East Georgia
STATE COLLEGE ®
Student Learning Communities
LEARNING TO ASSOCIATE

LET'S GET ASSOCIATED.

East Georgia State College's
Quality Enhancement Plan 2020

On-Site Review Date:
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Contents

Section I: Executive Summary

Student Learning Communities: *Learning to Associate*

East Georgia State College (EGSC) and the University System of Georgia (USG) have a long history and deep commitment to improving student success and student learning outcomes, improving retention, and improving progression towards graduation and graduation rates. National research, as validated by the experiences of the USG and EGSC, locally, indicates that students in their first year of college are at a high risk of failing academically and not persisting. Different initiatives to mitigate student attrition have been instituted in recent decades nationally, in Georgia, and at EGSC. One of the most powerful initiatives to be developed is the USG promotion of "Gateways to Completion" (G2C), which identifies and seeks to improve academic outcomes in first-year courses required for general education completion. These courses tend to have high DFWI rates and are major barriers to academic success and persistence. EGSC has been building G2C emphases into its First Year Experience (FYE) programming and is using this Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) to enhance the power of such G2C reforms through the creation and expansion of Student Learning Communities (SLCs) for selected first-year courses.

This QEP takes a systematic approach to establishing well-designed SLCs and expanding their provision on its main campus in Swainsboro and at two other off-campus instructional sites in Statesboro and Augusta. The QEP calls for EGSC to evolve from not having any SLCs, presently, to a total of 20 per semester by the fifth year of this QEP. By 2024-2025, an estimated 30% of EGSC freshmen will have taken selected first-year courses as part of SLCs. The impact of SLCs involving selected first-year courses at EGSC will be assessed in this QEP thorough use of three clearly stated, specific, and measurable student success outcomes (SSOs):

- Improved Success in Selected First-Year Course Completions,
- Improved Success in First-Year Academic Performance, and
- Improved Success in First-Year Retention.

The impact of these SLCs will also be assessed using two additional student learning outcomes (SLOs):

- Improved Student Learning in Passed SLC Selected First-Year Courses and
- Improved *Learning to Associate* in SLCs.

Assessment plans have been developed for determining the extent to which these expected outcomes are achieved during the formative stages of the QEP implementation and the summative stage of the completion and at the time of the Fifth-Year Interim Report. These assessment plans rely on analysis of both direct measures of student success and student learning and on indirect measures of *Learning to Associate*. Throughout the five-year course of the QEP, the use of these assessment results to modify and improve aspects of the QEP is expected.

Section II: EGSC History in Improving Student Learning and Student Success

EGSC is an open-access, associate degree dominant, transfer-oriented, liberal arts state college of the USG. It operates largely in rural and economically challenged sections of east-central Georgia, with its main campus in Swainsboro. The college's student body numbering 2,700+ is racially diverse and composed of many who are first-generation college students, academically under-prepared, and in need of learning support. Consequently, many of EGSC's students, especially those in their first year of college, are typically considered to be at high-risk of failing or not persisting in their collegiate studies. EGSC has a long record of pursuing improvements in student learning and student success. The establishment of Student Learning Communities (SLCs) at EGSC is the latest initiative to expand the effectiveness of those efforts.

EGSC's educational mission is unique in that it has two off-campus instructional sites in Georgia with substantial enrollments on or near the campuses of Augusta University (AU) in Augusta, and Georgia Southern University (GaSouU) in Statesboro. Both AU and GaSouU are, also, member institutions of the USG. Many of the students at those two campus locations did not meet admissions requirements for AU or GaSouU and are completing all or part of their first two years of study through EGSC. A high percentage aspire to transfer to AU or GaSoU and earn a bachelor's degree. Their ability to achieve those aspirations can also be undercut by a lack of academic success in their first-year studies, making the establishment of SLCs at those off-campus sites very important.

First-year courses in general education involving English composition, mathematics, history, biology, and public speaking at EGSC have high rates of DFWI final grades. They are often barriers at EGSC for first-year student success and student learning. Single or multiple failures in attempts to complete those required first-year courses can devastate a student's first-year GPA and cause the student to drop out or be dismissed. Improvements in the student success and student learning outcomes of these "Gateway to Completion" (G2C) courses are being sought in this QEP through the establishment of SLCs, which will complement and reinforce other First Year Experience (FYE) programming and educational reforms at EGSC.

This QEP, therefore, furthers EGSC's Mission Statement (EGSC Mission Statement, n.d.) which states:

> East Georgia State College is an associate degree granting, liberal arts institution of the

University System of Georgia providing its students access to both academically transferable programs of study and collaborative programs in occupation-related fields. The College also offers targeted baccalaureate-level degrees that support the University System's initiative to expand educational opportunities. The College prepares traditional and nontraditional students for success in the global 21st century through a technologically advanced teaching and learning environment that fosters personal growth by utilizing an expanding range of resources and amenities, including an on-campus student residential option. The College also continuously engages the communities it serves through public service and cultural enrichment.

This QEP also pushes EGSC closer to the attainment of its vision. EGSU's 200+ employees facilitate EGSC's fulfillment of the promises stated in the college's Vision Statement (EGSC Vision Statement, n.d.):

Through bold and transformative action, East Georgia State College aspires to significantly increase the educational achievement of its students and to be an indispensable pathway to a more fulfilling and prosperous future.

As such, this QEP is the next logical step in EGSC's long history of commitment to improving student success and student learning outcomes over the past 20 years. That interest has been shared and promoted by the USG Central Office, as well. For example, in 2005, the USG held a system-wide training conference to kick off its Retention, Progression, and Graduation initiative (RPG), during which best practices were shared for improving RPG outcomes on system campuses. EGSC's Annual Reports, which are maintained on a webpage of the President's Office, demonstrate implementation of the RPGs (2006 and 2007 Page 12). Since 2005, the USG has launched a series of related system-wide initiatives designed to improve student success and student learning outcomes.

In 2011, responding to state trends in student attrition, the governor of Georgia mandated the Complete College Georgia Initiative, leading to USG implementing Momentum Year (MY) (Appendix D) and G2C initiatives. MY has led to notable changes designed to enhance student success, and include restructuring learning support courses as co-requisites, strategic advising, and redesigned Freshman Orientation.

G2C is an USG initiative that guides and supports institutions in redesigns of foundational courses typical of first-year courses within the core curriculum and in area majors. EGSC Math and English (required of all students, the Area A curriculum includes 6 credit hours of communication skills, English Composition I and II, and 3 credit hours of quantitative skills, College Algebra or Quantitative Skills and Reasoning) are in the process of redesign

(Appendix A). G2C promotes a shift from lectures to equitable, active-teaching pedagogies. EGSC prioritizes G2C in its strategic plan: Student Success (Appendix B). The plan states that EGSC "provides access to innovative academic programs and engages in college completion initiatives, transforming students and equipping them with tools for success" (Appendix F). Because the G2C redesigns target improving the success of first-generation college students and traditionally undeserved students, EGSC believes that supporting the G2C "improves access and completion for traditionally underserved students" (Appendix F).

This QEP is, furthermore, a logical extension of EGSC's last QEP. *Critical Thinking* was EGSC's QEP topic adopted in connection with its last reaffirmation of accreditation by SACSCOC. As a result, many faculty members have invested much time and effort into designing courses and assignments that develop and assess critical thinking skills. Therefore, from a teacher's perspective, one of the most appealing aspects of *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate,* is the topic's ability to build on what faculty have already accomplished rather than tearing down a pedagogical foundation just to build another one.

In order to carry out this logical next step in EGSC's commitment in achieving its access mission, the broad purpose of *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate* is "to encourage integration of learning across courses and involve students with 'big questions' that matter beyond the classroom" (Kuh, 2008). As instructors come together to identify these big questions the linked courses should explore, the instructors draw from materials and activities previously designed to promote critical thinking. As instructors share their materials and formulate approaches that promote exploration and discovery of new connections, they ultimately create learning spaces that "provide a context for developing complex thinking skills, social cognition, creativity, metacognition so that students interact with the materials at a much deeper level than simply receiving information" (Brower and Dettinger, 1998, pp. 20–21). Thus, combining courses engaged in the big questions promotes critical thinking, even as the integration of learning across the curriculum encourages students to discover connections that they may not have necessarily made without the linking of the courses.

EGSC faculty members, through this QEP, are building on their previous pedagogical skills acquired through the Critical Thinking QEP, creating a seamless pedagogical transition from one QEP topic to the next. Furthermore, the faculty and staff at EGSC consistently demonstrate their commitment to students and EGSC's mission

statement through the conscientious execution of the duties their specific job entails. The broad-based support that *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate* received indicates that the institution and its constituents are supportive and committed to approaching the work that the QEP requires. The QEP Director and the members of the QEP Topic Development Committee and the QEP Planning and Implementation Committee were selected because of their roles in promoting EGSC goals for Student Success and standing with EGSC in its commitment to its students.

Section III: Definition of Key Terms

DFWI Rates

DFWI rates indicate unsuccessful attempts at courses. The grades "D" and "F" in foundational courses prevent students from moving to the next level. Students may withdraw from the course, receiving a "W" for the course or they may take an incomplete, which is indicated with the letter "I." Collectively, DFWI rates strongly predict a student's likeliness to withdraw from college before completing the degree.

Faculty Learning Communities

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) are groups of faculty (8-12) who work closely together during an academic semester or year to engage in teamwork and conversations regarding their instruction that is focused on a selected topic or theme (Georgia Tech Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

First-Year Retention Rates

The federal definition focuses on the first-time, full-time freshman student enrollment status from the first fall semester (or previous summer) to the second fall semester. The percentage of students who persist after that first academic year is the first-year retention rate. Freshmen enrolled in their first semester are counted as retained in their second fall semester if they are enrolled part-time or full-time. This QEP redefines first-year retention as the rate at which any full-time or part-time new student in the fall semester (or preceding summer) returns to EGSC as a full-time or part-time student in the succeeding fall semester.

First-Year Experience

The FYE program is rooted in a freshman seminar course aimed at introducing freshmen to the rigors and expectations to college life, campus life and its learning resources, study skills and career clarification, and other topics related to facilitating student success when making the transition from home and high school to college. The FYE programming is expanding beyond the FYE course to include other initiatives aimed at improving the success of first-year freshmen.

First-Year Students

First-year students are defined as those who are new freshmen at EGSC as of the fall semester or preceding summer and includes those who remain freshmen after their first year if fewer earned hours than thirty were earned in the first year.
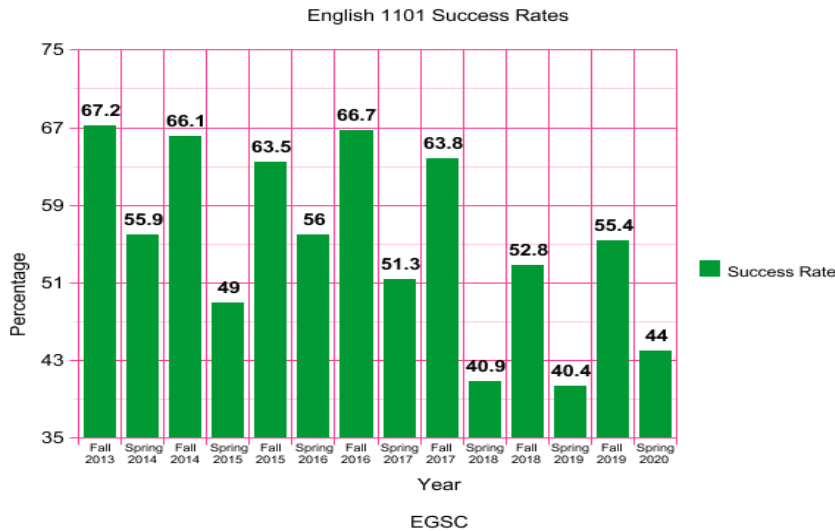
Selected First-Year Courses

"Selected First-Year Courses" refers to those entry-level, skill-building courses that serve as core requirements or pre-requisites to higher level courses. These courses represent skills and materials students must show competence in for their degree. The extent that selected first-year courses are problematic for student success is reflected in the rates at which students receive final grades of 'D,' 'F,' 'W,' and 'I' in those courses. Most of EGSC's curriculum consists of selected first-year courses that serve as prerequisites for other general education courses or introductions to majors. Thus, every freshman course qualifies as a selected first-year course. The highest DFWI rates are found in the four most common courses Freshmen must take to graduate: Quantitative Math, English Composition I and II, U.S. History I and II, and Introduction to Biology (See Table 1). Being an open-access institution made up of mostly selected first-year courses, EGSC's biggest challenge is lifting underprepared students to a college-ready level with equitable methods that engage students in deep learning, while also removing unnecessary obstacles. Therefore, the QEP *Learning to Associate* focuses on all required freshman courses across the curriculum, especially the selected first-year courses with the highest DFWI rates. This QEP aims to drop DFWI rates in Selected First-Year Courses as SLCs expand over the next five years of QEP implementation.

Table 1: Sampling of EGSC DFWI Average for Selected First-Year Courses: Fall Semester 2016 – Fall Semester 2019

QEP Selected First-Year Courses	DFWI Average F 2016 - F 2019	Target Range for DFWI	Change
MATH 1001 (Quantitative Skills)	41%	<25%	-16%
ENGL 1101 (Composition I)	39%	<25%	-14%
ENGL 1102 (Composition II)	39%	<25%	-14%
HIST 2111 (U.S. History I)	42%	<25%	-17%
HIST 2112 (U.S. History II)	40%	<25%	-15%
BIO 1103 (Intro to Biology I)	36%	<25%	-11%
Total Average	33%	<25%	-14.5%

Source: EGSC Institutional Research

Table 2: English 1101 Success Rates

English 1101 Success Rates

A bar chart titled "English 1101 Success Rates" with Percentage on the y-axis (35 to 75) and Year on the x-axis. Values by semester:
- Fall 2013: 67.2
- Spring 2014: 55.9
- Fall 2014: 66.1
- Spring 2015: 49
- Fall 2015: 63.5
- Spring 2016: 56
- Fall 2016: 66.7
- Spring 2017: 51.3
- Fall 2017: 63.8
- Spring 2018: 40.9
- Fall 2018: 52.8
- Spring 2019: 40.4
- Fall 2019: 55.4
- Spring 2020: 44

Legend: Success Rate. Source: EGSC

Gateways to Completion (G2C) Courses

The USG initiative "Gateways to Completion" (G2C) helps students, particularly those who are underrepresented or underprepared, succeed early in their academic career (Appendix A). The initiative pushes for momentum in the students' first year, even while shifting academic cultures towards active learning pedagogies that promote student engagement G2C assesses curriculum redesign in three areas: Pedagogic Changes, Curricular Changes, and Course Structure Changes. SLCs reinforce G2C recommended pedagogies by introducing students to cross-disciplinary perspectives that highlight the applicability of what is being learned. Currently, EGSC is completing G2C redesigns in MATH 1001 and College Algebra and is now focusing on redesigning English Composition I. Example data for G2C research may be viewed in Table 2, where we see successful course completion in the first English composition course is problematic. The fall success rates tend to be substantially higher than the spring success rates. However, the spring success rate may tell more about retention challenges, because students who did not pass this composition course in the fall are the majority of students enrolled in Composition I in the spring. If students have failed Composition in the fall and the spring of their first year, then they are less likely to return the following fall because their momentum slackened.

Learning to Associate

As an associate-degree dominant college, EGSC uses the theme "Let's Get Associated" to highlight the importance of associate degree education. This QEP plays off that theme with the related phrase "*Learning to Associate*." *Learning to Associate* represents the expected SLOs and SSOs that occur when EGSC students complete challenging first-year selected courses through linked learning opportunities. SLCs are designed and intended to facilitate and achieve learning outcomes in which students recognize and appreciate the following: a) associations of skills and course content across different disciplines; b) associated applications of general education experiences to personal growth; c) interpersonal and social associations of working effectively in a community of learners.

