Georgia Perimeter College Today

Georgia Perimeter College (GPC) is the largest associate degree-granting college and the third largest institution in the University System of Georgia (USG) with over 26,500 students. GPC admits more students each fall semester, accepts more transfer students, and sends more students on to other institutions than any other USG institution, accounting for more than one-third of all transfer students in the USG. GPC is the primary access institution in the state enabling underrepresented groups access to higher education. GPC further extends access through the largest online education program in the USG.

Students at GPC are mostly part-time, female, approximately twenty-three years of age, and are in need of remediation (Learning Support courses) and financial assistance. GPC is the most diverse institution in the USG with proportions of Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and African American students all above System averages, along with students representing 157 different countries.

For the purpose of this report, GPC defines First-time/Full-time (FT/FT) students in these three categories:

- Retained Students – FT/FT students who begin in fall semester and are retained through the following fall semester
- Graduates – FT/FT students who begin in the fall and graduate within three years
- Transfer Students – FT/FT students who transfer before graduating from Georgia Perimeter College

First-time/Full-time Students at Georgia Perimeter College
On average FT/FT students comprise 55% of the new student enrollment for FY 11. FT/FT diversity mirrors the overall diversity of the college. Data shows that nearly two-thirds of FT/FT students tested into Learning Support classes, verifying a higher need for remediation and academic support. USG data published for the fall 2009 FT/FT cohort (most recent available) show that GPC cohort students are much less likely to be HOPE scholarship recipients than the System-wide average. Only 12.2% of GPC first-time freshmen from Georgia high schools had HOPE, in comparison to 18.6% for all State Colleges, and 49.4% for the USG as a whole. Internal analysis of the Fall 2008 FT/FT cohort, conducted by GPC’s Office of Institutional Research and Planning, indicates that 24.4% of the cohort students attended GPC for four semesters or less and then transferred to four-year colleges and universities in the USG. Interestingly enough, another 1.8% transfer to Private in-state institutions, while 4.1% transfer out-of-state. This reflects a combined transfer rate of 30.2%, of whom 25.3% transferred without earning an associate degree from GPC. Of those students, 4.9% received an associate degree from GPC prior to transferring. Another 2.2% had received an associate degree from GPC by fall semester 2011, but had not yet begun studies at a baccalaureate institution (based on available data from the National Student Clearinghouse).

During the 2010 request by the BOR Task Force on Retention and Graduation, GPC reported retention, graduation and transfer rates based on an all-inclusive student population reflective of part-time, non-traditional and transfer-in students. This did not mirror the reporting standards established by the BOR and as such, the GPC Graduation and Retention Council worked to revise the metrics which now reflect first-time, full-time students only. Therefore, the newly revised retention rate for GPC is 61% and the revised graduation rate is 9.4% to be reached by fiscal year 2013 (see Appendix “A”).

Institution-specific retention rates for FT/FT students at GPC are 57.6% for FY2009-10, and 60.3% for FY2010-11. In a Board of Regents (BOR) November 2011 follow-up report on retention and graduation rates comparing peers within the USG, GPC had the third highest retention rate for FT/FT students.

In contrast, second-year institution-specific retention rates for FT/FT cohort students are 35.9% for FY2007, and 38.0% for FY2008. Second-year retention rate for the FY2009 cohort has not yet been published. However, Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander students are retained at higher rates during the second year compared to other ethnic groups averaging 46.4% and 56.0% respectively. Males are more likely to “stop-out” than females, and all minority students are more likely to return for the second year than White students.

**FT/FT Graduation Rates**

Over the past five years, GPC has awarded 9,094 associate degrees. In FY2010, GPC awarded 1,674 associate degrees. The vast majority – 86.7% of degrees awarded – were in liberal arts and sciences. The majority of career associate degrees were in Nursing (9.80 %), Dental Hygiene (1.25%), and certificate programs at 1.14%.

