

The Georgia Gwinnett College Mentoring and Advising Center

Institutional Description

Georgia Gwinnett College is a four-year public, liberal arts college that offers 15 majors, 14 concentrations and 11 minors. The College opened in 2006 with just over 100 students and currently has a student body of over 12,000 students. US News & World Report has ranked GGC as the most ethnically diverse college in the Southern region for three consecutive years. Most of the students are commuters and nearly half work over 21 hours per week. Almost 35% of the population are first generation college students and over 80% require need-based financial aid. Approximately 25% of the students are required to enroll in developmental support courses. As an institution with an access mission, GGC is committed to providing students with the necessary tools and resources to support their academic, professional, and personal success.

Program Development

Prior to the fall of 2013, GGC had a decentralized advising structure in which mentoring and advising were performed primarily by faculty. As a school with an access mission, the administration understood that many of the students, while motivated and full of potential, have many challenges that could hinder their academic achievement. Many of the students do not have the skills needed to navigate the college landscape. They understood these students required additional support to overcome their challenges. This concern, combined with the rapidly growing enrollment, necessitated a new model for serving students. A task force comprised of faculty and staff from across the campus developed a proposal for the establishment of the Mentoring and Advising Center. (MAC) The MAC would be tasked with providing the additional support to at-risk students. In addition to traditional advising, the MAC staff would

be responsible for helping students develop skills related to goal setting, effective communication, note-taking test-taking, studying, and time management. Additionally, they would help students understand college policies, connect them to campus resources, and teach them how to monitor their academic progress.

A major concern about the MAC proposal was funding for the Center; however, the College was able to secure a major gift from a donor that provided seed money to start the Center, including initial personnel, technology, and operating costs. After the first year, the College absorbed operating and personnel costs into the campus budget. While the initial proposal was to hire a director, associate director, an administrative assistant and 5 advisors, initial funding would only support a director, associate director, administrative assistant and 4 academic advisors. (Academic Advisors were renamed Student Success Advisors to reflect the mission of the Center and to differentiate their role from the role of other academic advisors on campus.) As all of the advisors were not funded, the advising caseload became another concern.

With a student population that includes many underrepresented groups, many of the GGC students require additional support to succeed in college. The number of students on each advisors' caseload had to be manageable and provide for the opportunity to offer effective support. Through reviewing institutional data, it was decided that the advisors would work with students enrolled in Student Success (developmental) courses. These students are assigned to the advisors and transition to faculty mentors after they complete all student success requirements, declare a major, and earn at least 15 college credit hours. Since the opening of the Center, four additional advisors have been hired, which has allowed the Center to keep up with the needs of the growing student body. Through its G.R.O.W. initiative, the Center has also begun to work with students who have been academically suspended. By the end of spring 2016, 3980 students

have been assigned to the MAC as advisees and 221 academically suspended students have worked with Student Success advisors in the Center.

Goals and objectives

Goals of Academic Advising are to:

- Assist students to develop self-awareness and learn decision-making skills in order to establish educational and career goals.
- Assist students to set life goals by relating their interests, skills, abilities, and values to careers, the world of work, and the nature and purpose of higher education.
- Assist students to develop an academic plan consistent with their life goals and objectives and to evaluate or reevaluate their progress toward established goals and educational plans.
- Provide students, faculty, and staff with accurate information about institutional policies, procedures, resources, and programs.
- Refer students to other institutional or community support services.
- Serve as the primary point of contact for information and resources related to student advising, mentoring, and early intervention on campus.

Student Outcomes for GGC Advising Center

- Students will articulate the meaning of higher education and an understanding of the GGC curriculum:

- Students will articulate the meaning and relevance of academic planning throughout their education:
- Students will demonstrate an understanding of and appropriately utilize the support services and resources offered at GGC:
- Students will execute their academic plan in consultation with their mentor/advisor and will prepare for the advising session:

Academic Advisor Outcomes in the GGC Advising Center

- Advisors will effectively communicate the value of the higher education experience:
- Advisors will practice ethical and legal standards:
- Advisors will maintain and expand their knowledge and skills related to academic advising and ensure consistency and quality in advising practices:
- Advisors will guide students in academic planning:
- **Advisors will refer students to the appropriate resources:**
- Advisors will be available and accessible

Program Description

The mission of the Mentoring and Advising Center is to assist students, through academic advising, to develop and implement plans for achieving educational and life goals. Students who are advised in the Mentoring and Advising Center will become self-directed, responsible

decision makers working to achieve their academic, personal, and career goals. This is achieved through a variety of touch points throughout the semester.

Student outreach begins at the start of the semester with a welcome email and newsletter. This is also the time advisors also begin to meet with advisees. In many advising programs, advisors do not meet with students until the registration period; however, MAC advisors understand the importance of early intervention when supporting at-risk students. During the initial meetings, advisors help students clarify academic, career, and other personal goals. Advisors work with students to understand their strengths and challenges and develop a plan including identifying campus and community resources to address challenges. Additionally, advisors help these students develop the social capital and success skills needed to succeed in college.

Student Success Advisors also conduct classroom visits to the student success classes throughout the first half of the semester. During these classroom visits the advisors review policies related to student success courses and course withdrawals. They also identify critical resources to support students' academic success. Additionally, these visits provide an opportunity for the advisors to connect with their advisees and reinforce important information shared in the individual meetings. Furthermore, it allows the advisors to build relationships with faculty and encourage early alert referrals for students who are in academic jeopardy.