Persistence

Persistence is the student's ability to enroll in college and remain enrolled until completing a degree.

Retention

While "persistence" and "retention" seem interchangeable, the National Center for Education Statistics defines "retention" as the institutional ability to keep its students from enrollment to completion and "persistence" is a student measure. Attrition results from lower student retention.

Student Learning Community (SLC)

The Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education defines learning communities as "classes that are linked or clustered during an academic term, often around an interdisciplinary theme, and enroll a common cohort of students" (n.d., para.1). The National Resource Center for Learning Communities claims SLCs should include, "at a minimum," the following three characteristics: "(1) strategically-defined cohorts of students taking two or more courses together, (2) robust collaborative partnerships between student and academic affairs, and (3) explicitly designed opportunities to practice integrative and/or interdisciplinary learning" (Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education, n.d.).

SLCs in this QEP

In order to keep the scope of this QEP manageable and affordable and to maximize its potential to show evidence of substantial student success and improved student learning, the types of SLCs that will be developed and

implemented for this QEP over the next five years are limited to course pairings involving EGSC's freshmen

selected first-year courses.

Section IV: Literature Review

Tinto's Interactionalist Theory of College Student Departure

Vincent Tinto (Tinto, 1975) published his research on the characteristics that factor into a student's decision to withdraw from college before completing a degree. He asserts that a student's social integration is crucial to forming an academic environment designed to retain students. His research plays a crucial role in creating movements in higher education that allow learning communities to emerge with prominence as a strategy for retaining first-year students.

Student Learning Communities, in general, according to Tinto's model for student retention, promote an increase in student success, retention, and graduation rates (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's model has provided the theoretical framework for student retention since 1975 and serves as one of the most respected models for understanding students' decision to drop out of college. The model positions peer-group interactions and its social integration as crucial commitments institutions should implement for retention. In other words, the model promises results because such learning communities help students to seek and work with other like-minded students, they learn to appreciate that their academic experiences can be associated with their social experiences, and students come to understand that knowledge is cultivated in various and meaningful ways" (Washington Center for Improving Undergraduate Education, n.d.). Put simply, curricular learning communities will empower students to move beyond access to success in college (Kern & Kingsbury, 2019).

Tinto's model of college student departure, also known as the model of longitudinal departure, has "near-paradigmatic status" (Berger & Braxton, 1998), as it focuses on the academic and social integration of the student into the institution as requisite for persistence. He postulates that the more students integrate into the academic and social communities, the more likely they persist and graduate. Thus, organizational behavior, including programs such as the student learning community, can serve to enhance student integration.

Tinto hypothesizes that for the student to become integrated into the college community and to persist to graduation, he or she would need to progress through three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. In the (mental) separation stage, the students must intentionally separate themselves and prepare to transition from

membership in their former communities such as their family, high school, and geographical areas (Berger & Braxton, 1998).

Then the student enters the stage when he or she transitions between separation from the old communities and full integration into the new college communities. Tinto expects the transition stage to be easier for students who accurately anticipate the nature of the transition, perhaps due to coaching from parents or other family members who have been to college. By the same logic, first-generation college students might experience a more stressful transition period. The incorporation stage marks the point at which the student was able to assimilate successfully into both the academic and social communities of the college. Students who enter college underprepared or those who are underchallenged might be more likely to leave the college (Seidman, 2012).

Tinto applies his theory in additional extensive research, conducted at both two-year and four-year institutions, on the effectiveness of learning communities in promoting student persistence. The findings of this research suggest that students in learning communities (1) form their own academic and social support peer groups, (2) remain actively involved in classroom learning even after class, and (3) ultimately learn more (Tinto, Goodsell Love, & Russo, 1994).

Tinto advised that "colleges and universities should make learning communities and collaborative learning a hallmark of the first-year experience" (5). They are especially powerful when used as early interventions for students engaged in making the transition to college life. To be effective, learning communities should be aligned with institutional missions and goals and should be monitored with ongoing assessment efforts (Goodsell Love, 2004).

Tinto recognizes that the student's individual attributes, skills, and intentions (input), and the student's interactions with members of the college community and experiences within the college environment contribute to student departure or persistence (Berger & Braxton, 1998). Thus, his model is comparable to Alexander Astin's environment model.

Astin's IEO (Input, Environment, Output) Model

The three components of Astin's input-environment-output (IEO) theory are (1) Input, referring to the personal qualities the students bring initially to the educational program or any pre-enrollment variable that could

conceivably affect the outcome; (2) Environment, referring to "the various programs, policies, faculty, peers, and educational experiences to which a student is exposed" (Astin, 2002), and which plays a role in the outcomes under study; (3) Output, referring to the talents students may develop in educational programs. In the framework of a causal model for assessment purposes, the output could be thought of as the dependent variable, while the input and environment could be considered independent variables.

April Heaney and Rick Fisher (Heaney & Fisher, 2011) use Astin's IEO model as a framework to assess first-year persistence for conditionally admitted students participating in a learning community. They found that the inputs and environmental factors the most predictive of persistence were social integration, academic conscientiousness (most notably the use of self-regulatory learning strategies) and select pre-college characteristics (including motivation and college preparatory curriculum). To put it simply, the changes that happen after a student's time at college (outcomes) are affected by personality and experiences prior to college (inputs) as well as the effect of peers, programs, faculty, and other environmental factors (environment) of college life.

Benefits of Learning Communities and Linkages to Research-Based Evidence

By providing first-year students the social support that they need to feel that they belong to a campus community and building a collaborative academic community, learning communities provide opportunities for student transformation from remedial or developmental learners to college students with a sense of purpose and belonging.

Longitudinal studies have shown that students who participate in learning communities experience significant positive effects that are intended functions of the program (Dunlap & Pettitt, 2008). Student learning communities have been linked with effective student communication, social belonging, higher grade point averages (Goodlad, Westengard, & Hillstrom, 2018), higher levels of academic effort, academic integration, and active and collaborative learning; more frequent interaction with faculty members; and more positive attitudes about the quality of academic advising and campus support (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Walker found that participation in a learning community was significantly and positively associated with cognitive gains (specifically, critical thinking, problem-solving, reading ability, and writing ability) for first-year students.

Garrett and Zabriskie found that students who participated in living-learning communities were more likely

to interact with faculty than students who did not participate in a learning community. Other researchers reported that students in SLCs experienced more frequent interactions with faculty (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). These increased interactions can serve to alleviate student feelings of isolation (Yuan & Kim, 2014).

Students who participate in diversely comprised SLCs can learn to value and benefit from multicultural diversity. Firmin and associates conducted qualitative research on the effects of a multicultural learning community. Their interviews revealed a shift in Caucasian students' personal biases and stereotypes and a generally positive learning community experience for most students regardless of ethnic/racial background (Firmin, Warner, Firmin, Johnson & Firebaugh, 2013).

Finally, student participants in learning communities report increased overall satisfaction. According to Zhao and Kuh (2004), participation in a learning community was positively linked with students' overall satisfaction for 80,000 first year and senior student respondents to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE).

It is necessary to mention that despite voluminous positive outcomes associated with learning communities, there are some studies that reported dysfunctions, which researchers have described as "unintended social dynamics that may hinder student learning, student development, and student-faculty relations." Examples include adversarial group dynamics, the tendency toward "groupthink" (Jaffee, Carle, Phillips, Paltoo, 2008, p. 57) in cases where the members of the class are very similar, "hyper-bonding" that might result in "group absenteeism, disrespect shown toward the instructor, off-task conversations during lecture or lab time, and other unruly behaviors" (Watts, 2013, p. 1). Student academic overconfidence might undermine learning if it causes the students to invest less involvement in study activities (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012).

Goodlad and associates (2018) observed that faculty and student perceptions of dysfunctions regarding academic performance and classroom behavior were statistically different and suggested that if this is characteristic of a learning community group, it could have a deleterious impact on the desired outcomes. Architects and administrators who design and lead the learning community program should be aware of these potential dysfunctions and take steps to militate against them. Nevertheless, evaluations of learning community programs have yielded measurable results (Gebauer, Watterson, Malm, Filling-Brown, & Cordes, 2013) demonstrating that these programs support the goals of increased retention and graduation rates. Student learning community

participation is linked to persistence and increased retention rates (Goodlad, Westengard, & Hillstrom, 2018) because SLCs positively impact many variables that are antecedent to persistence, retention, and graduation. "It is the quality of learning, not the possession of a diploma, that will make all the difference—to individuals, to an economy dependent on innovation, and to the integrity of the democracy we create together" (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007). SLCs improve retention by offering higher-quality undergraduate education (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990) and creating transformational experiences for many student participants (Gebauer, et al., 2013).

Section V: QEP Topic Planning and Evaluation Processes – 7.2 (a)

As is stated in the Executive Summary of this QEP, EGSC is an open-access, associate degree dominant, transfer-oriented, liberal arts state college of the USG. It operates largely in rural and economically challenged sections of east-central Georgia, with its main campus in Swainsboro. The college's student body is racially diverse and composed of many who are first-generation college students, academically under-prepared, and in need of learning support. Because many first-year students at EGSC flounder, academically, during their first semester/year of college, it was important to focus the QEP on proven methods that support and sustain student academic success. After an exhaustive process, the topic, Student Learning Communities, was selected for the QEP.

The general process for the topic selection is depicted in the flow chart below.

QEP Topic Selection Process Flow Chart

QEP Committee Formed	Call for Topic Ideas	Data Review
• Director identified • Committee Members called • SACSCOC standards and duties explained • SACSCOC Annual Meeting attended	• Online Forum through CETL • Emailed Proposals • Committee Brainstorming	• Institutional Data (Course success, retention, graduation, demographics, and CCSSE) • EGSC's Strategic Plan • Mission and Vision Statements • Marketing Motto

Constituents' Involvement	Campus Discussion	QEP Proposal
• Discussions with Student groups • Discussion with Faculty Senate • Student, Faculty and Staff workshops • Presentation to the EGSC Foundation Board of Trustees, discussion, and vote • Presentations to students, Faculty, and Staff	• Presentation of top 3 topics to faculty and staff • Discussion and brainstorming the 3 topics • Committee Meetings • Meetings with Institutional Effectiveness leadership • Identification of a need for FYE redesign • Submission of topic to EGSC's SACSCOC leadership team	• Committee Meeting to narrow proposed topic • Review of data, institutional goals, initiatives • Discussion about FYE program designs and what is needed to fill in the gaps of the redesign underway • Submission of final proposal and Executive Summary • Institutional approval of proposal • Subcommittees formed

Fall 2018, EGSC leadership discussed the QEP process and SACSCOC's reaffirmation requirements and Dr.

Ren Denton was appointed as the QEP Director. In December 2018, EGSC leadership formed the QEP Advisory Committee. Including the QEP Director, the committee consisted a broad range of representatives from faculty, staff, and administration. In this committee's early stages, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Affairs (VPASA) explained to this committee the QEP as a process in identifying a topic. The following factors were emphasized:

- The topic should emerge from EGSC's strategic plan and connect to EGSC's mission and vision statements.

- The topic should arise out of institutional data related to critical need for student success or learning.

- In compliance with the SACSCOC requirement for broad-based support of the QEP topic, faculty and staff participation would be essential throughout the process.

On February 1, 2019, a formal charge to the QEP Advisory Committee was issued. It stated SACSCOC requirements and presented a tentative timeline for the process.

In mid-February 2019, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) Director opened an online QEP forum for faculty to discuss their ideas for QEP topics. Faculty were asked to consider the following questions:

- What QEP topic would you like EGSC to implement for our next accreditation?

- How would the topic benefit our students and institution?

- How do you visualize faculty members and departments assessing your topic?

- Do you have research that would support your recommendation?

In this forum, faculty members discussed writing across the curriculum, close reading skills, and social belonging. Several links were posted to information about reading as a QEP and building communities for social belonging. Other faculty contacted the QEP Director, recommending Growth Mindset, Social Belonging, and Academic Culture as possible QEP topics. Although the product of this forum was not the actual topic, committee members had begun defining our task and centering it around our students, how we can start the process of topic

selection, and what sorts of ways that faculty could think about measuring student learning.

On February 22, 2019, the QEP Director called a meeting of the QEP Advisory Committee to review the institutional data on student success and retention rate. The committee noticed three trends that concerned them: the low success rate in selected first-year courses, gaps in demographic achievement, and the low retention rate.

The 2018 40.9% success rate in English Composition was problematic (see Table 3 below), as success in that course increases success in courses heavy in reading and writing. Faculty were not surprised by the declining success rates for English Composition. Thus, most faculty members favored a QEP topic that focused on reading or writing.

Table 3: Success Rates by Course and Semester

Semester	Overall Success Rates	MATH 1111 Success Rates	ENGL 1101 Success Rates	HIST 2111/2112 Success Rates	Learning Support Success Rates	Online Success Rates
Fall 2011	57.1%	48.5%	56.0%	53.4	34.6%	49.4%
Spring 2012	57.8%	46.9%	48.6%	52.2	34.8%	59.5%
Fall 2012	63.7%	53.9%	56.6%	58.5	47.6%	58.6%
Spring 2013	62.9%	44.9%	48.5%	53.4	43.2%	57.3%
Fall 2013	68.3%	54.8%	67.2%	53.2	49.8%	60.0%
Spring 2014	65.4%	45.7%	55.9%	58.5	53.3%	56.1%
Fall 2014	67.0%	50.1%	66.1%	63.9	56.4%	64.6%
Spring 2015	66.2%	42.7%	49.0%	63.4	55.1%	62.9%
Fall 2015	67.3%	53.8%	63.5%	56.0	57.4%	64.0%
Spring 2016	67.7%	45.5%	56.0%	54.1	55.9%	68.1%
Fall 2016	69.6%	59.1%	66.7%	53.6	61.5%	67.2%
Spring 2017	67.2%	46.2%	51.3%	56.3	51.4%	66.8%
Fall 2017	67.1%	51.1%	63.8%	56.4	52.0%	67.3%
Spring 2018	65.5%	41.0%	40.9%	55.0	36.3%	66.9%

Source: EGSC Institutional Research and Effectiveness

In response to the data, FYE Director David Strickland submitted a proposal that EGSC expand the FYE program beyond the first semester course that orients students to EGSC's policies and resources. Professor Strickland believes a broader FYE program would better build the foundation for success, particularly supporting

Math and English. The QEP committee agreed; however, members determined that a focus on reading would better serve students. Growth Mindset and lack of social belonging surfaced as psychological reasons while poor reading and communication skills were identified as contributing to the academic struggle. At this point, the committee members began to understand and appreciate the magnitude of the topic selection task, and this was evident in the discussions that continued regarding possible topics for the QEP.

At this point, there were many potential topics under review: reading, writing, social belonging or community building, academic culture, FYE, academic literacy, Socratic Method (logical thinking), professional communication, mindset, Momentum Year. Each of these topics stemmed from the data that was reviewed and focused on specific problems in the overall academic performance of the students. After a comprehensive list of the recommended topics was made, each of the ten topics was discussed in terms of what implementation and assessment would require. At this time, the committee voted to make Academic Literacy the QEP topic because it merged several recommendations while addressing a common need to increase reading and writing skills. As we can see, in retrospect, the committee was still mired in the process of topic selection because the topic continued to evolve.

In late March 2019, student groups, staff, and faculty, and EGSC Foundation members had opportunities to participate in the topic selection. For example, Dr. Brett Larson, Assistant Professor of Political Science, spoke to the Correll Scholars (an exclusive group of EGSC students who were selected and awarded scholarships based on many factors, including, grades, essays, community involvement, and personal interview). Dr. Deborah Kittrell-Mikell, Director of Academics in the Residence Halls, interviewed students on three campuses and worked with Stacy Grant, Director of Student Life to involve the Student Government Association and Student Residential Community. Dr. Denton, QEP Director, and QEP faculty committee members discussed the topics with students in their classes and invited them to the QEP Kickoff. As committee members held interviews and discussions with students, evidence emerged that students needed to feel more social belonging or wanted a professional communication focus.

