

First Things First

QEP Quick Facts

What is a QEP? Gordon State College is a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). As such, every ten years, as part of the institution's reaffirmation of accreditation process, Gordon State has the opportunity to develop a new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which is an action plan intended to improve an area of student learning or student success in a significant way through a college-wide, multi-year initiative.

What is Gordon State's QEP? "First Things First: Increasing Mastery in Quantitative and Communication Skills"

What is the plan? Math and writing skills courses in GSC's Area A Essential Skills block of the core curriculum are some of the first courses students take, and every student must receive credit for these courses. The QEP is designed to put "first things first" by improving student learning in Area A courses—so that students do well in these courses and in all other courses for which these courses are foundational. In order to achieve such goals, the QEP's action plan includes a redesign initiative for MATH 1111 College Algebra and ENGL 1101 Composition I; the creation of a special unit of Gordon State's First Year Experience Course dedicated to behaviors that will lead to success in those courses; and an ambitious professional development component to empower both faculty and tutors for the work ahead.



What exactly are the "math and writing skills" that the QEP will address? In the QEP Faculty Survey, given in fall 2015, the Gordon State College faculty identified the top basic skills with which students struggle:

- with regard to Quantitative skills, the area of concern involves algebra skills (fractions plus graphing, numerical intuition, and mathematical reading comprehension)
- with regard to Communication skills, the areas of concern involve writing clarity (issues that make it hard for readers to understand what is written, such as numerous grammar, syntax, and punctuation errors) and essay construction (issues like development, focus, and structure).



Message from the QEP Committee

Much has happened with the development of Gordon State's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) since the spring newsletter. At that point, the campus community had already selected the topic "First Things First: Increasing Mastery in Quantitative and Communication Skills," chosen after campus-wide discussion about GSC's mission and about the alarming numbers of students who fail to successfully complete Area A Essential Skills courses. Because these courses are foundational in nature, fundamental to every other discipline, and because every student must receive credit for courses in this unit, a plan was sorely needed to enhance student learning in this area. At the time of the first newsletter, the QEP Committee had already conducted a campus-wide survey and was developing the plan and narrowing its focus to a set of very particular skills and learning outcomes. Following Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) guidelines, the QEP Committee then moved through several phases, which have involved the participation and assistance of Gordon State faculty, staff, alumni, and students campus wide.

Research Stage

The QEP Committee conducted the "Review of Literature and Best Practices" to better understand the national dilemma concerning pass rates and student success issues in foundational courses such as those in GSC's Area A. The scholarship provided the committee with a wealth of information and data about this national issue. Additionally, the committee reviewed the scholarship concerning "best practices" for engaging today's students, each source offering suggestions for enhancing student learning. Fortunately for faculty who may feel hopeless in the face of student unpreparedness, the research concerning best practices was encouraging, demonstrating that there is hope for students with poor essential quantitative and communication skills.

Development Stage

SACSCOC recommends that institutions preparing a strong Quality Enhancement Plan ask questions such as "What do students not know now that they will know after the QEP?" The topic selection phase provided part of the answer: many students at Gordon State College struggle with essential quantitative and communication skills, failing out of the Area A courses that teach and build upon these skills. The faculty survey revealed that even those students who are successful in passing their Area A courses often fail to transfer the learned skills to the work in other courses. The next question for the committee to consider was "How will Gordon State's QEP help students with those skills?" The result was a QEP that seeks to improve student learning outcomes in Area A via a four-part action plan, the fulfillment of which will also benefit students throughout their academic career.

COMPONENT ONE is the establishment of a broad-based committee that will oversee all activities and processes of the QEP for the life of the plan. Such a component is a critical part of the overall plan, intended to ensure that "First Things First" can accomplish its goals.

FIRST THINGS FIRST ACTION PLAN

Component One:

Establishment of a Broad-based "First Things First" Committee to oversee initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP

Component Two:

Implementation of a course-redesign initiative for Area A courses MATH 1111 College Algebra and ENGL 1101 Composition I

Component Three:

Implementation of a "First Things First" Unit in Gordon State's First Year Experience course

Component Four:

Implementation of a three-part QEP Professional Development Plan





COMPONENT TWO is the implementation of a course-redesign initiative for two courses in Area A (MATH 1111 College Algebra and ENGL 1101 Composition I) in ways that will help students engage with the content since engagement has been shown to increase student success. The QEP Committee selected John N. Gardner Institute's (JNGI) Gateways to Completion (G2C) process as the mechanism by which to "kick start" this redesign process. The redesigned classes will be more "learner-centered," adapted to take advantage of the latest advances in research in the scholarship of teaching and learning and to help students master essential quantitative and communication skills—even those skills students perhaps should have learned in high school.

COMPONENT THREE is the implementation of a "First Things First" Unit in Gordon State's First Year Experience course (GFYE), which will also be transformed via the G2C initiative. Although the QEP will monitor neither the self-study nor the assessment processes required for the first-year course, the QEP will benefit from the redesign work completed on this important course, especially because a more engaged, learner-centered First Year Experience course will lead

to a more prepared student body entering courses in Gordon State's Area A courses. The particular goals of the "First Things First" Unit are to familiarize students with the "First Things First" initiative in general, to encourage participation in redesign courses, and to guide students in developing the proper attitudes for success in MATH 1111 and ENGL 1101, as well as in other Area A courses.