Advisors also connect with students who are not assigned to the MAC by facilitating group workshops in classrooms and as part of the Academic Enhancement Center's Student Success Workshop Series. They also work with students who have been academically suspended through the Grizzly Renewal Opportunity Workshop (GROW) program. The purpose of the program is to

facilitate academic recovery through self-reflection and the development and utilization of academic success skills. Learning outcomes include:

- Use Self-Assessment Strategies to identify strengths, weaknesses, and the learning strategies that are most effective.
- Apply learning strategies to improve academic performance.
- Develop and execute an academic success plan to guide their transition from academic probation to good standing and ultimately to graduation.
- Identify and use appropriate campus resources

This is an intensive program in which participants attend bi-weekly meetings with Student Success advisors to create and execute an individualized improvement plan to help them get back into good standing. The advisors assist the students in identifying circumstances and behaviors that contributed to their current stall in progress and strengths in which they can build upon to improve their academic standing. Students attend workshops and engage in activities based on their individual needs and challenges to support academic success. Students who earn at least a 2.0 semester gpa continue to work with the Student Success advisor until they are back in good academic standing.

Procedures used in Program evaluations:

Working with the office of Institutional Effectiveness, the MAC conducted its first formal assessment in Spring 2016. A survey was developed and administered to the Center's advisees. It was important for the MAC staff to understand how the Center's work fit into the overall mission and goals of the College. Therefore, they mapped their activities to the MAC student learning outcomes and then mapped the MAC goals and learning outcomes to the institutional goals and Integrated Education

Experience Student Learning Outcomes. An eleven-question survey was administered to MAC advisees who were first time students the previous semester. The survey asked about the skills and knowledge they acquired as a result of their interactions with the MAC. Results from the survey were used to identify areas of development for the advisors and to make changes in some of the student activities.

Results/outcomes

A summary of the survey results suggested most respondents indicated that they understood their degree requirements (80%) and knew how to register for classes (87%). Additionally, the majority indicated that they understood which campus resources address their academic (73%) and non-academic (69%) needs. Respondents indicated they knew how to access support from various campus resources, including Counseling and Psychological Services (69%), the Career Development and Advising Center (75%), the Academic Enhancement Center (77%), and the Office of Internationalization (63%). 73% of the respondents indicated that their advisor helped them clarify their career goals. While the survey results suggest that most the Advising Center advisees are achieving the designated learning outcomes of the Advising Center, the staff developed an action plan to improve further increase students' knowledge and skills. The staff engaged in two professional development sessions with the Office of Internationalization to learn more about their programs and how to prepare our advisees to engage with their office. Advisors also revised the "Advising Session Checklist" to identify the critical information and activities that should be shared with each advisee. Survey collected in the Spring of 2017 will be compared to that collected in the Spring of 2016 to determine if the changes have supported positive gains.

Additional outcome data that is reported to the administration include the pass rates in Student Success Courses, advisee retention rate and GPA, GROW participants' retention.

Student Success pass rates showed an increase after the opening of the MAC. (Table 1) Prior to the opening of the MAC, the 1st semester gpa of students enrolled in Student Success courses was 1.75. Students enrolled in student success courses for the first time in fall 2013 who were advised by the MAC had an average gpa of 2.19. There was also an increase in the 1st year average gpa and the 1 year retention rate. (Table 2) 60 Grow participants have improved their gpa to get back into good academic standing and 3 have graduated from the college. (Table 3).

Table 1: Student Success (Remedial) Course Completion Rates*

	Fall 2012	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
ENGL 0099	77%	83%	79%	85%
ENGL 0989	X	X	X	84%
READ 0098	81%	81%	77%	X
MATH 0099	52%	62%	61%	X
MATH 0111	X	X	70%	X
MATH 0999	X	X	X	67%
MATH 0997	X	X	X	76%
MATH 0987	X	X	X	63%
MATH 0989	X	X	X	57%
English for Academic Purposes (EAP)	X	77%	94%	88%

*There have been several changes to the learning support structure based on Board of Regents policies.

Beginning fall 2015, reading (READ 0098) was no longer offered as a separate learning support course.

New course numbers for English and Math were also introduced fall 2015.

Table 2: Advisee Retention Rates and GPA

	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015
First Semester GPA	2.19	2.03	2.16
First Year GPA	2.08	2.14	2.35
2 nd semester retention	92.6	83	87
1 yr retention*	57.7	63.1	73
2 yr retention*	39.1	42**	N/A
3 yr retention*	29.8**	N/A	N/A

*Based on the FTFR fall cohort.

Table 3: Grow Program Outcomes

	Total Participants	Number eligible to continue in the program	Number eligible to exit the program	Number eligible to return to GGC	Number who enrolled the following semester
Spring 2014	50	15	10	25 (50%)	20 (40%)
Fall 2014	58	24	10	34 (59%)	30 (52%)
Spring 2015	86	32	18	50 (58%)	39 (45%)
Fall 2015	54	20	13	33 (61%)	29 (54%)
Spring 2016	52	22	6*	28 (54%)	16 (30%)

*3 additional students exited during summer semester

Potential for adaption by other institutions:

This advising program model can be adapted by other institution through the allocation of new resources or the reallocation of exiting capital (human, final, and space). The institution first

must determine what student populations are most in need of the additional support and identify the specific needs of the populations. They must then identify what resources are available to support programming for these students. After reviewing these variables, stakeholders must decide which populations of students can effectively be served with the proposed resources. In the case of the GGC Mentoring and Advising Center, the contribution to increased student retention facilitated allocation of additional resources for the hiring of additional advisors. As such, additional outreach activities to support additional students are being planned. Advising units must also provide evidence of the institution's return on investment by articulating how their practices and programs are contributing to the institution's overall mission and goals. This task can be supported by developing a relationship with the institutional research unit to develop and implement an assessment plan and collecting and packaging the required data to demonstrate program effectiveness.