To further involve the college community, the QEP Director and the VPASA then planned a QEP Kickoff event complete with door prizes for students. On Tuesday, April 16, 2019, students, staff, and faculty met on all

three campuses to review the institutional data and discuss ideas to increase student success and to hear from students what they perceived as their greatest challenge in college. A handout explaining the purpose and process of the QEP was distributed among attendees and made available through email serve lists, as well as placed in specific areas around campus. Dr. Denton, QEP Director, presented data summaries and David Gribbin, Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research, discussed components of the 2018 Complete College Annual Report (the report submitted by EGSC to the USG that reflects how the college is efficiently and effectively preparing students for the contemporary workforce in Georgia).

In addition to considering topics that would support the Complete College strategy, students, staff, and faculty explored possible tactics related to the College Completion strategy. Committee participants and stakeholders divided into groups to once again, hone topic ideas. Mindset, academic literacy, professional communication, curriculum, and advising surfaced as possible topics. The QEP Topic Development Committee reviewed all topics and measured them against the forum outcomes and the community discussions. The topics selected from this activity were mindset, academic literacy, professional communication, reading comprehension, writing across the curriculum, First Year Experience/Momentum Year, Socratic Reasoning, social belonging, and structure for success. It was becoming clear to the committee members that: 1) student learning could be evaluated and assessed through many different avenues and 2) it was a challenging task to decide which avenue would best measure EGSC students' learning.

In May 2019, the QEP Director, a committee member from the QEP, the VPASA, key staff members, and the President of EGSC met with EGSC Foundation Trustees to discuss the institution's needs, student demographics, and the role of the QEP in student success. EGSC Foundation Trustees discussed the topics that had been suggested and ranked them. Their rankings placed mindset first, while also focusing on reading and/or writing in the QEP topic. As the committee members discovered, the EGSC Foundation Trustees were supportive of enhancing student learning. Their topic suggestions helped the committee continue to refine their thinking about what the most beneficial QEP topic might resemble.

The QEP director reviewed and discussed the results from the survey and forums with the VPASA. The goal was to identify the topics that attracted the most interest. The director weighed how each of the topics fared in the

survey and forum discussions and determined that mindset and professional communications were top contenders. The QEP Topic Development Committee was informed of the results and committee members were asked to present the topics to faculty and staff during the Fall Orientation to ensure an educated vote. While the ultimate topic had yet to be determined, this step in the process allowed the QEP Director and committee members to doggedly pursue and hone the ideas that would, ultimately, lead to Student Learning Communities.

In August of 2019, through the CETL workshops, the new faculty were oriented to the QEP process and were given the handout that was distributed during the QEP Kickoff event held in April. After a brief overview of the data, new faculty were invited to participate in the discussion and vote that would take place during Fall Faculty Orientation.

During the Fall Faculty Orientation, in August 2019, the QEP Director presented an update about the QEP process to faculty and staff. QEP committee members presented information on the topics the QEP committee identified as relevant to the academic needs of students: mindset, academic literacy, and professional communication. After the presentation, faculty and staff split into groups to discuss topics and to brainstorm implementation ideas. Faculty and staff then voted on a topic through an online clicker program. The survey results were too close to call. The director and QEP Topic Development Committee members had yet to identify the topic, and they decided that they still lacked the clarity needed to commit to a topic and would continue to engage in the topic selection process.

Soon after the Fall Orientation, the QEP Topic Development Committee met and discussed potential topics. Some committee members were concerned that the faculty's desire for reading had not had proper consideration, since it was combined with Academic Literacy. A few committee members were hesitant to select a topic based on a survey that was too close to call. The committee agreed to review the data and invite David Gribbin, the Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research, to the next meeting for a discussion. Mr. Gribbin suggested conducting a survey of a shortlist of topics, with one- to two-sentence descriptions for each. The QEP Topic Development Committee agreed on five topics: mindset, academic literacy, professional communication, reading comprehension, and FYE. Mr. Gribbin distributed the survey among faculty, staff, and students and collected the results.

After the survey, the QEP Director asked the Committee for Institutional Effectiveness (IE), a standing committee of the college, to host a meeting to review and discuss the survey results and mediate discussions about the top choices to ensure the topic selected best aligns with student needs and the strategic plan of the institution. The QEP committee learned that mindset and professional communication were top contenders, but, unanimously, the QEP committee rejected professional communication because it had the weakest connection to the initiatives and strategic plan of the college. The decision to select a topic that targeted retention and graduation rates was unanimous and supported by the IE committee.

During this meeting, the IE committee also introduced a report from an outside reviewer who recommended a focus on the First-Year Experience. FYE Director, David Strickland, agreed that EGSC would benefit from an enhanced FYE program that would include, but not be limited to, a restructured CATS (the required Freshman Seminar course; Critical and Academic Thinking for Success).

The QEP Topic Development Committee discussed the report and concluded that it would be appropriate to implement a reading and writing focus through the FYE, which would address the faculty's top concerns about literacy and structural redesigns. Moreover, the new Interim Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs (VPASA) informed the QEP committee that EGSC will take steps to redesign their FYE program. Committee members recognized if the QEP committee were to select the FYE as a topic, it could play a large role in the institution's strategic plan to facilitate students completing college. Committee members supported streamlining the FYE redesign and the QEP topic and discussed possible goals and outcomes for the FYE topic. The vote included the Momentum Year initiative as a focus. Some committee members advocated for mindset as a topic, because mindset was a consistent top contender throughout the process and played an important part of David Strickland's, Director of FYE, vision for the FYE. Developing a Growth Mindset among faculty and students had the potential to impact MY and student success. The committee members believed that some progress was being made. They knew, at this time, that students' belief systems (as agreed with the discussion of Mindset) would be included in the final topic.

At this point, a final selection survey was sent to QEP Topic Development Committee members. The QEP Topic Development Committee voted to focus on students' first-year experience. The QEP director shifted into the

planning and implementation stage of the project with a new committee approved by EGSC SACSCOC leadership team. The new committee, The QEP Advisory Committee, represented faculty, staff, and administration.

In mid-October, the QEP director met with the institution's QEP Leadership Team and reported that the QEP Topic Development Committee completed its comprehensive process that produced the topic First-Year Experience. A discussion about the topic led to a realization that the QEP could facilitate one aspect of the FYE redesign instead of undertaking the entire project. It made the QEP project manageable on its own timeline, instead of being reliant on the FYE Committee and its timeline. It also focused assessment on one component, making the outcomes for that one component easier to isolate and track. At the end of October 2019, the QEP Director met with both the QEP Topic Development Committee and the QEP Advisory Committee to inform them that she and the QEP Leadership Team believed that focusing attention on one component of the FYE would deliver a much more effective QEP topic, as energy could be put into one focus area that would have a significant impact on retention and graduation.

After reviewing various FYE components, the QEP Topic Development Committee, finally, gravitated toward those topics involving faculty-student interaction. Learning Support redesign was briefly mentioned, but the committee focused on the New Student Orientation, FY Seminars as a focus on developing close reading skills, and Student Learning Communities. At this point, the committees voted to select one of those three topics. Student Learning Communities received the most support and was the FYE element most in need of attention in EGSC's ongoing efforts to improve student success and student learning. *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate* was adopted as the refined topic for EGSC's QEP.

Section VI: QEP Development, Support and Engagement – 7.2 (b)

Broad-based support for the QEP's development flowed naturally out of engagement with EGSC's constituencies during the topic selection process detailed in Section V. Broad-based support for a QEP topic related to the FYE program was already high during the topic selection process. As documented in the previous section, QEP topic proposals from faculty and staff were heavily weighted toward initiatives aimed at improving the first-year experience and/or its associated low rates of course-level success and persistence. EGSC's long-held interests in initiatives that improved student learning and student success influenced the early choices made by the QEP Director and the QEP Topic Development Committee. Furthermore, the numerous iterations of reviews and reconsiderations of potential QEP topics engaged a wide array of campus constituencies broadly and solidified their commitment at the end of that process to a QEP focused on creating SLCs to improve student success and student learning outcomes.

As the QEP process moved from selection to planning and implementation, new committees were formed, consisting of faculty, staff, and administrators. Information on the committee structure is discussed in detail in Section VIII.

Although this focused QEP will not affect all EGSC students, it targets EGSC freshmen, traditional and non-traditional, at all three academic sites, especially students at the highest risk of not succeeding in their first year. Broad-based involvement of students is expected, based on the projection that QEP's planned expansion of SLCs will grow from zero, presently, to twenty-four per semester by year five. Approximately 4/% of EGSC freshmen will be engaged in the SLCs by spring 2025.

Table 4: Projection of SLCs Offered Freshmen Based on Fall 2020 Enrollment Figures

semester	Number of SLCs	Number of Student Participants	Percentage of Students
Spring 2021	7	168	~14%
Fall 2021	8	192	~16%
Spring 2022	10	240	~20%
Fall 2022	12	288	~24%
Spring 2023	15	360	~30%
Fall 2023	18	432	~36%
Spring 2024	20	480	~40%
Fall 2024	22	528	~44%
Spring 2025	24	576	~48%

Thus, student support is built into implementation and annual assessments of SLCs. Promotional material geared toward students will begin circulation in the Fall 2020 semester to pique student interest and solicit enrollment in SLCs from returning freshmen. Members of the QEP Committee will meet with student leaders for feedback (also detailed in Section VII). Should this QEP demonstrate that SLCs have substantial impact on improving student learning and student success, continued expansion of SLCs will likely occur after the QEP is completed.

The engagement of faculty in teaching SLCs is also expected to be broad-based. During Spring 2020 semester, the QEP Implementation Committee recruited fourteen faculty members across the three instructional sites to pilot SLCs for Spring 2021 semester. Many faculty members have expressed enthusiasm for teaching SLCs. As is indicated in Section VIII, 136 SLCs will be proposed and offered over the course of the next five years, from Spring 2021 to Spring 2025 as part of the QEP. Thus, faculty engagement in teaching SLCs reflects wide-ranging support.

Staff support and feedback played a crucial role in the QEP selection process. Continued support involves the coordinated input from the Director of Financial Accounting, who advises the Budget Committee. The Director of Financial Accounting receives feedback early in the academic year regarding the budget allocated by the state and shaped by the President and the Vice President of Business Affairs. Similarly, the QEP subcommittees work with the Registrar's Office, the Admissions Office, ACE (Academic Center for Excellence – the tutorial center at EGSC) Directors, the Counseling Office, and Advising in determining the logistics of enrollment, add/drop and withdrawal policies, and student advising.

As evidenced by the members who serve on EGSC Foundation Board of Trustees, the College strives to maintain excellent community communication and involvement. EGSC and the surrounding communities share a dedication to student success and improved student learning initiatives. The QEP Communications Committee informs and engages the community through marketing and promotional materials targeting high schools, churches, and community organizations. Interviews, press releases, and other communications also inform the community about EGSC's new SLCs.

In conclusion, *Learning to Associate* aligns with the College commitment to improve student learning and student success—a commitment that is reflected in faculty and staff attendance at Momentum 2020, the participation in Chancellor's Learning Scholar Program (a USG system program designed to train select faculty using proven methods to increase student success and retention), and the G2C course redesigns. *Learning to Associate* has the broad-based support from students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community.

Section VII: QEP Focus on Improving Student Success and Student Learning Outcomes 7.2 (c)

Just as the topic selection was an iterative process of creating, evaluating, reconsidering, refining, and re-evaluating potential options for the focus of the QEP, EGSC personnel were engaged in a similar pattern of cycles in the identification and refinement of the QEP's goals, expected student success outcomes (SSOs), and expected student learning outcomes (SLOs). The final product of that process (see the final goals, SSOs and SLOs in the discussion of phase 4 below) is a set of expected SSOs and SLOs that are specific, measurable, and appropriate for a well-focused QEP. They contain reasonable goals or targets for the improvement of each student success or student learning outcome that were derived from analyses of baseline data and reasonable estimates of expected improvements.

The topic selected for this QEP is Student Learning Communities. In order to understand how the SSOs and SLOs associated with that topic were eventually selected, the narrative below is provided.

Narrowing and Sharpening the Focus and Scope of the QEP

Earlier versions of the identification of QEP goals and expected outcomes focused largely on how the learning process or learning environment would change as a function of implementing the QEP and not enough on how student success or student learning would improve. That earlier lack of focus has since been addressed, and the principal goals of the QEP now pertain to specific expected improvements in student SSOs and SLOs.

Even though compliance with 7.2 (c) does not focus on goals and expectations for changes in the learning environment or learning processes, EGSC has included in its assessment plans supplemental efforts to determine whether SLCs are designed and operating properly or should be improved. These supplemental assessments are important, because when SLCs are not functioning well, the expected outcomes of greatest concern in a QEP for student success and student learning are not likely to be achieved.

Similarly, the scope of the QEP has become more focused as the QEP topic was refined. At an earlier time in this process, the QEP topic was broader and attempted to encompass a wide range of reforms underway in the EGSC First-Year Experience (FYE) programming (see Section VI above). That broad focus on the FYE was

narrowed later to the current focus on SLCs. SLCs are currently missing from EGSC's array of FYE initiatives, and the QEP increases the effectiveness of the FYE.

Earlier iterations of this narrowed focus included plans to institute SLCs involving selected first-year courses and to eventually create SLCs for other freshman and sophomore courses. That plan focused too much on changing the learning environment in as many ways as possible and not enough on staying focused on the success and learning of first-year students in their selected first-year courses. While such expansion of SLCs to other types of courses may ultimately happen, it is no longer included as part of the QEP. As a result, detecting the effects of SLCs on selected first-year courses taken by freshmen can be maximized.

The scope of the QEP was also narrowed regarding its early plans to examine the impact of freshman SLCs on the improvement of three-year graduation rates (or a modified transfer/graduation rate). The more recent decision to examine the first-year retention rates was done for several reasons. Most importantly, the five-year window of the QEP, especially with its first year being devoted to a relatively small pilot testing of SLCs, is too short a time for the institution to be able to detect the effects of SLC opportunities on graduation rates. Studying the effects of SLCs on first-year retention rates is more feasible and more likely to produce expected effects since that persistence rate is closer to when freshmen engage in the SLC experience.

Another reason not to focus on graduation rates has to do with the EGSC educational mission. Most students come to EGSC to earn academic credits toward transferring to a four-year college or university. Many of those students transfer in less than three years and before completing an associate degree at EGSC. Traditional definitions of the second-year retention rate and the three-year graduation rate do not take such early transfer interests into account as successful elements of student persistence. Instead, they are treated as instances of student attrition, making such measurements less meaningful to EGSC than the first-year retention rate. Persistence rates after the first year are more useful for EGSC, since students need to earn at least 30 semester hours of college credit with a 2.0 grade point average (4 point GPA scale) before they are eligible to transfer, and they often have not done so by the end of their first academic year. The QEP Implementation Committee agreed that it is better to stay focused on first-year retention rates rather than longer terms of persistence to graduation.

Identifying Expected Student Success Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes

The process for identifying the QEP goals, SSOs and SLOs progressed through four distinct phases. The final version appears in the discussion of Phase IV below. The phases were as follows:

Phase 1: Once the topic was narrowed, an initial set of outcomes for SLCs was developed, with the committee anticipating further revision. They were:

Student Success Outcomes:

- SSO 1: Students will connect to a network of peers, faculty, and advisors for support in persisting in their degree programs.

- SSO 2: Students will use the ACE, library staff, and faculty mentors to develop the skills that they need for course success and building momentum toward graduation.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- SLO 1: Students will develop qualitative, analytical, and communication skills through collaborated efforts.