The three-year graduation rates for FT/FT students were 8.74% (FY2006), 9.54% (FY 2007), and 7.68% (FY 2008). This dip in rate decrease from fall 2007 to fall 2008 cohort is most likely due to data reporting without the former Lawrenceville Campus, now Georgia Gwinnett College. Prior to the establishment of GGC, GPC Lawrenceville students had the opportunity to seamlessly transfer to UGA, but UGA only
offered upper-division courses at the Gwinnett University Center, which tended to motivate students to complete their associate degree at GPC. Furthermore, these rates are slightly below the GPC institutional graduation rate target of 9.4%. Nonetheless, given concerted and proactive retention and graduation efforts, GPC should be able to reach its stated target by FY 2013.

**Transferability**

GPC’s mission includes transfer to four-year colleges and universities. According to the latest Community College Student Engagement Survey (CCSE) in spring 2011, 75.1% of all new students who begin at GPC intend to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The majority of FT/FT students transfer after 3-4 semesters at GPC to other USG institutions: 20.9% (FY2006), 18.9% (FY2007), and 24.4% (FY2008, institution-calculated). While GPC transfer rates are slightly above the BOR transfer rates of 22.7% (FY 2006) and 24.1% (FY 2007), these rates reflect students who transferred within the USG only. GPC’s own tracking of students through the National Student Clearinghouse indicates that an additional 8.0% will transfer to private and/or out-of-state institutions, including online providers such as the University of Phoenix.

Of the fall 2007 FT/FT cohort students, 15.2% had transferred to a USG four-year institution by fall 2010, without earning an associate degree from GPC. Another 3.7% transferred after receiving their associate degree, for a total transfer rate of 18.9%. Additionally, in that same time period, another 6.1% of the fall 2007 FT/FT cohort had graduated from GPC, but had not yet transferred to a USG institution by fall 2010, bringing the total Associate Degree Plus Transfer Rate for the cohort to 25.0%. This represented a slight, but not statistically significant, drop from 25.8% for the fall 2006 cohort. Moreover, the rates are slightly below the USG rates of 28.6% (fall 2006) and 30.2% (fall 2007) most likely due to two main reasons: 1) GPC students are likely to delay entry into four-year programs due to financial constraints and 2) the current USG averages do not include students who transfer to institutions outside the System. The average transfer rate is 24.0% for Asian-Pacific students; 25.5% for White students; and 14.2% for Hispanic students. The average transfer rates for these groups are well above the transfer rate for African-American students – 11.5%. For students transferring and/or graduating with an associate degree, Asian-Pacific students is 31.5%; for White students – 33.5%; for Hispanic students – 22.1%, and 14.8% for African-American students. Again, the African-American group is well below its counterparts.

1. **Retention and Graduation Accomplishments and Progress**

GPC has made significant progress on the following retention and graduation initiatives identified in the 2010 GPC Report for the BOR Task Force on Retention and Graduation. Progress on retention and graduation initiatives is presented in the following categories: Enrollment Services, Special Programs, and Academic Programs.

**Enrollment Services**

- **Transfer Admission Guarantee Program (TAG)** – There are currently 48 TAG agreements with four-year colleges and universities in the USG and around the country. There have been 640 students who have participated in the TAG Program over the past year (fall 2010 – summer
2011). Renewed TAG agreements will now include data on the GPAs, retention, and graduation of GPC transfer students from partner four-year institutions.

- **Academic Advisement** – A new plan for academic advisement was rolled out in fall of 2011. New students will be assigned an academic advisor from Advising, Counseling and Retention Services. Students will remain with this advisor until they have reached 24 credit hours. At that time, they will be assigned a faculty advisor in their program of study. New advising checkpoints have been established at 12, 24, 36, and 48 credit hours to insure that students stay in close contact with their advisors and to catch any academic difficulty in plenty of time for intervention. During week five of each semester, all instructors teaching cohort students receive an “early alert” email notice. Instructors respond to one question “Is the student making satisfactory progress in your class?” If a negative response is submitted by an instructor, cohort advisors will receive a notification via e-mail. Instructors submitting the responses are encouraged to provide suggestions on how the student can improve. Once the faculty advisor receives the early alert, one-on-one meetings are scheduled during week seven with students. GPC will track the progress of cohort students in academic difficulty.

