

Short, Descriptive Title

(See SACSCOC summary page of QEPs for examples: <https://sacscoc.org/quality-enhancement-plans/>)

“Learning Beyond the Campus: Creative Initiatives to Increase Student Engagement and Retention with Camp Bobcat and Maymester “Study Away” Courses

Vision/Rationale/Statement of the Problem: Summary of Your QEP Idea

(Please include evidence, internal and/or external to GC, to explain why this topic is important, meaningful, and significant, and related to student success. Include references where applicable.)

Our proposed QEP theme is intended to build off the framework of our previous QEP, ENGAGE. It can incorporate most (if not all) of the GC Journeys experiences, including the First Year Experience, Community-based Engaged Learning, Study Abroad/Away, Internships, the capstone experience, and MURACE. These High Impact Practices (HIPs) have been demonstrated to improve student retention, completion, satisfaction, and engagement (Kuh, 2008; NSSE, 2007), and we already have a strong infrastructure in place to support HIPs in terms of faculty and staff activities and initiatives, core, course, and program assessment activities, as well as wider University System of Georgia efforts.

These kinds of educational experiences move “beyond the simplistic notion that students alone are responsible for their own effort to the more complex notion that institutions also influence the quality of student effort via their capacity to involve students with other members of the institution in the learning process” (Tinto 1993, p. 132). Key to this vision is the institutional role in ensuring that all students have ready access to the full range of transformative, high-impact practices during their time at GCSU. These learning experiences would help to differentiate Georgia College’s unique position in the USG with highly participatory and engaging experiences that are central to our liberal arts mission.

Student participation in many of these experiences is already high. Therefore, the additional/new activities proposed as the core activities in this QEP focus on improving the first year experience with the development and expansion of an optional orientation program **and** support for and expansion of faculty-developed study away and place-based learning opportunities. Because the university is attempting to ensure all students can participate in at least five high impact practices, increasing the number of such practices available to students will be crucial.

Kuh, George D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. AAC&U, Washington, D.C.

NSSE – National Survey of Student Engagement, (2007). *High-Impact Practices*.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Retention* (2e). University of Chicago Press.

Expected Outcomes

(What are the anticipated student learning outcomes related to student knowledge, skills, behaviors, and/or values?)

Primary Goals

- Further institutionalization of GC Journeys through an increase in the quantity and quality of HIPs available to students
- Improved outcomes related to the first-year experience (building academic and social integration and belonging)
- Student participation in study away and place-based educational experiences

Secondary Benefits to Institution

- Further differentiate our brand as Georgia's Public Liberal Arts University through an experience focused on engagement utilizing our state's unique natural resources
- Additional community partnerships
- Improved faculty engagement and recruitment through options for study away and place-based learning course development
- Regional economic development (connected with enhancement of the third mission of the institution)

Student Population

(The QEP does not have to involve all students but it should include a significant and substantial portion of the student population or sub-population. Please describe which students will be primarily involved in this QEP.)

This two-pronged proposal will directly impact first-year students through the in-depth orientation programs and potentially all students through the study away and place-based learning courses.

Strategies/Actions/Activities

(What are the major anticipated activities, programs, projects that will students, faculty, staff will engage in for this QEP?)

In addition to continuation of existing activities associated with GC Journeys, we propose the following two activities/programs/partnerships for the GC QEP.

First, we propose the return of innovative Maymester classes as accessible Place-Based options and "Study Away" options for students. These courses would help students broaden their connection through courses specifically focused on the Middle Georgia region and/or more distant courses that provide options for students who may not be able to afford study abroad.

Providing access to a wide range of transformative experiences in Maymester classes would give students access to these experiences in a more focused way than they might during the regular Fall/Spring semesters. Taking a GC1Y or GC2Y to important historical and ecological sites to enhance their learning is not always possible during the regular semester—especially when travel is involved. Using Maymester in this way would likely also generate more interest and enrollment in summer courses as students would have the opportunity to complete more immersive experiences than they may otherwise be able to complete.

Faculty have historically demonstrated high levels of creativity and innovation in these courses, including a Sociology of Food course by Dr. Sandra Godwin that took students to various locations around the South, including Koinonia Farms. As another example, Dr. Carrie Cook has interest in developing a course which tours the “Death Belt,” the capital punishment sites in the Southeast (building on the Criminal Justice GC1Y course). Another example is the Jekyll Island Contested Development class Dr. McClure taught many years ago, where students spent time on the coast learning about questions of who gets to decide how different resources are used. Given the quality and creativity of GC faculty, there are likely LOTS of very creative ideas here and this is a program with an existing institutional history/framework which could be easily resurrected and expanded.