- SLO 2: Students will integrate information from multiple disciplines to form a strong foundation of knowledge that supports long-term learning.

These outcome statements focused heavily on student behavior in the learning process and not on how well students succeeded in SLC courses or on persistence measures. SLOs were overly broad, general, and vague, and some aspects of them appeared unmeasurable.

Phase 2: In January 2020, adjustments were made, and by mid-January, the Steering Committee had the following goals and learning outcomes:

Goals for Student Learning Communities: *Learning to Associate*

- Creating opportunities that will connect students to a network of peers and faculty for support in persisting in their degree programs

- Developing a curriculum designed to integrate knowledge across the disciplines and promote and strengthen quality academic engagement

- Increasing student use of the ACE, library staff, and faculty mentors to facilitate accessibility of campus resources, foster a shared sense of community, and develop the skills needed for course success, even as students gain momentum toward graduation

Student Learning Outcomes for Student Learning Communities: *Learning to Associate*

- SLO 1: Students will integrate information from multiple disciplines to form a strong foundation of knowledge that supports long-term learning.

- SLO 2: Students will develop qualitative, analytical, and communication skills through collaborative efforts.

- SLO 3: Students will demonstrate personal growth as they are exposed to the different viewpoints and experiences of their peers.

These goals and outcomes were primarily aimed at changing aspects of the learning environment. Very little was said specifically regarding how student success would be impacted. SLOs remained overly broad, general, and vague, and aspects of them appeared unmeasurable.

Phase 3: After a rigorous planning process, the QEP Implementation Committee returned to the QEP goals and SLOs to ensure that the goals and outcomes reflected the plan and were concise and measurable. A lengthy discussion and workshop produced the next iteration of goals, SSOs, and SLOs entitled, *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate.*

The goals for *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate* are to increase student success and persistence by

- Providing opportunities for the type of collaborative learning that develops integrative thinking,

- Promoting active-learning pedagogies and teaching practices that engage learners,

- Cultivating connections between students, faculty, and staff, and

- Enabling students to identify and use campus academic support resources.

These goals target specific student success and student learning outcomes:

Student Success Outcomes:

- SSO 1: As actively engaged learners, students in student learning communities will have lower DFWI rates than students not in learning communities.

- SSO 2: Showing persistence, students in learning communities will return until they complete transfer or graduation requirements at a higher rate than students not in learning communities.

- SSO 3: Forming academic support networks, students in linked courses will increase their use of academic support resources such as the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and library.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- SSO 1: Students will develop quantitative, qualitative, analytical, and/or communication skills through collaborative efforts and engaged learning.

- SSO 2: Students will increase their problem-solving skills by integrating information across disciplines and synthesizing quantitative, qualitative, and/or analytical skills.

- SSO 3: Students will develop metacognitive skills, fostering persistence and personal growth necessary for cultivating life-long learning.

While this iteration of goals and outcomes contained several improvements, it also retained some weaknesses comparable to earlier versions. A major improvement involved the reformulation of SSOs, two of which had a stronger focus on improving specific measures of student success, such as lowered DFWI rates and higher persistence to graduation rates. However, specific goals for such improvements were not identified. The new opening statement for QEP goals called for increased student success and persistence, but then attributed those gains to four other goals for the learning environment and its processes for learning. Increasing the use of academic support services appears to have more to do with enhancing the learning process/environment than representing a student success outcome. The SLOs remained overly general, vague, inappropriate, and unmeasurable.

Phase 4: Once the initial draft of the QEP was completed in May 2020, it was reviewed by EGSC's accreditation consultant. He identified the strengths and weaknesses of the QEP, especially in its overall focus and the identification of its expected outcomes for student success and student learning. The focus of the QEP expected

outcomes was honed and adopted by the QEP Committee.

Student Success Outcomes of the QEP

- **SSO 1: Improved Success in Selected First-Year Course Completion**

  Students attempting selected first-year courses in Student Learning Communities will have 15% more passing grades (ABC) and proportionally fewer final DFWI grades in the grade distributions for those courses than students attempting selected first-year courses that were not part of SLCs.

- **SSO 2: Improved Success in First-Year Academic Performance**

  Students who began at EGSC and who participated in a Student Learning Community during that first year will have an average cumulative GPA that is at least a half a point (.5) higher than the average cumulative GPA of similar students who had not participated in a SLC.

- **SSO 3: Improved Success in First-Year Retention**

  Students who participated in Student Learning Communities will have first-year retention rates several percentage points higher than those of students who did not participate in a SLC.

Student Learning Outcomes of the QEP

- **SLO 1: Improved Learning Achievement in Passed SLC Courses**

  Students who pass selected first-year courses (C or better, DFWIs excluded) as part of SLCs will learn more and thereby earn higher passing grades than students who pass selected first-year courses which were not part of SLCs, and those gains in learning will be reflected by a half a point (.5) higher GPA for the SLC students as calculated by the passing grades they and their comparator group received in those courses.

- **SLO 2: Improved *Learning to Associate* in SLCs**

  At least 75% of students who participated in a Student Learning Community will rate their SLC learning experience positively for *Learning to Associate* on each of the five related SLC Course Evaluation items, and their average *Learning to Associate* scale score will increase significantly from Year 2 to Year 5 of the QEP.

Explication of Phase 4 SSO and SLO Improvements

SSO 1: Improved Success in Selected First-Year Course Completion

Successfully completing selected first-year courses in the first year of college is an important component of student success. This previously stated expected outcome becomes more specific when course completion is mentioned and quantitative goals for SLC success and DFWI reduction are included. ABC and DFWI rates are strong and direct measures of achieved course completion success. Selecting a 15% targeted increase for ABC rates and a corresponding reduction for DFWIs in SLC selected first-year course grade distributions is reasonably small at this point, since EGSC has no experience offering SLCs. That target could change with experience as EGSC progresses from year 1 to year 5 in its QEP implementation. Baseline data on the ABC and DFWI rates for each of the six selected first-year courses, separately for Fall 2019 and Fall 2016-Fall 2019, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: EGSC Key Freshman Courses with Highest DFWI Rates

Selected Freshman Courses with Highest DFWI	DFWI Rates for Fall 2019	DFWI Average Fall 2016-Fall 2019
MATH 1001 (Quantitative Skills)	37%	41%
ENGL 1101 (Composition I)	43%	39%
ENGL 1102 (Composition II)	38%	39%
HIST 2111 (U.S. History I)	40%	42%
HIST 2112 (U.S. History II)	37%	40%
BIO 1103 (Intro to Biology I)	33%	36%

SSO 2: Improved Success in First Year Academic Performance

This is an important expected outcome because the extent of academic success that first-year students experience often influences their decisions to persist or drop out of college. This is especially true at EGSC, since so many students have the goal of transferring into AU or GaSouU after not being eligible for freshman admission to those universities. Transfer admission standards depend largely on the strength of the student's cumulative GPA after the first 30 or more semester hours of completed college coursework (i.e., at the end of the year as freshmen). Many of the strengths of the previously cited expected student success outcomes apply here as well. The outcome is very specific and includes a quantitative goal for the better academic performance of SLC students over non-SLC

students. Measuring the end of academic year GPAs is accomplished easily. And those GPAs are strong and direct measures of student success in the first year of collegiate studies. Selecting a targeted difference of a half point in the average first-year GPA is reasonably small, yet, sufficiently measurable for a new academic program. This target could change with experience as EGSC progresses from year 1 to year 5 in its QEP implementation. Baseline data for average cumulative GPAs at the end of Spring semester 2020 for students who were new in Fall 2019 (or Summer 2019) on each of the three campuses and for EGSC overall are provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Spring 2020 Overall GPA of Fall 2019 New Freshmen

EGSC Academic Site	Overall GPA
Swainsboro	2.54
Statesboro	2.57
Augusta	2.74
Total Average	**2.58**

Source: EGSC Institutional Research

SSO 3: Improved Success in First-Year Retention

First-year retention rates for new undergraduate students are vitally important at most colleges since student attrition is greatest during or at the end of the first year of study. First-year retention rates, as defined in Section III, are measurable. Retention rates are strong, direct measures of persistence and student success after the first year of college. Selecting a targeted difference of a few percentage points in the first-year retention rates is reasonable given the difficulty of moving retention rates up and because this is a new initiative. This target could change as EGSC progresses from year 1 to year 5 in its QEP implementation.

Baseline data on first-year retention rates of 2017 first-year students who returned in Fall 2018 are provided in Table 7 below.

Table 7: EGSC Fall Cohorts: First-Time, Full-Time Freshmen 2017-2018

Academic Site / Year	Cohort Size	Spring Retention	Retained 1 year	Retained 2 Years
Swainsboro				
Fall 2017	318	288 (90.6%)	160 (50.3%)	66 (20.8%)
Fall 2018	371	328 (88.4%)	184 (49.6%)	N/A
Statesboro				
Fall 2017	418	359 (85.9%)	209 (50.0%)	68 (16.3%)
Fall 2018	444	377 (84.9%)	228 (51.4%)	N/A
Augusta				
Fall 2017	166	142 (85.5%)	88 (53.0%)	30 (18.1%)
Fall 2018	**150**	**122 (81.3%)**	**74 (49.3%)**	**N/A**

SLO 1: Improved Learning Achievement in Passed SLC Courses

This is the first of two replacement SLOs for those previously identified. This one addresses the level of learning achievement in selected first-year courses. It specifically indicates how the outcome will be measured and cites a quantitative goal for its achievement. Since it relies on instructor evaluations of student learning and performance in the selected first-year courses to determine whether an A, B, or C is earned, it is a direct measure of the SLO. Selecting a targeted learning achievement difference of .5 GPA is reasonable, given that this is a new initiative. This target could change with experience as EGSC progresses from year 1 to year 5 in its QEP implementation. Baseline data on the GPAs of students completing each of the selected first-year courses successfully on each campus and overall for Spring 2020, none of which were in SLCs, are provided in Table 8 on the following page.

Table 8: Spring 2020 Cumulative GPA of Freshmen Students Completing High DFWI Courses

Course	Swainsboro	Statesboro	Augusta	Overall
Quantitative Skills and Reasoning	2.04	2.19	2.45	2.18
ENGL Comp I	2.48	2.57	2.72	2.56
ENGL Comp II	3.00	2.97	2.93	2.98
U.S. History I	2.65	2.51	2.96	2.66
U.S. History II	3.03	2.65	3.23	2.89
Intro to BIO I	2.66	2.59	2.96	2.67
Intro to BIO II	3.03	2.82	3.32	2.96
Total Average	**2.54**	**2.61**	**2.74**	**2.58**

Source: EGSC Institutional Research

SLO 2: Improved Learning How to Associate in SLCs

This is the second of two replacement SLOs for those previously identified. This one addresses achievements in the various aspects of *Learning to Associate*, which focuses on the enhanced learning that occurs in SLCs. It indicates how the outcome will be measured and cites a quantitative goal for its achievement. Since it relies on self-reported learning by the students in end-of-course evaluations specifically designed to assess *Learning to Associate* in SLCs, it is an indirect measure of the learning achievement. Selecting a targeted learning achievement level of 75% is reasonable, given that this is a new academic initiative. This target could change as EGSC progresses from year 1 to year 5 in its QEP implementation. Baseline data on such self-reported learning outcomes does not exist here since EGSC has not offered SLCs previously.

Section VIII: Resource Commitment: Committee and Budget Allocations 7.2 (d)

As the SACSCOC *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Recertification* (2020) indicates, "resources" are expected to be much more broadly considered and described here than monetary expenditures alone. Most importantly, this section begins with descriptions of the human resources committed by EGSC toward the success of the QEP. These individuals include the QEP Director and her support staff and the many faculty and staff involved in a diverse array of QEP planning and oversight committees, administrative and academic support positions, and instructor positions in the SLCs. Their identities, qualifications, and responsibilities for initiating, implementing, and completing the QEP are presented. The scope of expected SLC developments and how those SLCs will operate and be evaluated for appropriate content are described next. A timeline for the QEP's advancement from commencement to finish is subsequently provided. Required physical resources beyond what already exists are minimal and discussed briefly. And finally, the substantial annual and cumulative financial commitments of the college to the support and success of the QEP are outlined and explained.

QEP Director and Support Staff

Dr. Denton, the QEP Director, is an Associate Professor of English with a Ph.D. in Literary and Cultural Studies. The VPASA named her the G2C team lead and liaison for English, nominated her to serve as a Chancellor's Learning Scholar, and offered her the position of the Director for the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). The VPASA supported Dr. Denton's nomination to direct EGSC's QEP.

Dr. Denton has benefited from training that she received from USG workshops and seminars for the G2C and Chancellor's Learning Scholars (CLS) (Appendix C).

Dr. Denton serves as the Director of the CETL and the Director of the QEP, which are complementary roles. As mentioned above, the research that keeps her informed of teaching trends in higher education feeds into the knowledge that she needs to guide a team into creating well-functioning SLCs that entail active-learning and high impact practices (Appendix E). She also uses the CETL D2L course as a resource to hold QEP online

discussions and disseminate information about the QEP. As the CETL Director, she planned and led faculty QEP workshops and presentations to the faculty and staff.

As the Director of the QEP, Dr. Denton has researched pedagogical trends, QEP topics, FYE programs, SLC structures, and institutional data. She has become familiar with institutional goals and strategies, USG's College 2025 (Complete College strategies), and the SACSCOC *Handbook for Institutions Seeking Recertification* (2020) She has attended meetings for the college SACSCOC Committee. She also attended the SACSCOC meeting in New Orleans, LA, where she participated in the QEP Bootcamp prior to the meeting, and she attended the SACSCOC's Institute in Dallas, TX. In October 2019, she served as an observer on a SACSCOC Onsite Reaffirmation Committee, where she observed a QEP going through the review process. She has been an active contributor and participant in the QEP Topic Selection Committee and the QEP Implementation Committee and continues to be an active contributor and participant in the QEP Advisory Committee (formerly known as the Implementation Committee). She has presented information and data to the faculty, staff, students, and Board of Trustees of the EGSC Foundation. She has served as the facilitator between the President's Office, the Office of Academic Affairs, and the QEP committees, even as she has chaired the QEP committee meetings and mediated topic-selection discussions, organized and led a QEP kick-off event and QEP workshops, and ensured the planning process met the SACSOC standards.

Dr. Denton also selected, recruited, and nominated new committee members when the need for committee structural changes became apparent. Even as she remained focused on student-oriented outcomes, she has taken a major lead in planning the implementation process and creating proposal applications, rubrics, and the Teach-Learn Evaluation specifically for SLCs. She has also advocated for an award system for students in SLCs and faculty teaching them. Dr. Denton has ensured that each SSO and SLO reflects the purposes of SLCS and connects to EGSC's mission, goals, and strategy, even as she has taken the lead role in writing the QEP report and undertaking the revisions.

Dr. Denton has had a strong support network consisting of Dr. Robert Boehmer, President of EGSC; Dr. Sandra Sharman, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs; David Gribbin, Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research; Mary Smith, Chief of Staff and Legal Counsel; David Strickland,

Professor of Sociology and Chair of the Literature Review Committee; Dr. Thomas Upchurch, Dr. Mary Waalkes, and Professor John Gleissner, who served as key leaders for the QEP Advisory Committee; Dr. Jim Brady, Chair of Communications; Dr. Carlos Cunha, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences; Norma Kennedy, Associate Vice President for Executive Affairs; Dr. Yelena White, Associate Professor of Physics, and Courtney Joiner, Associate Professor of History, as references for SACSOC standards; Dr. Brett Larson, Assistant Professor of Political Science, who kept the meeting minutes; Dr. John Giebfried, Assistant Professor of History, who served as her proxy at drafting meetings; and Antré Drummer, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, who turned data into charts and maintained the QEP online file for documents related to the QEP planning process.