- **Enrollment Management Suite/Business Intelligence Tools** – GPC purchased the SunGard Enrollment Management Suite in 2009 as a tool to better connect and track prospective students through the “admissions funnel”. Automated communication campaigns are now in place to make sure students know what admission documents are missing as well as information about applying for financial aid. Students are sent personalized GPC materials based on their academic and co-curricular interests. The Enrollment Management Suite will allow GPC to track the progress of students who have expressed an interest in GPC through their admission and orientation process. The Enrollment Management Suite will also be used to communicate with prospective students about the new COMPASS cut scores and will direct students to online resources to prepare for the COMPASS test.

- **Enrollment Suite – Retention Module** - During the summer of 2012, GPC will implement the Retention Module of the Enrollment Management Suite. This new module will allow staff and faculty to connect with students from the time they are admitted through their graduation. Again, tailored communication campaigns will be developed to disseminate appropriate and timely information to students about support services and other resources to help them persist.

- **Financial Responsibility/Literacy** – In spring 2011, 54.5% of students in the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) sample said that lack of finances would be a very likely or likely barrier to returning the following semester. This proportion was a statistically significant increase over the 48.0% who gave the same response in spring 2008. As a direct contributor to GPC retention efforts, Student Financial Services (SFS) created a Financial Aid Outreach Unit in the spring of 2011 to develop relationships with community partners to educate students and parents about the college financial aid process. Outreach Specialists provide information to students and parents that assist them in making early decisions about paying for college, selecting the right courses in high school, and planning for college. To date, more than 100 presentations have been conducted by SFS.
Military Outreach - The Military Outreach Center (MOC) at Georgia Perimeter College provides resources and support services for military, active duty, National Guard or Reserve, and veteran students, including spouses and eligible dependents. GPC gathers information on military students at the time of application and maintains contact throughout their education at GPC. The Military Outreach Center at GPC provides information about campus resources and community resources to military students. Georgia Perimeter College is committed to serving military students. A Military Recruiter has been hired and the process of hiring a full-time Director of Military Outreach is currently underway. Our goal is to assist each military student with a comfortable transition to achieve academic success. Retention, progress, graduation, and transfer rates will be tracked by GPC’s Office of Institutional Research and Planning for all students served by the MOC.

Retention and Graduation Council – GPC established a Retention and Graduation Council (RGC,) which meets monthly to review, analyze, and report on all retention and graduation initiatives, college-wide. Chaired by the Vice President for Student Affairs and Enrollment Services and the Vice President for Academic Affairs, this 15 member group was charged with developing the College’s retention framework by revising the Three-Year Graduation and Retention Plan as follows: to include appropriate goals, performance indicators and metrics, evaluation and assessment plans, and accountability. This group will also implement and monitor special efforts to achieve college-wide retention and graduation goals to include: identifying internal and external best practices, working with consultants in the development of comprehensive retention planning, establishing workshops for faculty and staff, reviewing appropriate policies and programmatic procedures, and infusing technology tools to support and measure the effectiveness of retention and graduation efforts across the College.

Special Programs

DECA - GPC and DeKalb County Schools partnered in 2006 to create an Early College Academy. DECA is a proactive intervention strategy providing students with an accelerated high school curriculum and access to college classes in a supportive environment. State provided ACCEL funding makes a college degree attainable. During spring-summer 2011, DECA and GPC graduated nine students who earned their associate degrees and high school diplomas, simultaneously. This spring-summer 2012, 22 DECA students will be awarded their associate degrees.

Georgia Perimeter College Education Achievement Program (GEAP) – Initiated in the summer 2010, GEAP provides programs and services to increase access and success to 120 Hispanic/Latino students at GPC. The GEAP cohort consists of two groups: (1) Step Ahead (incoming freshmen) and (2) College Completion (sophomore level). The program components are: (1) Academic Support and Personal Enrichment; (2) Civic Engagement and Outreach Initiatives; and (3) Financial Support. The project goals are to: (1) Create a supportive learning environment and (2) Increase the number of Latino students who graduate from GPC and complete their undergraduate degrees through assistance with the Transfer Admission Guarantee process. During academic year 2010-2011, 77.4% of freshmen participants and 79% of sophomore participants were retained at GPC. Moreover, 67.4% of GEAP participants
maintained the academic program requirement for good academic standing (GPA 2.0 or higher) as defined by GPC.

