



Technical College's GPS Program Guides Students Toward Success

by Melissa R. Batten, assistant vice president for student success and quality enhancement plan director, Horry-Georgetown Technical College

As part of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' *Principles of Accreditation*, an institution's leadership team is required to provide oversight for the development of a quality enhancement plan (QEP). According to the organization, a QEP is "a document developed by the institution that describes a course of action for institutional improvement crucial to enhancing educational quality that is directly related to student learning. The QEP is based upon a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of the institution in supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution."¹

As a result of a broad assessment of Horry-Georgetown Technical College's (HGTC) institutional needs and priorities, the college community—consisting of three campuses in South Carolina—decided to develop and implement a QEP related to academic advising and support services for students: the Guided Plan for Success (GPS). Unquestionably, all members of the college community—including students, faculty, staff and administrators—believed that implementing the GPS was important not only for student learning and success, but also for the continued accomplishment of the college's mission "to provide accessible, affordable, high-quality, comprehensive two-year collegiate education and workforce training; to provide a student-centered environment and inspire lifelong learning ..."²

GPS overview

The focus of the GPS is to promote student learning by improving the college's student-advising system. The GPS provides a system of orientation, academic advising and guided student planning that teaches students the elements of success at HGTC by helping them to create, pursue and achieve their academic goals through the incorporation of academic planning and goal-setting skills. These skills include identifying strengths, abilities and challenges, and using a variety of college services available to support students in the pursuit of goals.

As the central component of the GPS, the student advising process has been changed from a prescriptive advising model to a developmental advising model. In the updated model, new students develop a personalized academic plan, called My Academic Plan (MAP), with a



new-student advisor's help. During the initial advising session, new students their respective strengths and challenges as they relate to career and personal goals, which gives the advisors the opportunity to recommend support services tailored to individual needs.

After the first semester, students are assigned a faculty advisor—who teaches in the student's chosen major—to provide an opportunity for communication with a professional in the field. The MAP is transmitted electronically to the student and faculty advisor so the faculty advisor can help the student interpret and follow or adjust the plan that was originally developed.

Other key college support services have been enhanced as part of the GPS implementation. Specifically, a registration center—WaveNet Central—was established on all three HGTC campuses, allowing students access to computers and trained staff who assist with functions within the college's self-service portal. In addition, new student orientation was rebranded as NAVIGATE-HGTC and is offered not only at multiple times on each campus during the spring and summer, but also in an online format.

Additional support services include an expanded and renovated tutorial support center on each campus, an established writing center, increased availability of peer and professional tutors, online tutorial sessions and online college success tools. Lastly, the college's academic alert system was improved through integration with the college's self-service portal, providing faculty a fully automated system with which to refer students to support services at the college.

Student learning outcomes

Three student learning outcomes were identified during the GPS's creation and development:

- Students will develop personal academic plans to effectively pursue educational goals.
- Students will seek and use appropriate support services to address self-identified academic challenges.
- Students will apply their personal academic plans to achieve their educational goals.

The identified student learning outcomes were confirmed in consultation with established professional criteria published in the *Sixth Edition of the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) Professional Standards for Higher Education*. These standards are nationally



recognized as a foundation for creating an effective academic advising system and environment to promote student learning.³

CAS was established in 1979 “for the ultimate purpose of fostering and enhancing student learning, development and achievement.”⁴ Currently, this organization maintains a membership of more than 100,000 professionals who represent institutions from all sectors of higher education. CAS exerts tremendous influence on higher education, particularly on matters related to “institutional effectiveness, student learning, outcomes assessment, accountability and quality assurance.”⁵

The college established related goals for each GPS student-learning outcome and linked each goal to an assessment method. Data gathered as part of the existing institutional effectiveness cycle was used as benchmark data, and a detailed five-year assessment plan to gauge student learning was developed.

This five-year assessment plan clearly outlines each student-learning outcome, related goals for each outcome, an associated assessment method and time frame, the specific group to be assessed, benchmark data, success criteria, timeframe for the assessment and the functional area responsible for the assessment. The assessment plan is used as a guide for implementation, and the college administration and GPS implementation committee regularly review the data. As part of the implementation, changes have been made to GPS’ scheduled implementation plan when the results from assessment have warranted modifications.

Assessment methods

Each student-learning outcome and related goal is assessed through several different methods. The assessment plan provides for the collection of qualitative data, quantitative data and survey results. Collecting varied types of data strengthens the overall assessment because it shows whether the findings from the assessment methods are parallel.

The summary chart at the end of the article outlines the three student-learning outcomes, related goals and associated methods of assessment for the GPS.

After two full years of implementation, the GPS has become a guide for advisement and orientation practices, and has inspired a review of related procedures and services, including intake and enrollment, faculty training and graduation processes. Because of the institutionwide



input to identify the need to modify advising practices, there is institutionwide awareness and commitment to implementing new and revised procedures to enhance student learning.

Student-learning outcome No. 1
Students will develop personal academic plans to effectively pursue educational goals.
Related goals
Students will develop an appropriate academic plan with new-student advisor.
Students will engage with trained advising and enrollment personnel.
Assessment methods
My Academic Plan (MAP) participation rate (proportion of new students developing a MAP).
Credit usage ratio for degree program graduates (ratio of total number credits earned to the number of credits required for a degree program).
Major change rate for degree program graduates.
Survey items from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Horry-Georgetown Technical College (HGTC) student satisfaction survey.
Student-learning outcome No. 2
Students will seek and use appropriate support services to address self-identified academic challenges.
Related goals
Students will use support services provided by HGTC.
Students will persist toward academic goals.
Students will participate in support services.
Assessment methods
Participation rate for new student orientation.
Participation rate for tutorial services.
Retention rates—IPEDS cohort.
Retention rates—fall to spring population of HGTC students.
Survey items from the CCSSE, the HGTC Student Satisfaction Survey, tutorial services exit survey and new student orientation evaluation survey.
Focus groups with currently enrolled students.
Student-learning outcome No. 3
Students will apply their personal academic plans to achieve their educational goals.
Related goals
Students will achieve academic goals.
Students will satisfy academic requirements.
Assessment methods
Graduation rates—IPEDS cohort.
Graduates placement rates.
Focus groups with currently enrolled students.
Survey items from the HGTC student satisfaction survey and the HGTC nonreturning student survey.
Focus group with HGTC graduates.



References and notes

1. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, *Handbook for Reaffirmation of Accreditation*, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003.
2. Horry-Georgetown Technical College, "Mission," www.hgtc.edu/int_y.php?pageid=1430&searchstring=mission statement.
3. L. Dean, ed., *CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education*, sixth edition, Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

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