The QEP subcommittees focused on different aspects of the implementation and assessment process and are listed and discussed below.

The Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr. Carlos Cunha, and the incoming Dean of the School of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Dr. David Chevalier, champion the QEP as mid-level administrators. Campus Coordinators for Humanities and Social Sciences, Courtney Joiner in Swainsboro and Dr. Thomas Upchurch in Statesboro, assist Dr. Cunha in scheduling the SLCs at the three sites. Dr. Damon Andrews, Chair of the Mathematics Department, assists Dr. Chevalier in the scheduling of math- and science-based SLCs. David Gribbin, Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research, and David Strickland, Professor of Sociology, assist with assessment and reporting. Sheila Wentz, Director of Financial Accounting, ensures the QEP budget aligns with institutional commitment of funds.

Engaged EGSC Faculty, Staff, and Administrators in QEP Committees

As various needs arose, a broad array of QEP subcommittees were formed. The committees are listed below.

The QEP Leadership Team is composed of senior administrative staff and the QEP Director. The QEP Leadership Team met monthly, and when needed, to discuss the status of the QEP and to ensure that it would meet the SACSCOC accreditation requirements. The President also met with the QEP Leadership Team after he reviewed the first copy of the rough draft. He explained to the committee that professional rigor was expected

from them during the revision process.

QEP Leadership Team:
Dr. Robert Boehmer, President
Dr. Sandra Sharman, Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs
Mary Smith, Chief of Staff and Legal Counsel
Norma Kennedy, Associate Vice President of Executive Affairs
David Gribbin, Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research
Dr. Ren Denton, Director of Quality Enhancement Plan

The QEP Topic Development Committee consists of faculty with proven records for their commitment to

improved learning and student success. The details of the duties of the Topic Development Committee is

reported in Section V.

QEP Topic Development Committee:
Ren Denton, QEP Director, Director of Quality Enhancement Plan
Courtney Joiner, Academic Program Coordinator, Swainsboro, Associate Professor of History
Dr. Tori Kearns, Professor of Psychology
Dr. Deborah Kittrell-Mikell, Director of Academic Support Services
Christian Kraus, Assistant Professor of English
Dr. Brett Larson, Assistant Professor of Political Science
David Strickland, FYE Director, Professor of Sociology
Dr. Mary Waalkes, Professor of History
Dr. Yelena White, Professor of Physics

Because there are so many moving parts to creating new learning communities, it was clear that there also

needed to be site leaders and faculty representatives for the three campuses. These individuals represent the

three instructional sites and make up the QEP Advisory Committee. They are responsible for implementing

personnel and administrative details on their respective academic site.

QEP Advisory Committee:
Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English (Statesboro site)
Dr. John Giebfried, Secretary of the QEP, Assistant Professor of History (Statesboro site)
Dr. Mary Waalkes, Professor of History (Augusta site)
Dr. Thomas Upchurch, Academic Program Coordinator, Statesboro, Professor of History (Statesboro site)
David Altamirano, Associate Professor of Sociology (Statesboro site)
Dr. James Brady, Associate Professor of Public Speaking and Communications (Augusta Site)
Dr. Carlos Cunha, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences (Swainsboro campus)
Antré Drummer, Assistant Professor of Math (Statesboro Site)
Courtney Joiner, Academic Program Coordinator, Swainsboro, Associate Professor of History (Swainsboro Campus)
Dr. Tori Kearns, Professor of Psychology (Statesboro site)
Christian Kraus, Assistant Professor of English (Swainsboro Campus)
Dr. Brett Larson, Assistant Professor of Political Science (Swainsboro Campus – left EGSC after Spring Semester 2020)
Dr. Deborah Kittrell-Mikell, Director of Academic Support Services (Swainsboro Campus)

Mike Moran, Director of Admissions (Swainsboro Campus)
Karen Murphree, Director of Learning Commons (Statesboro Campus)
David Strickland, Professor of Sociology (Swainsboro Campus)
Dr. Yelena White, Professor of Physics (Swainsboro Campus)

During implementation planning, a QEP Steering Committee was formed, including the Director of the

QEP and representatives from each campus acting as liaisons between the QEP Director and the implementation

committee members on their respective campuses. The QEP Director and Vice President of Academic and

Student Affairs elected to restructure the committee and add new members, particularly those in key roles that

would be crucial to the implementation of SLCs.

QEP Steering Committee:
Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English
John Gleissner, Instructor of Math (Statesboro site)
Natasha Goss, Assistant Professor of Accounting (Swainsboro campus)
Dr. Thomas Upchurch, Academic Program Coordinator, Statesboro, Professor of History (Statesboro site)
Dr. Mary Waalkes, Professor of History (Augusta site)

The duties of the Literature Review Committee include researching and reviewing the extant literature on

Student Learning Communities and writing the Review of the Literature for the QEP.

Literature Review Committee:
David Strickland (Chair), Professor of Sociology
Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English
Dr. Mary Waalkes, Professor of History

The Application Committee will review the faculty proposals for participating in an SLC. The committee

members review the applications and evaluate how the proposed linked courses might contribute to a significant

interdisciplinary experience.

Application Committee:
Dr. Mary Waalkes (Chair), Professor of History
Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English
Dr. Thomas Upchurch, Academic Program Coordinator, Statesboro, Professor of History
Mr. John Gleissner, Instructor of Math
Dr. Carlos Cunha, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences
Courtney Joiner, Academic Program Coordinator, Swainsboro, Associate Professor of History

The Assessment Committee will evaluate the syllabi of the linked courses, faculty assessment reports, and

student evaluations to determine if the students are meeting the SLOs and SSOs. The QEP Director, who is on

the Assessment Committee, will also assess if the SLCs are functioning the way they are supposed to function

and communicate her findings to the Steering Committee and FYE Director. Details of the Assessment Plan are

in Section IX.

> **Assessment Committee:**
> Dr. John Giebfried (Chair), Assistant Professor of History
> Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English
> Dr. Thomas Upchurch, Academic Program Coordinator, Statesboro, Professor of History
> Courtney Joiner, Academic Program Coordinator, Swainsboro, Associate Professor of History
> David Strickland, Professor of Sociology
> Dr. Yelena White, Professor of Physics

The duties of the Budget Committee are to create and manage the QEP budget. The Budget Committee

ensures that the QEP remains within budget while demonstrating EGSC commitment to the QEP. The details of

the budget are found in this section.

> **Budget Committee**
> Dr. Thomas Upchurch (Chair), Academic Program Coordinator, Statesboro, Professor of History
> John Gleissner, Instructor of Math
> Antré Drummer, Assistant Professor of Math

To publicize the QEP on campus and in the community, the Communications Committee was organized

to update social media, select promotional items, facilitate press releases, and develop a strategy to disseminate

QEP general information to EGSC constituents. The Communications Committee also works with campus

resources and local and digital communication resources to publicize the QEP. The Chair of the

Communications works with the QEP Director in maintaining the QEP webpage on the EGSC website.

> **Communications Committee:**
> Dr. James Brady (Chair), Associate Professor of Public Speaking and Communications
> Ed Rideout, Part-time Instructor of Public Speaking and Communications
> Harley Strickland Smith, Communications Coordinator
> Katelyn Moore, Marketing Coordinator
> Dr. Deborah Kittrell-Mikell, Director of Academic Support Services

The Awards Committee will design and implement a process for selecting self-nominated student work

that reflects interdisciplinary connections while meeting the SLOs for the QEP. The Awards Committee also

identifies faculty members who best demonstrate interdisciplinary teaching.

> **Awards Committee:**
> Dr. Deborah Vess (Chair), Professor of History
> David Altamirano, Associate Professor of Sociology
> Dr. James Brady, Associate Professor of Public Speaking and Communications
> Anthony DiLorenzo, Assistant Professor of History

Dr. Rabia Hakima, Assistant Professor of English
Tori Kearns, Professor of Psychology
Christian Kraus, Assistant Professor of English
David Strickland, Professor of Sociology
Kathy Whitaker, Associate Professor of English
Christine Xie, Associate Professor of Math

The Writing Committee organized and composed the thirteen sections of the QEP.

Writing Committee
Dr. Ren Denton, QEP Director, CETL Director, Associate Professor of English
David Strickland, Professor of Sociology

In addition to the extensive array of committees developed for the QEP, the letter of support from EGSC President Boehmer demonstrates that EGSC is committed to marshaling the full array of resources to successfully carry out this QEP (Appendix J).

Students

With a student body of approximately 3,000, we anticipate a participation rate of about 14% in the first year, increasing to approximately 48% of freshmen over five years. We expect an increase in student demand for SLCs, as student awards encourage them to participate. The marketing and communication plans include social media posts, articles in the school newspaper *The Hoopee Bird*, a targeted advisement campaign, email messages and phone calls from the President, discussions of SLCs in our required freshman orientation course CATS, local radio spots, fliers and brochures handed out during orientations, and signs and banners displayed around the three instructional sites. The financial resources allocated to the recruitment of students primarily will be incurred in these last three items involving commercial advertisements and promotional literature. The dollar amount anticipated is estimated to be $23,000 in the 2020 lead-up to launch in Spring 2021, and the amount thereafter is approximately $1,000 per year, for a total of nearly $28,000 over five years.

Faculty

The investment of time and effort that faculty make in redesigning their course(s) to be part of an SLC is substantial. To compensate faculty for participation in SLCs, the college offers a stipend of $500 per semester/$1,000 per year. Faculty are encouraged to include their participation in an SLC as "Service to the College" in their *Faculty Annual Report,* even as their participation is counted favorably toward tenure and/or

promotion. We also encourage faculty participation in SLCs at faculty meetings, through email messages, and by word-of-mouth recruitment efforts. Part-time faculty are encouraged, but not required, to participate. A total expenditure on this aspect of the QEP is estimated at $137,000.

Administrative and Advisory Expenditures

The FYE Director, the CETL Director, and the VPAA collaborate to identify experts for professional development as needed. Moreover, the CETL Director works with the FYE Director and the VPASA in planning and organizing workshop or seminar opportunities for professional development in the areas of teaching and assessing SLCs. Resources are provided on the CETL's learning management system (D2L). Also, as needed, EGSC will engage experts in one or more areas of QEP development, implementation, and/or assessment to train administrative staff and/or faculty. This expense is shared with the CETL (see Physical Resources for details). A final expenditure involving human resources related to faculty development is that of funding professional development opportunities for faculty and/or administrative staff. The amount of $1,200 per year is budgeted for paying conference registration, lodging, travel, and per diem costs, for a total of $6,000 over five years.

QEP Leadership Team and Administrative Staff

The QEP Director already receives one course release in the spring and fall as the CETL director. For her to assume the major responsibility of leading the QEP, her teaching load is reduced by one additional course in the spring and fall semesters and she receives a salary supplement of $2,340 per semester or $4,680 per year. The cost of replacing her in the classroom with part-time faculty is $4,680 per year, for a total expenditure of $9,360 per year, amounting to $46,000 over five years.

In addition to the Director, there are three other members of the QEP Steering Committee who serve as site leaders. These leaders, Dr. Mary Waalkes, Dr. Thomas Upchurch, and Mr. John Gleissner, will assist in implementing the QEP at their respective instructional sites. Each jointly helps lead in recruiting faculty at their locations, receives SLC proposals, assures compliance with the SLC standards and will supervise faculty participants throughout the semester for guidance and troubleshooting. Also, they will assure that assessments are completed and submitted and communicate with and report to the Director on a regular and timely basis. For

their work, each will receive one course release per semester, worth $2,340, for a total of $7,020 per semester, or $14,040 per year, for a total expenditure of more than $70,000 over five years.

Physical Resources

Commitments to Physical and Financial Resources for the QEP

The CETL is the academic support unit for delivering faculty development workshops for SLC instructors, providing SLC resource materials, bringing in SLC guest speakers, and facilitating FLCs, all of which increase substantially between the years 1 and 5 of the QEP's implementation. Most of these support services are new, so additional CETL funding is allocated annually, but it will not be charged to the QEP budget. The budget allocated $3,000 for the first year for bringing in an outside consultant to oversee the initial training of faculty and administrative staff in developing SLCs.

Additional Investments in the Physical Resources of Classroom Furnishings

Before Year 1 of the QEP commenced, EGSC invested $12,000 in FY 2020 to enhance the furnishings of an additional classroom at the Swainsboro and Statesboro campuses to include worktables and movable chairs. As the number of SLCs increase, additional investments in worktables and movable chairs may be forthcoming for other SLC classrooms, so the QEP budget has included $12,000 per year in years 2-4.

Summary of Additional Investments in QEP Initiation, Implementation and Completion

To illustrate the above, Table 9 (next page) shows five-year approximate expenditures for the QEP.

Table 9: Five-Year Approximate Expenditures For the QEP

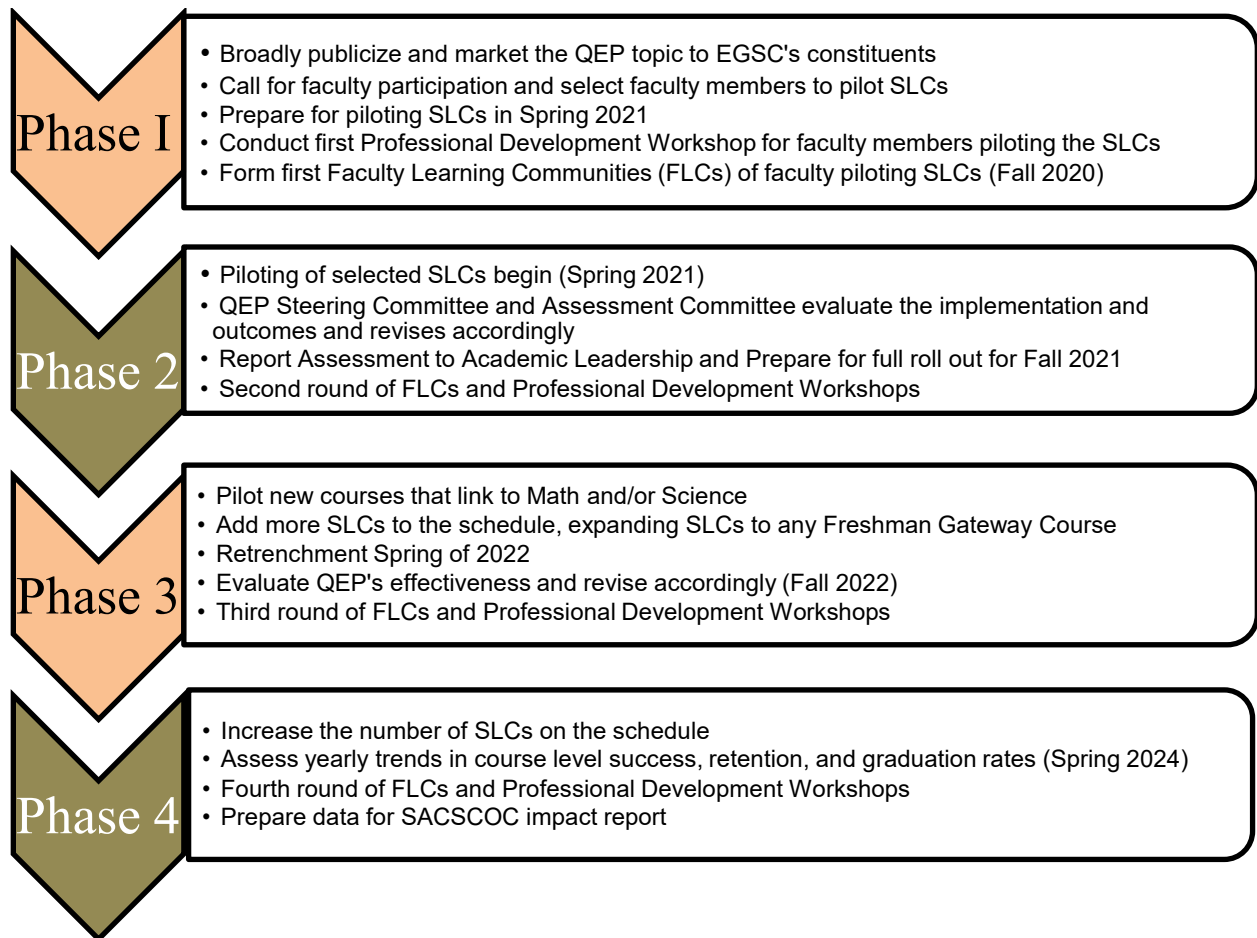| QEP Annual Budget	2020-21*	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	Total $
QEP Director Course Releases	4,680	4,680	4,680	4,680	4,680	23,400
Steering Committee Course Releases	14,040	14,040	14,040	14,040	14,040	70,200
Cost of Redirected Faculty Resources	18,720	18,720	18,720	18,720	18,720	93,600
QEP Director Annual Stipend	4,680	4,680	4,680	4,680	4,680	23,400
QEP Faculty Participants Stipend	7,000	20,000	30,000	40,000	40,000	137,000
Faculty/Staff Development Funds	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	6,000
Training Consultant	3,000	-	-	-	-	3,000
Direct Payments to Personnel	15,880	25,880	35,880	45,880	45,880	169,400
Classroom Remodeling		6,000	12,000	-	-	18,000
Instructional Materials and Supplies	1,000	2,000	3,000	4,000	4,000	14,000
QEP Promotion and Marketing	23,360	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	27,360
Total Supporting Costs	24,360	9,000	16,000	5,000	6,000	60,360
Total Cost of SLC Resources	56,960	53,600	70,600	69,600	69,600	323,360

*Spring semester only

The uncertainty of future state funding for EGSC is more pronounced now than in recent times due to the loss of state revenue resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic shut-down. The Board of Regents of the USG has directed that the FY 2021 (July 2020 through June 2021) operating budgets of member colleges and universities include major reductions in state appropriated revenues, necessitating substantial reductions in planned operating expenses. The QEP budget, therefore, may be amended as needed.