- **Student Support Services** – Student Support Services is a program funded by the US Department of Education (USDOE) to serve low income, first generation, and/or college students with disabilities. The mission is to increase the retention, graduation, and transfer rates of eligible students by delivering academic, personal, and financial support services including the following: academic advisement, career counseling, cultural enrichment, tutoring sessions, and peer mentoring. GPC was granted two programs, which are located on the Decatur and Clarkston Campuses. The retention rate for Cohort 2009 is 78.77% during academic year 2009-2010. The average retention rate for FT/FT Student Support Services participants for academic years 2005-2010 is 76.43%, exceeding the USDOE goal of 73%.

- **Leadership Academy** – The Leadership Academy is an innovative scholarship and retention program launched in 2005 as part of a USG initiative and a GPC commitment to increase access to underserved populations. The Leadership Academy focuses predominantly on African-American males who benefit from the financial, academic, and personal support that the Academy provides. The level of scholarship aid received is linked directly to participant grades. The average retention rate for FT/FT Leadership Academy students from 2007-2010 is 80.32%. The average graduation rate for FT/FT Leadership Academy students is 17.88%, and the average graduation and transfer rate is 35.72%. All of which exceeds the GPC average retention, graduation, and transfer rates.

**Academic Programs**

- **Math Learning Support Initiatives** – In fall 2009, the Decatur Campus began a pilot of early exit for Math 97 students. Students with an A in Math 97 were allowed to take the COMPASS exit exam. Of the 29 students who were eligible, only 26 took the test, with the following results: 31% did not pass the exam (only given one attempt); 15% of the students decided to take Math 98 again; and 46% went on to take Math 1101 or Math 1111 and successfully completed them. Since this percentage was higher than the percentage of students who start in Math 97 and then enter collegiate mathematics, the discipline approved an Early Exit policy. It was noted that the students in Math 1101 had a significantly higher pass rate than that of the Math 1111 students.

During the 2010-11 academic year, the MCSE discipline made substantial progress toward changing Learning Support. Faculty unanimously voted to change the method of delivery to a Mastery Approach by fall 2012. Then, with recommendations from NCAT and AMATYC, the discipline submitted a proposal to eliminate Math 0097 and then created only one Learning Support class to be offered by fall 2012.

Anticipating the acceptance by the GPC Faculty Senate for the new Learning Support course, it was necessary to seek funding for the implementation of the redesign. The GPC Grants Team assisted the dean in an application for funding from the Department of Education. GPC was awarded a 1.44 million dollar Predominately Black Institute grant to fund the construction and
furnishings of labs on all campuses. The Dunwoody and Clarkston campuses will be the first to convert to the lab setting in spring 2012 after construction is completed during the winter break.

In a process to decide the best software for this approach, the Alpharetta campus began a pilot using My Math Lab with mastery spring 2011. After acquiring laptops through the Technology Fund application process, the Decatur and Clarkston campuses began a similar mastery approach using ALEKS software in fall 2011. During fall 2011, information sessions were held at each campus to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of each software package. The discipline will make a final choice in February 2012.

In addition to changing Learning Support, the discipline introduced a new entry level Math class (MATH 1001) designed specifically for non-science majors. The old Math 1101 course that students avoided because of “word problems” was removed from our course offerings. With campaigns to assist in advising students to take this course to satisfy their Area A requirement, it is hopeful that more students will be retained during their pursuit of a degree at GPC.