The second major additional activity we are proposing is working with the Office of Enrollment Management, First Year Experience, Student Life, and academic departments to create a range of enhanced orientation programs for first year students. Many different models for enhanced orientation programs exist across the country and use a range of activities to more fully integrate students academically and socially.

Tentatively proposed as “Camp Bobcat,” these overnight programs would run between three and five days and be offered on a number of academic topics. Each experience would be led by a combination of faculty and upper-class student mentors. Each would have a unique focus connected to the faculty member’s teaching, research, artistic, and/or service expertise.

While building relationships with GC faculty, students would also engage in dynamic activities to introduce them to aspects of their major or academic interests. This program has the potential to incorporate an early introduction to undergraduate research across many disciplines as well as allow the QEP to involve folks from across the University and be a stand out part of the First Year Experience. We have over 15 years of data on our campus demonstrating the positive impact of an intensive summer program through our current Bridge Scholars Program model. Camp Bobcat would allow more students to build connections with both faculty and fellow students prior to their arrival on campus

Camp Bobcat would have the added benefit of addressing current issues with onboarding of new students, where the content of SpringFest, Summer Orientation, Week of Welcome, and/or First Year Academic Seminar do not always provide the opportunity to highlight the unique opportunities Georgia College offers while creating an experience that builds bonds with students across a diverse range of majors, perspectives, and experiences, outside of typical

organizations, clubs, and teams. Many departments are at a loss for how to meaningfully differentiate the content of these sessions in ways that impact the student connection to their programs and faculty. Furthermore, student data shows that our students are looking for ways to connect with faculty in their major during their first year. Camp Bobcat provides an avenue for new and innovative connections with our students.

We propose that Camp Bobcat be developed in partnership with nearby Indian Springs State Park. In addition to serving as a potential location for this outing program, Indian Springs offers many potential additional partnerships, including with the creative writing program, with biology and environmental science programs, with theater (there is an outdoor amphitheater on the site), history (the history of the park, the region, the history of the indigenous people of the area, the history of 4-H), with museum studies, with the Rural Studies Institute, with marketing (related to the historic and contemporary tourist industry), with food studies, religious studies, with the art department, community and public health, exercise science, and environmental education for K-12 teachers.

As another example, the site could provide for an excellent workshop setting to train faculty interested in teaching in Study Abroad programs. One of the major challenges is thinking creatively about how to connect curricular and disciplinary content to a particular place. This setting provides an incredible range of potential applications and would also be a beautiful place for faculty and staff collaboration.

We believe this partnership would help us to make connections with another great public institution in the state (a public-public partnership), could have a positive impact on economic development in the region, and would help us better live up to a promise of community engagement that we are still struggling with as an institution. There are lots of opportunities for conservation, restoration, and redevelopment, which could lead to the identification of many new grant-funded projects. And ideally, this first intensive community partnership could serve as a template for others down the road.

Possible Means of Assessing Outcomes/Activities *(How will we demonstrate student learning and student success?)*

Using Maymester courses as an opportunity to provide increased access to components of the GC Journeys program would reinforce the emphasis on High-impact Practices on campus. It would make it easier to direct students to transformative experiences they are not able to complete during the regular Fall/Spring semester.

One method of assessing is tagging these courses through the Registrar's office and track how many students are completing these experiences. Faculty who incorporate these experiences can use the implementation rubrics developed by committees through CTL to ensure student success. We could have faculty trained on rubrics to measure the products created by these courses to see if they meet the outcomes (similar to VALUE).

Furthermore, similar to the GC Journeys Program Assessment, we could survey these students to find out whether having access to these experiences outside of the regular semesters is effective. Additionally, we could involve the Office of First Year Experience to run focus groups with student participants and participating offices—similar to FYAS assessment—to gain qualitative insights on Camp Bobcat. The AAC&U’s VALUE Rubric for Integrative Learning provides a nationally recognized way to assess the unique and interdisciplinary nature of learning that is expected from these programs.

Anticipated Resources Needed

(What dedicated resources might this QEP need including personnel, financial, dedicated time, space, materials, etc...)

We need resources to encourage faculty to think big with their Maymester course ideas. There should be funds readily available that faculty can use to develop truly transformative study abroad/study away and community-based experiences.

The faculty Champions program through the Office of Transformative Experiences needs funding to continue. This is a program that provides support for faculty who wish to create or revise the high-impact practices some choose to incorporate into their courses.

Funds could be set aside for more co-curricular transformative experiences. In this way, staff might be able to supplement the offerings during the Maymester period, too.

While this is designed to be able to operate at a significantly reduced cost compared to a study abroad, it would be extremely useful if the University could also set aside funding or partial funding for these experiences in order to make them more accessible to *all* Georgia College students regardless of income. A cooperative working agreement between the University and the park could also significantly reduce costs for park facilities.