Section IX: Resource Commitment: Implementation and Timelines 7.2 (d)

Timeline of the QEP's Implementation Action Plans

The implementation of *Learning to Associate* has four phases: Publicize and Prepare; Pilot Testing of SLCs; Initial Full Year of SLCs; Expand, Adjust, Complete. Detailed assessment plans that overlap and complement this timeline are provided in the next section of this QEP. The four phases are illustrated in the chart below:

Phase I
- Broadly publicize and market the QEP topic to EGSC's constituents
- Call for faculty participation and select faculty members to pilot SLCs
- Prepare for piloting SLCs in Spring 2021
- Conduct first Professional Development Workshop for faculty members piloting the SLCs
- Form first Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) of faculty piloting SLCs (Fall 2020)

Phase 2
- Piloting of selected SLCs begin (Spring 2021)
- QEP Steering Committee and Assessment Committee evaluate the implementation and outcomes and revises accordingly
- Report Assessment to Academic Leadership and Prepare for full roll out for Fall 2021
- Second round of FLCs and Professional Development Workshops

Phase 3
- Pilot new courses that link to Math and/or Science
- Add more SLCs to the schedule, expanding SLCs to any Freshman Gateway Course
- Retrenchment Spring of 2022
- Evaluate QEP's effectiveness and revise accordingly (Fall 2022)
- Third round of FLCs and Professional Development Workshops

Phase 4
- Increase the number of SLCs on the schedule
- Assess yearly trends in course level success, retention, and graduation rates (Spring 2024)
- Fourth round of FLCs and Professional Development Workshops
- Prepare data for SACSCOC impact report

Phase I: Plan, Publicize, and Prepare (Fall 2019-Fall 2020)

Application Process

The Planning and Implementation Committee designed an application form that encourages faculty to plan their linked courses. The application form is designed to keep faculty focused on the linked course experience rather than one professor using the other professor's course as spillover for materials s/he could not cover in their

own courses.

Thus, creation of an approved SLC begins with a faculty member filling out an application and submitting that application to the Application Committee for feedback and approval. Once the QEP Steering Committee is satisfied that the proposed linked courses meet the QEP goals, the committee communicates with the appropriate faculty member for scheduling.

Professional Development

To ensure that faculty have the training and support they need, the Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) holds professional development workshops and forms faculty learning communities (FLC) to support faculty through the development of their linked courses. These workshops occur during Fall Orientation for faculty planning to teach SLCs that academic year. These offer tips on how to coordinate and plan a true interdisciplinary learning experience and avoid the common error of courses linking by name only. Rubrics for assessing SLOs will be discipline-specific and will be designed during the Fall Faculty Workshop. Assistance with constructing SLC linked course syllabi will also be provided.

FLCs will meet monthly to discuss readings, pedagogies, collaborative techniques, and high impact practices. From this pool of FLCs, mentors will be recruited support faculty through the pedagogical transition, while taking note of pilot testing on a faculty level. All mentors will meet with faculty teaching SLCs twice a semester and will meet to compare notes and report to the QEP Director. At the beginning of each semester, the CETL Director will establish FLCs on each campus for faculty teaching SLCs. Every fall, members of the FLCs will lead a faculty development workshop for SLCs.

Designing SLCs and Assessing Implementation

The QEP Steering Committee and Communication Committee will inform the EGSC community about the pilot SLCs. The QEP Communications Committee will market and distribute promotional items.

Regarding the actual learning environment, the QEP Advisory Committee determined that linked courses should be small in class size, encourage a high degree of student collaboration, and increase the opportunity for interaction with faculty. Faculty will be expected to engage in interactive pedagogy and foster curricular coordination.

Currently, first-year English composition courses are capped at twenty-four students. So, all paired courses in

SLCs will be capped at twenty-four students. When limiting course enrollments in other areas of disciplinary study where capped enrollments are much higher than 24, this limitation becomes an attractive incentive for faculty participation in SLCs. By allowing for the maximum of twenty-four students per SLC and seven SLC options in the Spring 2021 pilot, a maximum of 168 students is expected to participate in the piloting of *Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate*. Although the total number may be lower depending on overall enrollment and the success of recruiting efforts, approximately 10% of the freshman student population of 1,600+ in Spring 2021 will be engaged in SLCs.

For an analysis of freshman enrollment in SLCs, please see Table 4 on page 26.

In Spring 2020, the QEP Steering Committee informed faculty about the QEP SLCs and invited faculty applications for participation. The QEP Steering Committee subsequently received twelve applications during the Spring 2020 semester identifying courses that faculty proposed to link. By late spring, the Application Committee had identified fourteen faculty who had their proposals accepted for the pilot as listed below in Table 10.

Table 10: Spring 2021 Linked Courses for the Pilot				
Course	**Level**	**Linked Course**	**Level**	**Instructors**
English Composition	1101	Physical Education	1071	Kraus, Eaton − Swainsboro
English Composition	1102	Psychology	2102	Jordan, Braddy – Swainsboro
English Composition	1101	History	2111	Chambers, Upchurch − Statesboro
English Composition	1102	History	2112	Denton, Howell − Statesboro
Quantitative Skills and Reasoning	1001	History	2112	Xie, Giebfried − Statesboro
English Composition	1101	History	2111	Hakima, Waalkes – Augusta
Public Speaking	1110	American Government	1101	Brady, Mullins − Augusta

The English Composition II and Psychology courses are complementary, as Professor Annliss Jordan employs a literary-based approach to writing in her Composition II courses. Literature often provides opportunities for students to apply psychological analysis to characters. In this linked course, students will learn the application of psychological concepts while gaining a deeper understanding of the literature. A surprising link may be Christian Kraus' English Composition I course and Johnna Eaton's Physical Education course. Both professors will incorporate shared readings and assignments about kinetic learning and physical health.

Currently, the CETL Director communicates with the pilot SLC instructors to direct them to appropriate

resources, provide personal consultations as needed, assign FLCs for SLCs, and describe their purpose. Fall 2020 semester begins with Orientation for faculty and staff. During this event, faculty will be recruited to participate in SLCs, and a workshop will be presented on the procedure for creating an SLC.

Phase 2: Pilot Testing of SLCs (Spring 2021)

Prior to Spring 2021, advisors will enroll students in SLCs. Professional advisors will work with new freshmen and students who need support classes and who are enrolled at Swainsboro and Statesboro, while faculty advisors assist the remaining students. EGSC Augusta handles students differently due to their smaller numbers. Faculty advisors will work with all students whose majors fit their disciplines. To appropriately advise students placed in SLCs, professional advisors receive a list of linked courses at least one semester prior to registration. During registration, full-time advisors who create freshman fall schedules will select students for specific learning communities according to the students' major, academic needs, interests, and availability. During orientation, students will be informed of SLCs and the benefits of learning communities so that students can understand the structure of the schedule and opt to register for other SLCs during advising and registration for the spring semester. Advisors will coordinate with the Registrar's Office, Enrollment Management, Admissions, and Deans to ensure that the advising process appropriately meets students' needs.

Annually, the QEP director and a faculty member of the QEP Advisory Committee and a member of the QEP Steering Committee will meet with student representatives serving in the Student Government Association to assess student perception of the SLCs and how SLCs may be adjusted to meet student needs. Student representatives will gather their information through student comments given in anonymous surveys. In other words, student feedback will play a crucial role in the ongoing assessment of SLCs.

It is important for EGSC to conduct practical tests of its SLC prototypes to check their functional performances before initiating a full-scale implementation of SLCs. QEP mentors' involvement as collaborating partners with the pilot SLC instructors throughout Spring 2021 will ensure the maximum benefit is gained so that the SLC course evaluation data gathered at the end of the semester provides additional perspectives and insights on the success of the pilot SLCs. Such pilot testing oversight is invaluable for fine-tuning and strengthening the SLC's conceptual model and its implementation processes going forward. Also, at the end of Spring 2021 semester, the

Awards Committee will meet to select the best essay and best project, using a rubric to ensure the student work meets the SLOs for the QEP. Students will receive their awards at the EGSC Honors Night program.

While pilot testing is in full operation, preparations will continue for the first full academic year of SLCs at EGSC in 2021-2022. CETL again will offer its faculty development workshops during the Spring 2021 semester for instructors selected to offer SLCs in Fall 2021. The Applications Committee will solicit and review proposals for the ten SLCs to be offered in Spring 2022, one year in advance. Those who taught a linked course will be considered only after new volunteers proposing new and different pairings are given first consideration, as the QEP Steering Committee wants to build a diversity of experiences. Selections of SLC proposals for Spring 2022 will correlate to the need to have a balanced distribution of SLCs across all three campuses and the inclusion of select freshman courses. Once those ten sets of faculty are selected and identified, CETL will provide them with training on their upcoming course and faculty development preparations in Fall 2021. Finally, at the end of every semester, the QEP Director will hold assessment workshops. Assessment following the Spring 2021 semester will follow procedures outlined in Section X.

Phase 3: Initial Full Year of SLCs (Fall 2021-Spring 2022)

The 2021-22 academic year will be the first year of full implementation of the new SLCs in both fall and spring, and the oversight of SLC implementation in Fall 2021 is comparable to that provided in the Spring 2021. One difference is that the pool of potential FLC mentors will be expanded to include QEP committee members and the instructors of successful pilot tested SLCs. The other difference is that the SLC course evaluation data gathered at the end of the Spring 2021 semester will provide perspectives and insights invaluable for fine-tuning the SLC's conceptual model and its implementation processes.

As is routine every semester moving forward, the Applications Committee will call for SLC proposals by midterm of the semester for the following year. Selections of instructors and course offerings will be made by the end of the semester, prompting CETL to inform those instructors about upcoming course preparations and faculty development programs. As is expected every fall, CETL will provides its SLC faculty development workshops for the previously identified instructors. The Assessment Committee will call for a review of syllabi as assessment workshops get underway at the end of the semester. Assessment following the Spring 2021 semester will follow

procedures outlined in Section X.

Phase 4: Expand, Adjust, Complete (Fall 2022-Spring 2025)

The pattern of full academic year implementation of the QEP as described for 2021-2022 in Phase 3 will be repeated for the next sets of SLC instructors in the Plan's final three years of 2022-2023, 2023-2024, and 2024-2025 until the number of SLCs offered in each of the last two semesters stands at more than 20. The planned expansion of SLCs in this phase should ultimately impact about 48% of freshman enrollment.

Throughout the entire five-year period of the QEP, adjustments will be made to the QEP and its implementation, as needed each term, in accordance with assessment results that suggest changes for continuous improvement of SLCs and their effectiveness. Although the QEP is expected to be completed in Spring 2025, for purposes of Fifth-Year Interim reporting to SACSCOC, continuing reliance and expansion of SLCs for gateway courses are expected at EGSC in academic years after 2024-2025 once the effects of improving student learning and student success outcomes are demonstrated in the first-year courses addressed by the QEP's implementation.

Section X: QEP Assessment Plans and Achievement of Expected Outcomes 7.2 (e)

The principal purpose of EGSC's QEP is to improve the student success and student learning of freshman students through the establishment of SLCs for its selected first-year courses. Improvements in first-year student success rates will be recognized if SLC students have lower DFWI rates in selected first-year courses, higher cumulative first-year GPAs, and higher first-year retention rates than students not in SLCs. Similarly, student learning outcomes in selected first-year courses will be recognized as improved if SLC students receive higher passing grades than students not in SLCs for the same selected first-year courses.

This section describes the QEP assessment plans for determining the extent to which the three student success outcomes (SSO) and two student learning outcomes (SLO) are achieved. These assessments are of primary interest for achieving the principal purpose of the QEP and for demonstrating compliance with standard 7.2 (e).

Most of the data required to complete these assessments are recorded in or calculated from EGSC's student information system (Banner). The Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research is responsible for the collection, analysis, and distribution of findings to the QEP Steering Committee for planning and assessment purposes. The extractions of Banner data to complete the planned assessments described below will require the tagging of selected first-year courses in the Banner database and the tagging of specific sections that were part of an SLC each semester.

Following each assessment cycle, the QEP Director and the Director of Strategic Planning and Institutional Research will meet with the QEP Advisory Committee and the Assessment Committee to carefully evaluate and monitor progress and make any necessary changes in implementation or assessment strategies. Dr. John Giebfried, Chair of the QEP Assessment Committee, has experience in assessing programs and courses and has contributed to building the assessment plan and tools. He chairs a committee of faculty and program coordinators who also have experience with assessing courses and programs.

Assessment Plans for the QEP's Student Success Outcomes and Student Learning Outcomes

<u>**Assessment of SSO 1**</u>: Students attempting selected first-year courses in Student Learning Communities will have 15% more passing grades (ABC) and proportionally fewer final DFWI grades in the grade distributions for those courses than students attempting selected first-year courses which were not part of SLCs.

Assessments will be conducted at the conclusion of each semester. All final grades posted for selected first-year courses will be retrieved from Banner, distinguishing grades earned as part of an SLC and grades not earned in an SLC for each of the six selected first-year courses.

<u>Levels of Analysis Planned:</u> At the basic level of analysis each semester, the combined grade totals of ABC and DFWI for all sections taught as part of an SLC will be compared to those for similar courses not taught in an SLC. Any observed differences in those grade distributions will be tested for statistical significance using Chi Square analysis.

A trend analysis of successful course completion results will also be conducted and updated each semester. Results will be compiled and analyzed on a semester and annual basis. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP. Summative analysis for this expected student success outcome will also be prepared at the end of the QEP and for the Fifth-Year Interim Report. Assessment of SSO 2: Students who began at EGSC and participated in an SLC during that first year will have an average cumulative GPA that is at least .5 higher than the average cumulative GPA of similar students who had not participated in a SLC.

