designed to meet the increasing need of students who are academically qualified but have financial circumstances that might otherwise prevent them from pursuing a UGA degree. The scholarship program will help improve access to college and increase retention and graduation rates at Georgia’s first land-grant university, which coincides with the goals of UGA’s Complete College Georgia Plan released earlier this fall.

According to data from the Office of Student Financial Aid, the number of federal aid applications received at UGA has increased 37 percent since the beginning of the recession in 2008. More than 33,000 applications were filed for the 2011-12 academic year, the most recent time period for which full-year data is available. Only about 12-15 percent of incoming freshmen receive academic scholarships in addition to the HOPE scholarship.

In addition, approximately 45 percent of UGA students graduate with $16,000 in student loan debt. The number of loans obtained by students to pay for UGA courses has grown more than 58 percent since 2008. Pell Grant recipients grew by 100 percent since 2008 to more than 7,000 undergraduate students in the 2011-12 academic year. “This is an extraordinary program that benefits all students at the University of Georgia,” said Laura Jolly, UGA’s vice president for instruction. “It is the first comprehensive scholarship program at UGA from which qualified students enrolled in any school or college at UGA can benefit, no matter their major or area of discipline.”

Three programs make up the Gateway to Georgia Scholarship Program. Donors may designate their scholarship gift of any amount to support merit (Georgia Opportunity), need (Georgia Access) or general scholarships (Georgia Gateway).

Marty and Janet Quirk of Atlanta, chairs of the UGA Parents Leadership Council, endowed a Georgia Access needs-based scholarship in honor of Marty’s sister Janet Case, a firm believer in higher education. “Our children have benefited from a University of Georgia education, and we wanted to provide students who have worked so hard to attend UGA the opportunity to reach their full potential,” said the Quirks.

For more information or to make a donation to the Gateway to Georgia Scholarship Program, go to https://www.externalaffairs.uga.edu/index.php/gateway, or contact Lauren Griffeth at lauren1@uga.edu or (706) 542-8137.
Improving Access

The University of Georgia launched the Gateway to Georgia Scholarship Program last fall to help improve access to college and increase retention and graduation rates at Georgia’s first land-grant university. The scholarship program is part of UGA’s Complete College Georgia Plan released earlier this fall.