• **Project DEgree** – In spring 2011, GPC initiated Project DEgree at the Dunwoody campus. Funded by the Gateway to College National Network, Project DEgree is designed to improve student progress through the Learning Support course sequence, resulting in greater retention and success in college-level courses. The first Project DEgree cohort began in spring 2011. An additional cohort began in fall 2011, and the final cohort will begin in spring 2011. The progress of the students in each cohort is tracked in comparison with a matched cohort of students who entered GPC Dunwoody campus at the same time, with COMPASS scores in the same range as the Project students. To date, the Project DEgree students successfully completed 70.2% of courses attempted, while the comparison group of students successfully completed only 52.2% of their courses. Of the original spring 2011 Project Degree cohort, 57.9% were enrolled at GPC in fall 2011, while only 34.8% of the comparison group cohort was retained to fall 2011. If preliminary trends remain consistent throughout the life of the Project, lessons learned from the Project Degree pilot will be incorporated into future initiatives to improve student success in Learning Support.

• **LSAMP** - In 2005, GPC began working with five other colleges and universities to support underrepresented minority populations in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). The plan was to increase graduation rates at both the two-year and four-year college levels. LSAMP is funded through the National Science Foundation. GPC serves as a feeder school for the four-year institutions in the Alliance. Students receive mentoring, financial support, and opportunities for summer research. Since its inception, there have been 206 LSAMP scholars at GPC. Twenty-seven students (13.11%) have graduated in STEM from GPC; 34 students (16.50%) have graduated, but changed their majors; 97 students (47.09%) have transferred to senior institutions as a STEM major; and 106 students (51.46%) have transferred to senior institutions, but changed from STEM major. All-in-all, LSAMP participants have been successful and exceed institutional retention, graduation and transfer rates.
• **First-Year Experience (FYE) Course** – GPCS 1010 was piloted fall semester 2011 and will be required for all new students in fall of 2012. GPCS 1010, First-Year Seminar, is a three-credit course that introduces new students to college life at GPC, provides information on expectations of college students and strategies for college success, and builds information literacy through investigation of a specific theme. Themes are selected and designed by seminar instructors. National data shows that FYE courses help new students integrate into college and aid in retention. Retention, progress, graduation, and transfer rates will be tracked by GPC’s Office of Institutional Research and Planning for all students enrolled in GPCS 1010.

• **Supplemental Instruction** - To be piloted in fall semester 2012, GPC’s Student Support Services (SSS) grant programs and Academic Affairs will provide peer-facilitated study sessions led by qualified and trained undergraduate SI leaders who attend classes with students will encourage participants to practice and discuss course concepts in sessions. Research shows this will improve their understanding of the material, as well as their grades. Plans are currently underway to host SI Trainer, Dr. Maureen Hurley, from the University of Kansas, during spring 2012 to meet with key faculty in English and math, as well as other support staff for an SI training to include: SI Overview, Dialogue on Elements of SI, Data Study, Video-based SI, and Coaching SI leaders with strategies for SI sessions. This framework will take several semesters to see data results.

2. **Important Variables That Affect Graduation Rates**

   **Learning Support** - Over half of new students at GPC place into at least one area of Learning Support. As an access institution, GPC is often the entry point for many students to begin their college education. Learning Support students continue to be a variable affecting GPC’s graduation rate as many students have to take remedial courses before they can take collegiate level courses. GPC has made a concentrated effort to develop a pilot of remediation for students who do not meet the new COMPASS cut scores, which will be implemented in fall 2012. They will be given an opportunity to participate in free tutorial assistance before their retest. GPC will track the progress of the students who take advantage of this free remediation to determine the impact that it has on their success. If this pilot is successful, the remediation will be expanded to applicants to GPC as an option prior to their first COMPASS exam. The new COMPASS cut scores will ultimately have a positive impact on retention and graduation as better academically prepared students will be enrolling at GPC.