This assessment will be conducted annually after the spring semester has ended. Once final grades for the spring term have been recorded for Spring 2021 (the pilot testing term) through Spring 2025 (end of QEP), data will be extracted from Banner that includes the cumulative GPAs of freshman students who were new to EGSC in the previous fall (or summer) and who completed selected first-year courses as part of SLCs and selected first-year courses not part of an SLC during their first academic year. The data will be disaggregated and coded so that the specific selected first-year course(s) completed within the SLC(s) is separately identified for the SLC students and the selected first-year courses completed by non-SLC students can also be separately identified.

<u>Levels of Analysis Planned:</u> At the basic level of analysis each May, the mean cumulative GPA of first-year freshmen who participated in at least one SLC will be compared to the mean cumulative GPA of first-year

freshmen who did not participate in any SLC. Observed mean differences between the two groups will be tested for statistical significance using an appropriate t-Test.

A trend analysis of the first academic year GPA results will also be conducted and updated at the end of each academic year for 2021-2022 through 2024-2025. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP. Summative analysis for this student success outcome will also be prepared at the completion of the QEP and for the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Assessment of SSO 2: Students who began at EGSC and participated in an SLC during that first year will have an average cumulative GPA that is at least .5 higher than the average cumulative GPA of similar students who had not participated in a SLC. This assessment will be conducted annually after the spring semester has ended. Once final grades for the spring term have been recorded for Spring 2021 (the pilot testing term) through Spring 2025 (end of QEP), data will be extracted from Banner that includes the cumulative GPAs of freshman students who were new to EGSC in the previous fall (or summer) and who completed selected first-year courses as part of SLCs and selected first-year courses not part of an SLC during their first academic year. The data will be disaggregated and coded so that the specific selected first-year course(s) completed within the SLC(s) is separately identified for the SLC students and the selected first-year courses completed by non-SLC students can also be separately identified.

Levels of Analysis Planned: At the basic level of analysis each May, the mean cumulative GPA of first-year freshmen who participated in at least one SLC will be compared to the mean cumulative GPA of first-year freshmen who did not participate in any SLC. Observed mean differences between the two groups will be tested for statistical significance using an appropriate t-Test. A trend analysis of the first academic year GPA results will also be conducted and updated at the end of each academic year for 2021-2022 through 2024-2025. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP. Summative analysis for this student success outcome will also be prepared at the completion of the QEP and for the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Assessment of SSO 3: Students who participated in SLCs will have first-year retention rates that are 10 percentage points higher than those of students who did not participate in a SLC.

This assessment will be conducted at the conclusion of the fall semester, annually. Once the official census date for fall enrollment has been reached each academic year, from Fall 2021 through Fall 2025 data will be extracted from Banner for the calculation of the first-year retention rates of freshmen who were new in the previous fall (or summer), had attempted one or more selected first-year courses in their first year, and had re-enrolled in the current fall semester. This extracted data will also be coded as to whether an SLC was completed or not during the first year and which selected first-year courses were completed as part of SLCs.

Levels of Analysis Planned: The percentage of students who were retained and not retained after their first Year at EGSC will be compared for the group participating in an SLC and the group not participating in an SLC. Observed differences will be tested for statistical significance using Chi Square analysis.

A trend analysis of the first-year retention rate results will also be conducted and updated each fall for 2021-2022 through 2024-2025. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP if the goal for this student success outcome is not achieved. Summative analysis for this student success outcome will also be prepared for the completion of the QEP and the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Assessments of Improved Learning Achievement in Passed SLC Courses

Assessment of SLO 1: Students who pass selected first-year courses (C or better, DFWIs excluded) as part of SLCs will learn more and thereby earn higher passing grades than students who pass selected first-year courses which were not part of SLCs, and those gains in learning will be reflected by a .5 higher GPA for the SLC students as calculated from the passing grades they and their comparator group received in those selected courses.

This assessment will be conducted after every semester has ended. After each fall and spring semester beginning Spring 2021 (the pilot testing term) through Spring 2025, all final grades posted for passed selected first-year courses (C or better) conducted that semester will be retrieved from Banner so that grades earned as part of a SLC can be separated from those not earned in a SLC for each of the six selected first-year courses.

Levels of Analysis Planned: At the basic level of analysis each semester, the average (mean) GPA for the all grades earned by students who passed a selected first-year course that was part of an SLC will be compared to the average (mean) GPA for the all grades earned by students who passed a selected first-year course that was not part of an SLC. Any observed differences will be tested for statistical significance using an appropriate t-Test analysis.

A trend analysis of these learning achievement results will also be conducted and updated each semester. Trends for fall and spring semesters will be examined separately as well as trends for fall and spring combined from the 2021-22 academic year to the 2024-25 academic year. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP if the goal for this student learning outcome is not achieved as initially expected. Summative analysis for this expected student learning outcome will also be prepared at the end of the QEP and for the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Assessment of SLO 2: At least 75% of students who participated in a Student Learning Community will rate their SLC learning experience positively for *Learning to Associate* on each of the five related SLC Course Evaluation items, and the average *Learning to Associate* scale score will increase significantly from Year 2 to Year 5 of the QEP.

These assessments will occur near the end of every semester starting with the pilot term in Spring 2021 through Spring 2025 (end of the QEP). The data collected for these assessments will be extracted from the Teach-Learn Course Evaluation Questionnaire for Student Learning Communities ([Appendix I](#)), which will be completed by students when their SLC ends each semester. Since the QEP focuses on the impact of SLCs on selected first-year course success and learning, only the course evaluations for the SLC selected first-year courses will be used. The evaluations for the other linked courses will be collected and may be used for other assessments not part of this QEP.

Half of the questionnaire items (the "Teach" half) will call for students to evaluate what the professor does to facilitate *Learning to Associate* or how the learning environment of the course exists to do that. Use of the student evaluations on those items will be discussed below in the next subsection on assessment.

The "Learn" half contains items that are intended to focus on what the student reports to have learned from the SLC selected first-year course in terms of *Learning to Associate*. The other five items on the Learn side, which are used in these assessments, will focus on what the students learned, which is relevant to *Learning to Associate*. They will read as follows:

4. I'm leaving this course with a sense that I have had a deeper engagement in my academic studies because of the way the courses linked.

10. I better understand the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge (how courses interconnect by building on knowledge from one discipline to another) because of my experience with the learning community.

12. I believe that, as a result of participating in this SLC, I have a stronger foundation on which to build more knowledge as I move toward the completion of my degree.

14. I feel socially connected to other students in my learning community because of the structure of this course and learning community.

16. I am leaving this class with a sense that I have grown as a person in that being introduced to new perspectives has increased my ability to learn, respectfully articulate my core beliefs or defend my process for problem solving, and put myself in other people's situation.

Each item is rated on a five-category scale of (4) strongly agree, (3) agree, (2) disagree, (1) strongly disagree, or (0) for not applicable. Ratings of strongly agree and agree will be counted as a positive response to having achieved the learning referenced in the item. The ratings of all five items will be combined to produce a scale score from each respondent on how much she/he has learned about *Learning to Associate*. In the calculation of that scale score, the point value for each item will be 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree, 1 for strongly disagree, and 0 for not applicable.

Although the identities of the student respondents will not be captured in this data collection, the results from each completed evaluation form will be associated with the specific SLC selected first-year course involved and the semester/year in which it was offered.

Levels of Planned Analysis: The basic analysis will involve descriptive statistics (frequency distributions and percentages) in a detailed item analysis for each of the five questionnaire items on the *Learning to Associate* that occurred in SLCs. The extent to which the goal of 75% of respondents indicating positive learning achievements in all five aspects of *Learning to Associate* will be interpreted. The other basic analysis referenced in SLO 2 will involve comparing mean *Learning to Associate* scale scores from the first full year of the QEP implementation to the final full year. While that analysis may not occur until the QEP is completed in Spring 2025, annual progress toward that final comparison will be accomplished and tracked each semester of each year. The extent to which the goal for those scale scores increase over the years as more SLCs become operational at EGSC will be interpreted.

A trend analysis of these learning achievement results will also be conducted and updated each semester. Trends for fall and spring semesters will be examined separately as well as trends for fall and spring combined from the 2021-2022 academic year to the 2024-2025 academic year. These analyses will be formative and may suggest changes in the QEP if the goal for this student learning outcome is not achieved as initially expected. Summative analysis for this expected student learning outcome will also be prepared for the end of the QEP and for the Fifth-Year Interim Report.

Assessments of the Extent to Which SLCs Are Designed and Functioning as Expected

Assessments of these SLCs will occur at several different levels.

When SLC proposals are initially submitted each semester to peer evaluators on the Applications Committee for acceptance and inclusion in the future expansion of SLCs at EGSC, that initial review will constitute the first direct assessment of a prospective SLC. The rubric used by those peer evaluators to make the determination of acceptance will include the course design characteristics, course linkages, pedagogical approaches, learning activities, and operational philosophies expected of a well-designed plan for implementing a SLC linking a selected first-year course to another freshman course. Subsequent peer reviews of proposed SLC syllabi constitute other direct assessments in the development of the SLC, which will help keep its content, design, and expected functioning on track for becoming a well-designed SLC.

Informal assessments of FLC members and SLC Advisors/Mentors during the design and implementation of SLCs will be conducted. These are intended to maintain and improve the proper and effective design and operation of SLCs.

Systematic assessments of a completed SLC will be conducted in two ways. SLC instructors will provide indirect assessment data about their SLC through a self-evaluation form that goes to the Assessment Committee for review and analysis. In addition, the Teach component of the SLC Course Evaluation Questionnaire that students complete will generate direct assessments of the instructor's performance as observed and evaluated by her/his students that correspond to the expected design and functioning of a proper and effective SLC.

Of course, the ultimate test of whether SLCs are meeting their educational objectives will be found in the results of the assessments of the expected student success outcomes and student learning outcomes cited above.

Section XI: Conclusion

This QEP meets the expectations for compliance with standard 7.2 (a) through 7.2 (e). It is a substantial initiative of major importance to the college that fills a gap in FYE programming and shows promise of successful accomplishment. It concerns a topic that flows naturally from the EGSC and the USG ongoing planning and evaluation processes related to facilitating student success and persistence. The QEP has broad campus-wide support and engages a wide array of faculty, staff, administrators, and students in its implementation at EGSC. Iterative QEP planning processes have yielded a focused, affordable, and manageable QEP. Its expected student success outcomes and student learning outcomes are clear, specific, measurable, and appropriate. Great care has been taken to distinguish between focusing on student success outcomes and student learning outcomes separately from the planned changes in EGSC learning processes and learning environment, which are associated with the introduction and expansion of SLCs. Appropriate human and financial resources are provided to support the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP. A comprehensive, detailed, and realistic timeline of practical action plans for the QEP complete implementation is provided. Plans for assessing the extent to which the QEP's three expected student success outcomes and two expected student learning outcomes are achieved are outlined. They include the timelines for data collection, most of which are direct assessment measures, and various levels of planned analysis, which will be conducted with references to formative and summative accomplishments. The initiation phase of the QEP is currently underway as EGSC's three principal campuses prepare for their pilot testing of the first seven SLCs involving selected first-year courses in composition, mathematics, biology, history, and public speaking. Suggestions for additional refinement of the QEP from the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee are solicited and welcome.

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Section XIII: Appendices

Appendix A: Strategic Academic Initiatives: Gateways to Completion

STRATEGIC ACADEMIC INITIATIVES

Academic Affairs Division

University System of Georgia and Gateways to Completion

Selected first-year courses are considered to be classes that are high-risk with high enrollment and are often the foundation level courses for an academic major. Success in foundation level courses, such as accounting, biology, chemistry, math, writing, and rhetoric, is a direct predictor of retention. Gateways to Completion (G2C) provides faculty and institutions with processes, guidance, and tools to support redesign of lower division and/or developmental level courses.

G2C also includes a Teaching and Learning Academy and an Analytics Process Collaborative. University System of Georgia (USG) Faculty attend the Gateway Course Experience Conference and participate in the G2C Community of Practice meetings. There faculty/administrators network with like-minded institutions and reflect on and shape the body of scholarship on selected first-year course success.

The University System of Georgia is the only University System in the nation approaching this work from a System perspective. Cohort I began the three-year process in 2015. Cohort II launched in 2017.

What is Gateways to Completion (G2C)?

The Gateways to Completion program is an exciting initiative to help students enrolled in USG institutions achieve success early on in their academic career. "Developed with insight of a distinguished national Advisory Committee, the comprehensive G2C approach provides faculty with a structured, evidence- based course self-study process with unparalleled advice and support from the nation's leader in higher education student success." The G2C process improves planning and offers engaging pedagogues, analytic tools, and expertise from the John N. Gardner Institute.

Cohort I

In 2015, ten USG institutions began a three-year collaboration with the John N. Gardner Institute on

Gateways to Completion:

East Georgia State College
Georgia Highlands State College
Georgia Southern University
Georgia Southwestern State University Gordon State College
Middle Georgia State University
Kennesaw State University
South Georgia State College
University of West Georgia
Valdosta State University

Cohort 2

In 2018, the remaining USG institutions and eCore joined the collaboration with Gateways to Completion:

Abraham Baldwin State College Albany State University
Atlanta Metropolitan State College Augusta University
Clayton State University College of Coastal Georgia Dalton State College
East Georgia State College
eCore
Fort Valley State University Georgia College & State University Georgia Gwinnett College
Georgia Highlands College
Georgia Institute of Technology Georgia State University
Savannah State University
University of Georgia
University of North Georgia

Appendix B: EGSC Strategic Plan

EGSC Strategic Plan FY 2019-20 – FY 2021-22 (Excerpt pp. 2-3)

Institutional Goals and Strategies

As a unit of the University System of Georgia (USG), EGSC bases its institutional goals on the USG vision statement and system goals. Presented below are the vision statement and goals of the *USG Strategic Plan 2024* as approved by its governing Board of Regents in November 2019 and taking effect in January 2020.

USG Vision Statement

The University System of Georgia will excel in meeting the needs of our state and economy through universities and colleges that: provide an affordable, accessible and high quality education; promote lifelong success of students; and create, disseminate and apply knowledge for the advancement of our state, nation and world.

USG Goals

1. **Student Success:** We will increase degree completion through high quality and lifelong academic options, focused learning and eliminating barriers to access and success for all Georgians.

2. **Responsible Stewardship:** We will ensure affordability for students by containing costs and optimizing efficiency across the system.

3. **Economic Competitiveness:** We will equip graduates with knowledge, marketable skills and experience to meet workforce needs throughout our diverse and complex state.

4. **Community Impact:** We will work with communities to improve quality of life across Georgia.

Consistent with its role as an access institution within the USG, EGSC's four institutional goals are presented below.

1. **Student Success**: East Georgia State College provides access to innovative academic programs and engages in college completion initiatives, transforming students and equipping them with tools for success.

2. **Responsible Stewardship:** East Georgia State College uses innovative cost control

measures to deliver high quality, affordable degree programs.

3. **Economic Competitiveness**: East Georgia State College is a catalyst for economic development through a variety of initiatives and degree programs that nurture effective student leaders equipped to transform communities in innovative ways.

4. **Community Impact:** East Georgia State College provides a rich array of public service programs through its Sudie A. Fulford Community Center and Morgan House to the communities it serves.

