

Award-winning GPC Contact Center handles volume of calls with ease *by Rebecca Rakoczy*

In The Loop
The Newsletter of Georgia Perimeter College
October 2010



GPC's new Contact Center won the USG Chancellor's Customer Service Contact Center of the Year award for 2010. Director Fran Mohr accepts the gold award from Chancellor Erroll Davis.

Judith Nichols thought the phones were not working on Dunwoody Campus.

As chief registrar on that Georgia Perimeter College campus, Nichols was accustomed to her staff fielding hundreds of calls a week from students and prospective students. "We got calls like, 'What is the status of my application?' to 'What are the hours of the weight room?'" Nichols says. Some students called multiple times a day.

But in a single afternoon, the calls suddenly stopped.

"When you have three rollover lines and eight regular lines ringing constantly, the stillness that results from no phone calls is unimaginable," Nichols says.

All the Enrollment Registration Services calls had just been rerouted and were being answered at the new GPC Contact Center. Dunwoody had gone "live," joining the ERS departments on Newton, Decatur and Clarkston campuses.

Nichols and her staff were now free to focus on their jobs more efficiently and assist students personally, rather than fielding general inquiries and random phone calls all day. In addition to Enrollment Registration Services inquiries, Advising, Counseling and Retention Services and GPC Online questions also are now being handled by center staff. Financial Aid is scheduled to be added in November.

Providing better customer service to students and potential students was the impetus behind opening the center, says Fran Mohr, director of the college's Customer Service department and the new Contact Center.

The success of the center was recognized recently when the Contact Center won the Customer Service Contact Center of the Year gold award from the University System Chancellor's office; it was one of four customer-service related awards won by GPC. ([See separate story.](#))

Georgia Perimeter is the first University System of Georgia institution to utilize a state contract with Avaya that provides GPC's small Contact Center access to the same state-of-the-art technology as a larger contact center.

Staffed with 20 trained "customer solutions associates," the center is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. The associates use two flat-screen computer monitors to pull up data relevant to the call. For example, they may find answers to general queries in the AskGPC frequently asked questions data base or on the college website or they may utilize eSAMS to find the answer to a specific question such as whether the college has received a student's transcript.

Every call that comes into the center receives a "ticket," says Mohr. Student inquiries are tracked by their GPC identification numbers; prospective students are assigned their own generic numbers. And random calls are answered as well. "We also get calls like 'What are the pool hours at Clarkston?'" notes Mohr.

Despite the variety of calls, Mohr stresses that this is not a big switchboard; the associates do not route the callers to a voice mail—they try to resolve the caller's questions themselves.

"We've been able to provide an answer for the caller and 'close' 90 percent of all tickets," Mohr says. "Those tickets that aren't closed are kept open until they are resolved. If we cannot answer the question, we assign the ticket directly to the appropriate department for resolution."

From the caller's perspective, calling the center is virtually the same as calling one of these departments itself, says Erica Cockfield, center manager. "No one can tell it's a contact center. For example, the phone number is the same as if they are calling Enrollment and Registration Services directly."

Cockfield and the center supervisors regularly monitor the associates and their responses to callers.

“I hear a wide array of calls: just recently a gentleman called and said he had an IT degree but couldn’t find a job. He was interested in the nursing program. Our associate walked him through the website to where he could get the information and showed him where all the links were—and then wished him the best, telling him that nursing is a great career choice. He did that all in five minutes.”



Robert Edwards, left, and Carlos Montgomery answer pertinent questions about GPC at the college’s new Contact Center.

To actually document caller responses and the types of inquires, Marcus Stewart, the center’s workforce management analyst, tracks all calls received at the Contact Center and also charts the quality of experience the caller received through random surveys. More than 100,000 calls have been logged regarding just enrollment and registration since the Contact Center opened Feb. 15; and since June, the center has answered more than 14,000 queries about advisement, counseling and retention.

“We have certainly benefitted greatly from the work of the Contact Center,” says Nichols. “We are able to provide a much faster turnaround to student record changes, the hundreds of verifications of enrollment and grade change forms, and processing requests for tuition reclassification. And I also have had professional colleagues from two local colleges contact me to get more information on how our center works.”