

Investing in the Core: Enhancing G2C Communication and Visibility at Georgia Gwinnett College

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During the initial G2C rollout at Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC), key partners for enacting pedagogical interventions were easily identifiable and on-boarded, but cross-functional area involvement and literacy were harder to achieve because of inconsistent messaging. We established two goals for improving and sustaining project productivity: 1. Renew buy-in from key campus partners and 2. Increase institutional literacy about the initiative. Through a combination of promotional presentations, regularized communication pathways, and identification of synergies between G2C and ongoing initiatives among stakeholders, a new cultural framework around G2C was created, prioritizing transparency and broad access to data and existing resources.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As a (relatively) new and rapidly growing institution, Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC) has had to manage a range of communication issues resulting from a still-developing infrastructure and an often-compressed timeline between the recognition of a need and the implementation of a solution. In the case of the initial Gateways to Completion (G2C) rollout in 2017, messaging and organizational issues led to less focus about the direction of the initiative and the contributions of individuals optimally positioned to engage the effort. Campus partners had varying degrees of knowledge about the work and were unevenly invested in the stakes of it. Coming to the project as liaisons midstream, and both having faculty appointments and strong ties to the faculty community, we identified two key goals for moving the project into its next, most productive and sustainable phase: 1. Renew buy-in from key campus partners; and 2. Increase institutional literacy about the initiative. We approached both of these goals as opportunities for infrastructure building at GGC. We knew that infrastructure would require clearly defined, regularized communication and reporting within our core team, as well as systematic communication and reporting out to the broader campus community. Standardizing our communication culture was a first step toward addressing another challenge for fast-growing institutions like ours – a proliferation of often overlapping initiatives. The more we reported (in and out), the more we would find existing resources to leverage, we hypothesized. Finally, we hoped the increased visibility that comes from a solid communication infrastructure, as well as the increased efficiencies from finding synergies, would afford us opportunities to advocate for more resources in recognition of our key partners' hard work in the service of our students' success in gateway courses. These communication and literacy goals were intended to increase enfranchisement and investment in the initiative throughout the college. In so doing, they would improve data literacy about the equity gaps in our target courses, while more widely promoting and disseminating existing High-Impact Practices (HIPs) and interventions.

METHODS

Our approach to ensuring buy-in engaged different levels of the organization and stakeholders with diverse perspectives. Firstly, we wanted to elevate G2C work in visibility and significance with campus leadership. Secondly, we wanted course coordinators to have full backing of disciplinary colleagues, which required greater transparency about the nature and goals of G2C. To the first end, we secured small stipends for coordinators, along with a Provost memo indicating that the leadership work for G2C should earn the principals full credit for service as a component of annual reviews. We reinforced coordinators' leadership expectations with monthly meetings and a clear reporting structure. To the second end, we undertook a "G2C roadshow," visiting faculty and leadership meetings. We kept our presentations brief, providing an overview of the Gardner Institute, the goals of G2C, and the efforts underway in our intervention classes. Our walk-through of the institutional inventory data invariably was the most productive part of our visits, resulting in many attendees asking for their own access. In effect, we were able to demonstrate the data-based ethos of the project, spark constituents' curiosity, promote involvement, and alleviate some initiative fatigue via clear demonstration of utility and grounding principles. To both of these ends, we worked with our course coordinators to thoroughly workshop the JNGI Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for each course, at the same time that we created an exhaustive inventory of student success initiatives across the college. This thorough effort in both areas allowed us to leverage already-existing initiatives as shared areas for improvement.

OUTCOMES

We are, all of us, thinking differently about outcomes than we were prior to the COVID-19 pivot, and we cannot think about our progress on this initiative apart from that reality. Fortunately, because so many of our efforts in Academic Year '19-'20 were aimed at building robust communication infrastructure, reporting habits, and cultural literacy about G2C efforts, we are well-positioned to move forward in an uncertain environment. The success of this year's work has landed us in a place where the initiative is regularized and routinized enough to weather a change in modalities and to find its most adaptable parts. The second part – adaptation – has led us to realizations we hadn't been pursuing. Some of the interventions our team operationalized – Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILTed) assignments, for example – are much more readily adaptable to an online environment than others, presenting opportunities for even further expansion across campus. Our most valuable outcome, then, and the one that ensures that this work seeds a sustainable change, is the creation of a new cultural framework around G2C, one that prioritizes transparent and regular communication and broad access to data and existing resources. That new framework, combined with the needs that the COVID-19 pandemic has made urgent, allow us and our team to think more carefully about the interventions we plan to scale for Fall 2020, and to think about the range of contingency plans we should work through. One of the most keen opportunities is the imperative to evaluate the stakes of equity matters as we imagine a range of modalities for instructional and intervention delivery.

PLANS FOR CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION

The COVID-19 online pivot has illuminated which G2C and G2C-adjacent interventions are sustainable and scalable across platforms and time. Among these are efforts to promote students' self-efficacy and growth mindset. This year, GGC invested heavily in messaging, supporting, and integrating academic growth mindset interventions across campus. These efforts synchronized work for G2C, USG's Momentum Approach, and GGC's ongoing student success programming. ENGL 1101 Composition I (one

of our G2C courses) and GGC 1000 First-Year seminar sections participated in the pre-/post- USG mindset surveys. GGC 1000 and learning support Math and English instructors accessed materials on academic growth mindset through the USG's partnership with Motivate Labs. Many GGC 1000 instructors included activities on cultivating growth mindset; many learning support (Access) Math instructors assigned students MyMathLab videos to learn about applying mindset concepts; GGC's STEM IV grant team incorporated growth mindset training for its PSI (Peer Supplemental Instruction) leaders. The G2C team intends to promote and expand these efforts to stimulate students' engagement with mindset-oriented activities. Similarly expanding is our faculty's exploration and integration of informed pedagogy, a goal that G2C shares. Our G2C ENGL 1101 course team featured TILT as its primary intervention. As we shifted to online learning in March, the TILT design method increased the likelihood that students could fully engage material—whether learning synchronously or asynchronously. The G2C leadership team continues to advocate for TILT as a universal pedagogical intervention that that increases equity potential and reduces achievement gaps.

LESSONS LEARNED AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

Through a careful assessment of GGC's G2C organizational structure and accomplishments to date, we were able to identify and tackle several obstacles to programmatic success. These obstacles included: 1) A proliferation of USG-led and strategic campus initiatives that were similar in broad strokes to G2C. There was identifiable confusion among stakeholders about what work was connected to which thing and what was at stake in them; 2) In turn, this lack of clarity about initiatives and interrelatedness presented an obstacle to buy-in; 3) With less central coordination and communication that clearly illustrated synergies and opportunities for collaboration, project management approaches were siloed and differentiated vs. unified and systematized. One universally recognized detriment of that initial model was lack of data sharing and data consistency both vertically and horizontally across campus. Our efforts as liaisons have focused on building infrastructure and consistent communication pathways for G2C. This work will continue, as we seek to share with our colleagues the ways in which G2C course redesign efforts may dovetail with projects they're already doing (TILT, SEED grant-funded pedagogical interventions), other primary initiatives (such as Momentum Approach and learning communities) and ongoing student success programs (tutoring, PSI, learning support, etc.). Further, with the recent onboarding of a Vice President for Student Engagement and Success, more concentrated efforts are underway to identify, gather, and share out key metrics across campus. This increase in data analysis and literacy, supported by the full leadership team, can be understood as building on the groundwork G2C has laid.