EGSC Strategic Plan FY 2019-20 to FY 2021-22 Strengthen Momentum Year Initiates Excerpt

EGSC Goal #	Strategy Tactic	Strategy (Bold) and Tactics (Italics)	Responsible Unit and Responsible Staff Member	Target Date to Implement This Tactic	Target Date to Complete This Tactic	Assessment Measure for Each Tactic	Target	How Funded?
	1	Strengthen Momentum Year Initiatives						
1	1a	Develop a system of peer-mentoring/tutoring for Area A courses	Director of the Learning Commons	Fall 2019 (fully implement by Fall 2020 if funding obtained)	Ongoing if successful	Increased success rates (A, B, C) for all students who underwent tutoring in Area A courses	3% annual increase	Use AAMI & Correll grant funds (discussion would need to be had about utilizing these funds.)
	1b	Continue to engage the G2C course redesign project for math and English	School Deans	Fall 2018/ Spring 2019	AY 2021 (three-year process)	Increased success rates for ENGL 1101, MATH 1001, & MATH 1111	3% annual increase	Partly funded by CTL, VP ASA, & President's Office
	1c	Implement professional development initiatives targeting faculty mindset	VP ASA; CTL Director; Chancellor's Learning Scholars	Fall 2019 and ongoing	Ongoing if successful	Increased success rates in courses taught by participating faculty	3 percentage point annual increase	Funding from CTL
	1d	Ensure that student growth mindset is addressed across the curriculum	VP ASA; Deans, & FYE Director	Fall 2020	Fall 2022	Increase the number of courses that offer growth mindset modules	25% course increase	Chancellor's Learning Scholars Workshops

Appendix C: Faculty Development

Academic Affairs Division

Chancellor's Learning Scholars

The Chancellor's Learning Scholars (CLSs) are representatives from each institution in the University System of Georgia (USG) who facilitate Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) on their campuses.

FLCs are designed to give small groups of faculty (typically 8-10) the opportunity to engage in sustained, meaningful conversations about teaching and learning with supportive colleagues from across campus. Members will meet regularly throughout the length of the program as they explore areas of interest, leading to changes in their teaching practice.

At the end of the program, each CLS and FLC participant should be able to point to a change or innovation they have made in their classroom or on their syllabus to an assignment, activity, or course material as a result of their participation in the FLC.

Appendix D: Momentum Year

Academic Affairs and Policy
Academic Affairs Division

What is a Momentum Year?

Momentum Year is a suite of strategies designed to help University System of Georgia students in their crucial first year of college. We work with students to guide them on a path to achieve their educational goals, including successful degree completion and on-time graduation.

We know that:

- Predictive analytics and proactive advising help keep struggling students on track toward graduation, saving students money in the long term.
- Changes in remedial education that include intensive tutoring in conjunction with courses being taken for credit have led to big jumps in student success rates.
- First-year students who take at least three courses connected to what they think they want to study are 40 percent more likely to graduate than students who do not.
- Taking 15 hours a semester improves student success as well as shortens the time to graduation.

Evidence-based research confirms that college students are most successful when they:

- Start out their college careers by making a purposeful choice in a focus area or program,
- Develop with a productive academic mindset,
- Follow clearly sequenced program maps that include: core English and math
- nine credits in the student's academic focus area and 30 credits in their first year.

Put together, these three elements create a Momentum Year for students—a starting point that helps students find their path, get on that path, and build velocity in the direction of their goals.

There is considerable logic in this. By helping students make a purposeful choice about what they wish to study, institutions help narrow the thousands of course options to a manageable level and align the work a student undertakes in college with their goals, interests, and expectations. Such an approach does not preclude student exploration—indeed, for many students, the process of discerning the program path will be one of exploration. And for students who are undecided, institutions can assist them to understand how their interests, goals, and dreams intersect with programs of study and future careers.

Academic Focus Areas

Supporting this work are academic focus areas—sometimes referred to as meta-majors—that group programs together so that students groping with uncertainty can pursue coursework from the start that contributes to college completion and also provides exposure to potential majors, helping them refine their post-secondary path. Courses a student pursues in their first year in an academic focus area should count across all programs under the focus area umbrella and offer an informative exposure to the subject field.

These courses should be broadly applicable across a wide range of majors within the area, helping students avoid unnecessary credits as they narrow their program choice.

Program Maps

Program maps help structure the choices students must make to reach their academic and personal goals in college, graduating on time and without wasted credits. These maps sequence courses for students by semester, eliminate uncertainty about what courses students should take and when, identify prerequisite and corequisite courses, and highlight key academic and non-academic milestones students should satisfy along the way.

In the first year, program maps should include:

- the completion of core English and the aligned mathematics course (including any required learning support courses),
- nine credit hours (three courses) in a student's selected major or academic focus area,
- and a total of at least 30 credit hours.

While the momentum year addresses the challenges of students making the transition to college, the benefits persist, with students accruing more credits across all student subgroups and preparation levels and demonstrating
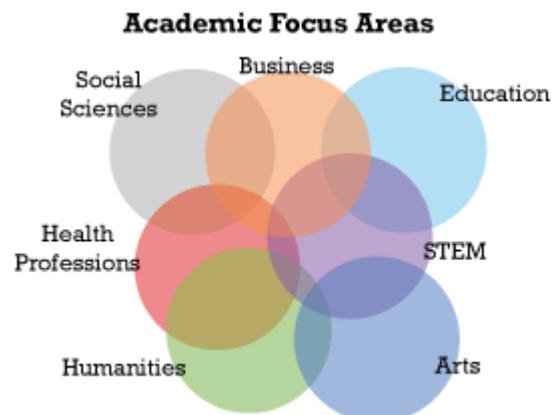
greater persistence to graduation.

Academic Mindset

Finally, supporting students in college to reach their full potential demands promotion of a growth mindset around academics, supporting students' resilience in the face of setbacks. A mounting body of evidence supports the benefits of small interventions that encourage students to view intelligence as malleable, helping them build resilience in the face of setbacks and avoid becoming demotivated and disengaged with their academic pursuits.

Appendix E: High-Impact Educational Practices Overview

A**A****C****U** Association of American Colleges & Universities

A VOICE AND A FORCE FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION

High-Impact Educational Practices: A Brief Overview

Below is an excerpt from High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, by George D. Kuh (AAC&U, 2008).*

Chart of High-Impact Practices (pdf)

The following teaching and learning practices have been widely tested and have been shown to be beneficial for college students from many backgrounds. These practices take many different forms, depending on learner characteristics and on institutional priorities and contexts.

On many campuses, assessment of student involvement in active learning practices such as these has made it possible to assess the practices' contribution to students' cumulative learning. However, on almost all campuses, utilization of active learning practices is unsystematic, to the detriment of student learning. Presented below are brief descriptions of high-impact practices that educational research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement.

Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

Appendix F: EGSC Strategic Plan FY 2019-20 to FY 2021-22 Excerpt

EGSC Strategic Plan FY 2019-20 to FY 2021-22 Excerpt

EGSC Goal #	Strategy/ Tactic	Strategy (Bold) and Tactics (Italics)	Responsible Unit and Responsible Staff Member	Target Date to Implement This Tactic	Target Date to Complete This Tactic	Assessment Measure for Each Tactic	Target	How Funded?
1	4	Improve access and completion for traditionally underserved students						
	4a	Embed high impact practices across the curriculum	VP ASA/ Deans/ Chairs	Fall 2019	Ongoing	Increase completion rates from fall to fall semesters	2% Annually	No funds needed
	4b	Support AAMI and other initiatives that target minority populations through grants available to minority serving institutions (MSI)	Director of AAMI	Fall 2019	Ongoing	Decrease achievement gap from fall to fall semester	2% Annually	Request additional funds
	4c	Enhance use of the ACE through faculty-led learning communities, peer tutoring across the curriculum, and innovative approaches to technology	Director of Learning Commons	Fall 2019	Ongoing if successful	Increase success rates in selected first-year Courses	3% annually	Existing funds

Appendix G: College 2025 Initiative

COLLEGE 2025 Adaptability, Essential Skills, Lifelong
Learning & Partnerships

In recent years, many have raised questions about the cost and mission of public higher education. New forms of instruction, technology, and student learning are all challenging long-held views of public higher education. Public higher education has traditionally represented a path to advancement for both states and their citizens. To be successful, institutions must maintain both cost affordability and academic quality while preparing graduates for the workforce and to be productive members of their communities - the College 2025 Initiative, which Chancellor Wrigley launched in May 2017, is creating a map to address those concerns and offer real solutions based on the nationally acclaimed research by Dr. Tristan Denley.

To address the challenges, Chancellor Steve Wrigley announced the launch of the College 2025 Initiative and the Commission in support of it. He has tasked the Commission with developing a five- to 10-year academic roadmap for the USG and USG Institutions which build on the strengths of institutional sectors, individual campus identities and missions, and faculty expertise. The Commission's roadmap will inform future direction within our state public higher education system allowing Georgia to maintain its position as a state that is responsive to the educational needs of all its citizens.

The USG Office of Academic Affairs Executive Vice Chancellor & Chief Academic Officer Tristan Denley are providing support to the Commission. Georgia College & State University President Steve M. Dorman is chair of the Commission.

Appendix H: QEP Topic Selection Questionnaire

EGSC QEP Topic Selection		
Please select from the following list a QEP topic that would be most beneficial to EGSC students.		
Answer Choices	**Responses**	
Mindset: focuses on building a healthy appreciation of how intelligence can grow with authentic learning and accepting that failure is part of authentic success.	27.47%	125
Academic Literacy: focuses on helping students to read on a college level while becoming part of an academic culture, using college resources effectively, and applying college-level terms and concepts to real-world challenges.	12.97%	59
Professional Communication: focuses on helping students develop professional written and verbal communication skills, including body language, manners, habits, and presentation of self, to prepare for real-world challenges.	29.23%	133
Reading Comprehension: focuses on developing strong close-reading skills necessary for critical reading, critical and analytical thinking, and college/career success.	8.57%	39
First Year Experience/Momentum Year: focuses on improving the experiences of first-year students so that they can gain significant momentum toward graduation and career success.	21.76%	99
	Answered	455

Appendix I: SLC Course Evaluation Questionnaire

East Georgia State College

Teach – Learn Course Evaluation Questionnaire for Student Learning Communities

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Presented below are ten multiple choice and five related short answer questions that address five major areas of the teaching and learning process within student learning communities: Integrated Curriculum, Engagement, Skills and Knowledge, Connection, Personal Growth. Use the following scale to respond to the multiple-choice questions by **filling in the bubble** that best matches your opinion for each of the ten multiple choice statements presented below. **Do not circle the bubbles** that represent your preferred answers.

 (a) Strongly agree **(b)** Agree **(c)** Disagree **(d)** Strongly disagree **(e)** Not Applicable

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Teach			Learn	
1. The way the two courses connected was explained.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Curriculum	**2.** Learning objectives for the linked courses were explained.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
3. The two courses shared at least one reading assignment and one essay or major project that helped me make connections between the course content of one course to the course content of the other course.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Curriculum	**4.** I'm leaving this course with a sense that I have had a deeper engagement in my academic studies because of the way the courses linked.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
5. The professor gave students an opportunity to practice or apply what was taught through lectures, viewing materials, or assigned readings.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Engagement	**6.** I had opportunities to participate in a variety of classroom activities that encouraged exploration of topics, student interaction, and faculty-student interaction.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)

7. The professor encouraged students to investigate and analyze new ideas and/**or** problem-solve (analytically or quantitatively).	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Skills	**8**. I had assignments or projects that stimulated critical thinking, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, **or** communication (verbal or written) skills.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
9. The professor encouraged students to explore critical connections between the two linked courses through activities, presentations, guest speakers, discussion, written assignments, **or** projects.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Knowledge	**10.** I better understand the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge (how courses interconnect by building on knowledge from one discipline to the other) because of my experience with the learning community.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
11. The professor demonstrated an interest in what the students learned in both courses.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Knowledge	**12.** I believe that, as a result of participating in this SLC, I have a stronger foundation on which to build more knowledge as I move toward the completion of my degree.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
13. The professor gave students opportunities to connect with other students and the campus through group work, discussions, attending events or social gatherings, **or** service work and requiring **or** encouraging the use of the ACE, the library, or faculty interaction.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Connection	**14.** I feel socially connected to other students in my learning community because of the structure of this course and learning community	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)
15. The professor facilitated students' personal growth by giving students the opportunity to share different perspectives **or** learning styles, providing self-reflection opportunities such as discussions, surveys, or essays, **or** exploring critical questions that led to new realizations about the self, the learning process, and/**or** our humanity.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)	Personal Growth	**16.** I am leaving this class with a sense that I have grown as a person in that being introduced to new perspectives has increased my ability to learn, listen and understand, respectfully articulate my core beliefs or defend my process for problem solving, and put myself in other people's situation.	(a) (b) (c) (d) (e)

The five short answer questions are printed on the back of this form. Please respond to the short-answer questions in the space provided.

Directions: Please respond to each of the following questions using complete sentences.

	16. What general comments do you have about the linked course experience
	17. How did the professor give feedback, and how did you use that feedback for improvement in both classes?
	18. How did the social aspect of learning communities influence your desire to attend class or visit your professor during office hours?
Connect	
	19. How did the sharing of common materials and assignments increase your understanding of subject(s)?
Engage	
	20. What skills (intellectual, problem-solving, emotional, social, leadership, or career-oriented) do you believe this course introduced, developed, or increased?
Skills	

Appendix J: EGSC President's Letter of Support

EAST GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE
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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

July 17, 2020

EGSC Quality Enhancement Plan Committee
Dr. Gina R. Denton, Associate Professor of English; Director of the QEP;
Director of the Center of Excellence for Teaching & Learning

RE: Quality Enhancement Plan

Dear Dr. Denton,

I am pleased to provide this letter of strong support for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) developed by the QEP committee over the last 2 ½ years.

East Georgia State College's (EGSC) Faculty Senate President sent a letter to me dated June 11, 2020 in support of EGSC's QEP. That letter stated:

"It gives the Faculty Senate great pleasure in recommending East Georgia State College's new Quality Enhancement Plan. The new QEP, "Student Learning Communities: Learning to Associate" will provide EGSC students with many educational opportunities that they might not receive in a regular classroom. The Faculty Senate is committed to providing whatever is necessary to ensure the success of the QEP. This means that the Faculty Senate will support the implementation, assessment, and successful completion of the QEP. . . . With our highest
recommendation, the Faculty Senate unanimously supports this crucial endeavor.

This Faculty Senate statement of support was then shared with the President's Cabinet on June 23, 2020 at its regular meeting. The Cabinet then adopted the following statement of support of the QEP:
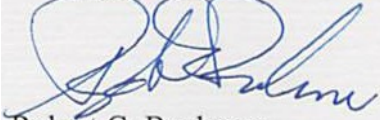
"The Cabinet of the President of EGSC adopts the following statement in support of that QEP.

- The Cabinet endorses the statement of support by the Faculty Senate;
- The Cabinet represents all of EGSC's administrative support units and recognizes that support of the QEP over a period of 5 years is essential to the success of the QEP. The Cabinet pledges that support;
- The Cabinet recognizes that commitment of financial resources over a 5 year period is essential to the accomplishment of the goals of the QEP. The Cabinet recommends to the President that adequate resources of the college be allocated to enable the goals of the QEP be accomplished."

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION INSTUTION

I heartily endorse the above statements. Over a period of more than two years, I have closely observed the process of selecting the QEP topic and developing the QEP. The process has involved students, faculty, staff, senior administration and the EOSC Foundation, Inc. The process has involved careful study by the QEP committee of the vision, mission and strategic plan of EOSC. The QEP grows out of and furthers the college' s mission and strategic goals. It will, in my opinion, greatly improve learning by the unique EGSC student body. That student body is highly diverse and includes a high number of first generation college students. The learning communities which will be established by the implementation of this QEP will meet the unique needs of EGSC's student body for an engaged and interactive learning environment. I congratulate the QEP committee for the participatory process leading to selection of this topic and for the scholarly and thoughtful manner in which the QEP was developed. The college will support this QEP throughout the following five years by providing adequate financial and human resources and leadership support as needed to enable the QEP goals to be accomplished.

Thank you to the QEP committee for your service to EGSC.

Robert G. Boehmer
President
East Georgia State College