   **High Fail Rate Courses – W, D, and F** - Not surprisingly, the most habitual courses with low success rates are learning support ones. Once the BOR announced the new policy to reduce the learning support courses to one each, the college began to address ways to improve pass rates. The first action was to reduce, a year in advance, all English and Reading courses to one. This will allow us to gain insight into the reasons for students’ success and failure in those courses. In addition, the English and Reading faculty have developed some new course approaches that we will try in fall 2012, to improve teaching and learning in those learning support courses. The second action is to convert all math Learning Support instruction to a redesign model that has proven successful in other states. The Math division began pilot courses with the redesign strategies in fall 2011. The Math division has also decided to reduce its learning support courses from two to one for fall 2012 and has received a grant to make physical changes to the classroom to support the move to an "emporium" redesign method.
By rethinking our approach to teaching learning support, we expect that some other courses will see benefits from a higher pass rate. For example, courses such as Humanities through the Ages, Art Appreciation, Film Appreciation, and Theatre Appreciation are available to learning support students when others are not. The pass rates for these courses are negatively impacted by Learning Support students who must withdraw from all courses when withdrawing from the LS ones. Furthermore, with the redesign in Math and the new pilots in English and Reading, we are extending these new ideas into our collegiate courses. For example, we have developed a portfolio-based class for English 1101.

Finally, we are taking two additional actions that should improve success rates. First is to extend the requirement for our new First-Year Experience program to all Learning Support students, which should help them adjust more quickly to college and to know what resources are available to ensure success. Second is to transform our tutoring center into an academic support center that utilizes group advising, supplemental instruction, and online resources in order to target students in the courses with the low success rates. By providing students with more and varied instruction, the success rates should rise and result in a better, more prepared, and more confident student.

3. Modifications to the GPC Three-Year Retention and Graduation Plan

Retention and Graduation Continuum – The Graduation and Retention Council meets monthly and has worked hard over the past year to fine tune and revise the three-year plan. As a result of changes to targeted retention and graduation rates within the three-year plan, updates to the approved framework have been implemented. This framework serves as the “lenses” by which the College views student success in the context of retention strategies and initiatives to achieve goals, policies, practices across the campus, strategic planning, and business intelligence. While the content of this framework is not completely prescriptive, modifications are essential to drive the three-year tactical plan (see Appendix “B”).

4. GPC Plans and Revisions for Remaining Two Years

Work will continue on reaching the goals listed on the GPC Three-Year Graduation and Retention Plan. All academic and enrollment services departmental plans will include retention and graduation initiatives in their departmental goals and plans. WEAVE Online will be used to track and assess departmental graduation and retention initiatives.

A new Grade Forgiveness policy has been developed and is being reviewed in policy councils for approval. Students who have retaken courses and earned a higher grade may request to have the first grade excluded from their institutional GPA under the Repeat-to-Replace policy. Before requesting to apply the Repeat-to-Replace policy, a student must have retaken the same undergraduate course (or the renumbered substitute for that course) in the same department at GPC and earned a higher grade in the course retaken. No more than a total of four course grades (from four different courses) may be replaced and excluded from the student’s GPA. Higher retention and graduation should occur as a result of this new policy.

GPC’s commitment to student success has resulted in the hiring of Coordinators of Student Success and Retention. These new coordinators will respond to early alerts when students are in academic difficulty. There will be a coordinator at each campus to work with students who are on academic warning,
probation, and exclusion and will connect them to resources and support services to help them get on track and stay on track. Data will be collected on students in each area of academic success to monitor their progress and the effectiveness of available support services.

GPC has also implemented a new Academic Difficulty Communication Campaign for students who are in academic distress. Students will now receive phone calls, emails, and letters if they are on academic warning, academic probation, and exclusion. This intentional outreach will insure students are well aware of their academic standing and have the resources they need to stay on track.

5. **Graduation a Campus Priority at Georgia Perimeter College**

On August 15, 2011, President Tricoli rolled out the GPC Three-Year Graduation and Retention Plan to the college community at Convocation. The Three-Year Plan is now accessible on the new Enrollment Management and Student Success web page. Campus Forums have been scheduled at each GPC campus, January 19 – 26, 2012 to discuss this new plan and to collect information about what retention initiatives are currently underway. A consultant from Academic Impressions will be facilitating a full-day training session on retention on January 18th for GPC faculty and staff. The Vice President of Academic Affairs has met with all discipline deans about the importance of retention at GPC. Discipline deans and department chairs are identifying retention “champions” for each discipline. A faculty incentive program is being developed to support mini-grants focused on retention and graduation initiatives.