

Gordon State College

Quality Enhancement Plan Implementation Form

Title:

**Fostering a Culture of Reading**

Submitted By:

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## Implementation Plan: “Fostering A Culture of Reading”

Please complete the following information. Attachments may also be included. All submissions must be received by June 30, 2015. You may submit your topics electronically to [t\\_betkowski@gordonstate.edu](mailto:t_betkowski@gordonstate.edu).

### **Rationale:** Describe why your topic is important to Gordon State College.

As Gordon State continues to evolve into a baccalaureate institution, more and more, we have a responsibility to ensure that our students are not merely “adequate,” but are truly well prepared to contribute to Georgia’s future. Put bluntly, if Gordon State’s four year graduates are not seen as excellent, then the success of our entire baccalaureate initiative is called in to question.

Perhaps our biggest challenge, therefore, is to maintain broad based access to higher education while turning out quality graduates. Surely a hallmark of baccalaureate learning should be a high level of literacy, the ability to comprehend and communicate with the kind of standard, collegiate American English that should be taken for granted in the college classroom. Many of us on the faculty find, however, that our students’ lack of verbal ability is a material impairment to their success. (To underscore the point, we would simply note that in a Gordon State classroom of 30 students, we’d expect that several students wouldn’t fully comprehend the preceding sentence.) Indeed, we would argue that even in quantitatively oriented classes like business and science, the key to success is not mathematical but rather verbal ability.

The premise that the kind of verbal acuity fostered by broad based reading is a key to academic success, at virtually every level of study, is so widespread as to be considered virtually axiomatic. Yet our sense is that our students don’t read, not merely that they avoid assigned class texts, but more importantly, that they haven’t assimilated reading, be it for pleasure, information, or instruction, as a part of their lives, with obvious consequences beyond the classroom, highlighted by a lack of ability to self-learn, arguably one of the most important aspects of an undergraduate education. Motivating our proposal, therefore, is the simple notion that teaching our students to incorporate reading into their lives is critical not just to their academic success, but to their ability to contribute to the world around them. It is those contributions, showcasing the excellence of our graduates, which will set Gordon State apart from being “just another state college.”

### **Goals:** State the goals and identify the student learning outcomes that will be addressed.

The goals we propose focus more on breadth of reading, across and even outside of the curriculum, than the notion of “critical” reading, which is, or should be, already embodied in the critical thinking overlay of our core curriculum. Our goals here are simple: both to **enhance the likelihood of our students’ short-term success (retention and graduation)** and **ensure that our graduates possess a level of literacy appropriate to their degrees which will serve them well on a path of lifelong learning.** To pursue those goals, our plan calls for implementation, over a three year period, of a number of initiatives which will address the following specific learning outcomes:

- ✓ Students will broaden the scope of their reading outside of individual courses to encompass both interdisciplinary and extradisciplinary texts.
- ✓ Students will show improvement in verbal comprehension and communication abilities.
- ✓ Students will be better prepared for success in upper level classes.

Perusing the internet reveals a number of college level reading initiatives, usually focusing on either the “single book across campus” concept or remedial areas of reading comprehension. At Gordon State, our specific initiatives in pursuing these goals should be creative and varied, engaging the attention of both students and faculty at this institution. “One book-one campus,” for example, makes sense at a residential campus, perhaps with a bit more homogeneity in students’ abilities than at Gordon State, but seems less feasible at a college still committed to an access mission. Remediation, on the other hand, is an area more appropriate to the Gordon College of ten years ago; it’s still needed, of course, but perhaps should be provided outside of the QEP. Examples of specific initiatives which may be both appropriate to and feasible at Gordon State are listed in the Resources section of this plan.

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**Assessment:** Describe how the student learning outcomes will be assessed and how assessments will be utilized for continuous improvement.

While more detailed planning will suggest additional avenues for assessment, the following comprise a solid assessment foundation for our proposal:

1. **Re-institute the Survey of Presently Attending Students (SOPAS)**, which was implemented at Gordon State College between (approximately) 2003 and 2008. SOPAS, designed as a cooperative effort between faculty and administration, surveys students on institution-specific issues, so reading habits can easily be incorporated, and changes over time can be measured. SOPAS should be reinstated in the coming (2015-2016) academic year to gather baseline data for whatever QEP direction we eventually take.
2. **Track the performance of students based on exposure to the reading initiatives**, especially with respect to retention, graduation, and performance in upper level classes. Proper implementation of our plan should expose a high proportion of our students to one or more reading initiatives, and measuring subsequent academic performance based on such exposure should be an easy matter.
3. **Require Senior (fourth year) level students to take a test of verbal aptitude and reading comprehension** similar and comparable to tests they took for admissions. While taking the test would be a requirement for graduation with a bachelor’s degree, a specific score would not be a requirement.

**Resources:** Identify the kinds of resources needed to implement your proposal

To foster broad based reading and verbal acuity, we propose implementation of a number of well-defined initiatives, limited individually in scope and resources, which over time will engage a high proportion of our students at various levels of study. Framing our design is the notion that a number of different initiatives, all aimed at fostering a culture of reading, may be more effective in reaching students and engaging faculty throughout our heterogeneous campus than one or two wide reaching, “universal” initiatives.

Financial resources would focus around incentives for faculty participation, perhaps involving some sort of “mini” grants, but incentives involving evaluation, promotion, and tenure could also be employed. The plan would be administered by a faculty committee, with a chair designated as a Level 1 or Level 2 special faculty assignment.

While the specifics of such initiatives need to be worked out in a more detailed planning phase, the following examples show the kinds of activities which may be appropriate. The following initiatives are meant as examples, intended to motivate further ideas and suggestions, to be solicited early in the 2015-2016 academic year.

<u>Implementation Year</u>	<u>Example Initiatives</u>
2017-2018	<b>Inter-class reading projects:</b> two or three faculty in different disciplines assign the same reading; students then participate in either online or face-to-face discussions across classes. <b>Class Reading Circles:</b> Groups of four to six faculty, hopefully across disciplines, would agree on a specific reading within their group to incorporate into their classes.
2018-2019	<b>Club Sponsored Reading Events:</b> Student clubs would be given incentives to sponsor events focusing on specific readings pertinent to their club activities. This initiative could be especially valuable for promoting extradisciplinary reading.
2019-2020	<b>One Level, One Book:</b> A variation of the one book across campus theme, students entering either the Sophomore (second year) or Junior (third year) level would participate in a series of activities focusing on their reading of a common book. Because of widely varying schedules on a commuter/residential campus, online activities would be an important component of these initiatives.

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<sup>i</sup> No, we did not make up this term! See Brian Holmes, “Extradisciplinary Investigations: Towards a New Critique of Institutions,” <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/holmes/en>