COMPONENT FOUR is the implementation of an ambitious three-part professional development plan, which was created to benefit faculty participating in the MATH 1111 and ENGL 1101 redesign initiative, faculty and staff campus wide, and Student Success Center (SSC) tutors. First, participating faculty will have access to monthly, sometimes weekly, webinars facilitated by the experts at the Gardner Institute; some of these webinars, such as those focusing on predictive analytics, will empower instructors to act before a particular student begins failing a course, while other webinars allow faculty to be part of the professional G2C Community of Practice, the Teaching and Learning Academy, and the Analytics Process Collaborative. These three professional communities meet both virtually all year and annually at the Gateway Experience Conference.

Second, all faculty and staff at Gordon State College will benefit from three professional development opportunities connected to the QEP: the Teaching Matters Conference, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) program, and the newly designed Student Success Summit. Topics for all of these development opportunities will be designed to extend and complement the "First Things First" focus. In fact, the theme of the 2017 Teaching Matters Conference, "Engaging Students and Empowering Educators," and the selection of the Key Note Speaker for the Student Success Summit both evolved directly from the research conducted in support of the QEP.

Third, Student Success Center tutors will gain invaluable experience from the QEP's professional development plan, as 15-20 peer tutors will attend the Georgia Tutoring Association (GaTa) annual conference for all five years of the QEP. At the conference, tutors will attend sessions and presentations on best practice, which will empower them to handle the kinds of issues that the QEP committee reviewed during the research phase. The tutors will also network with peer tutors from other University System of Georgia (USG) and Technical College System of Georgia (TCGS) institutions.

Message from the QEP Committee Continued

Marketing Stage

“First Things First: Increasing Mastery in Quantitative and Communication Skills” is a carefully crafted, multi-year plan to enhance student learning and to further the mission of Gordon State College. The plan has been developed to respond to institutional needs highlighted during the QEP topic search, to fulfill the college’s mission, vision, and strategic planning priorities, to voice the opinions and hopes of the entire campus community, and to enhance student learning in significant ways. Such an important initiative calls for a strong marketing campaign; accordingly, after they selected an official logo, the QEP Marketing Subcommittee launched their twofold plan to welcome new students while informing them about the QEP’s goals and to remind returning members of the college community of the details of the QEP. The plan includes distribution of “First Things First” gifts and business cards at events ranging from the summer New Student Orientation (NSO) programs, to athletic events and Convocation. Additionally, the plan will take advantage of screens across campus, the Gordon State College website, the student newspaper, and various social media. The Marketing Subcommittee has been assisted in their efforts by offices all over campus, from Admissions, to the Bookstore, to Student Activities and Dining Services. Such generosity marks the spirit with which the entire campus community has participated in putting “First Things First” in order to enhance student learning at Gordon State College.

MEMBERS OF THE QEP COMMITTEE

Coordinator & Chair of Steering Committee:

Anna Dunlap Higgins-Harrell

Steering Committee:

Bernard Anderson
Alan Burstein
Bruce Capers
Peter Higgins
Stephen Raynie
Theresa Stanley

Development:

Kristen Albritton
Peter Boltz
Skipper Burns
Don Butts
Geoff Clement
Tonya Coleman
Kathy Davis
Allen Fuller
Anissa Howard
Joyce Klaus
Britt Lifsey
Creché Navarro
Tony Pearson
Jim Rickerson
Autumn Schaffer
Wanda Stuckey
Brian Webb

Hannah Haden
Douglas Lindsay
Damien Peele
Ashley Smith

Communication Skills Research:

Stephen Raynie, Chair
Kathy Davis
Peter Higgins
Anissa Howard

Quantitative Skills Research:

Bernard Anderson, Chair
Geoff Clement
Allen Fuller
Brian Webb

Special Topics Research:

Peter Higgins, Chair
Alan Burstein
Creché Navarro
Wanda Stuckey

Marketing:

Peter Boltz, Chair
Skipper Burns
Autumn Schaffer
Tonya Coleman
Peter Higgins

Bruce Capers
Anissa Howard
Tony Pearson
Jim Rickerson
Hannah Haden
Douglas Lindsay
Damien Peele
Ashley Smith

Special Projects:

Creché Navarro, Chair
Elizabeth O’Brien
Laura Shadrick

Technology Specialists:

Britt Lifsey
Creché Navarro

Internal Consultants:

Teresa Betkowski
Jessica Eanes
Susan Finazzo
John George
Cortney Grubbs
Erica Johnson
Mark King
Jeffery Knighton
Rhonda Toon
Wesley Venus
Sherlana Walker
Ed Whitelock

MEMBERS OF THE “FIRST THINGS FIRST” COMMITTEE

Steering Committee

Anna Dunlap Higgins-Harrell, Chair
Jeffery Knighton
Bernard Anderson
Alan Burstein
Susan Finazzo
John George
Peter Higgins
Erica Johnson
Britt Lifsey
Stephen Raynie
LaRonda Sanders-Senu
Autumn Schaffer
Teresa Stanley
Ed Whitelock

JNGI G2C Leadership Team

Jeffery Knighton
Anna Dunlap Higgins-Harrell
Britt Lifsey

MATH 1111 Course-Specific Subcommittee

Bernard Anderson, Chair
Geoff Clement
Allen Fuller
Kathy Davis, Advisory Member
Joyce Klaus, Advisory Member
Brian Webb, Advisory Member

ENGL 1101 Course-Specific Subcommittee

LaRonda Sanders-Senu, Chair
Doug Davis
Becky Godlasky
Robert Ivey
Mark King
Erik McCarthy

Stephen Powers
Wesley Venus
Kathy Davis, Advisory Member

GFYE Course-Specific Committee

Peter Higgins, Chair
David Casebeer
Gay Grubbs
Anissa Howard
Wanda Stuckey
Trisha Walker
James Woodruff
Jennifer Woodson
Cathy Lee, Advisory Member
Michelle Perry-Stewart, Advisory Member