

Presidents update to College community (12/2013)

**Dear East Georgia State College Community,**

I hope all of you are enjoying a peaceful holiday season.

My first thought today is about the busy semester we have just completed. Thanks to the entire East Georgia State College community for your hard work this semester and for your commitment to continually improving the College.

Quickly, my thoughts turn to the many things which need to be done during spring 2014 to keep us on track towards our strategic goals.

Here are top priority items for spring 2014:

**1. Establish an FY 2015 budget.**

As you know, the state legislature allocates funds to the University of System (USG) as guided by the state's higher education "funding formula." That formula is currently an enrollment based formula (but will switch to a performance formula in FY 2016). In applying this formula, there is a two year lag from enrollment to the resulting funding. This means that fall 2012 enrollment (a semester in which the USG, as a whole, and EGSC, specifically, experienced a substantial decline in enrollment) will be the basis for the FY 2015 budget. The bottom line: ***there is a potential for a significant decline in our state funding in FY 2015 due to the fall 2012 enrollment drop.***

- a. Early in 2014, the legislature will open its new session. That session will continue through spring. Communicating effectively with our legislators about the needs of higher education during the legislative session is a spring 2014 priority.
- b. Once the legislature establishes the USG budget this spring, the USG will then notify EGSC and the other 30 institutions of higher education concerning the budget of each institution. Although EGSC has already had its budget hearing (11/2013), communicating effectively with the USG about the specific needs of EGSC until the time our budget is set is a spring 2014 priority.

In communicating these EGSC needs, it is important to communicate how our funding level compares with that of other USG institutions. Our level of state funding per full time equivalent student is the lowest in the USG. Accomplishing our strategic goals will be jeopardized if this level of funding continues. Accordingly, it is a spring 2014 priority to make this point clearly and effectively.

In communicating these EGSC needs, it is also imperative to communicate the specific ways in which this funding level impacts EGSC on a day to day basis. Human resources are certainly the best example. Two aspects of this deserve emphasis. First, our current faculty and staff salary levels will not allow us to remain competitive in hiring and retaining faculty and staff. Second, our funding level will not allow us to establish new positions needed to carry out our mission. For example, our curriculum needs to be internationalized. This includes expanded study abroad and internationalization of our curriculum. We simply do not have funds at this time to hire an international programs director. As another example, we

need to dramatically expand the number of grants for which the College applies. We simply do not have the funds at this time to hire a grant writing specialist. There are many, many similar examples of areas in which the College needs to improve and for which we do not currently have funding.

## **2. Increase enrollment**

This is closely related to # 1 above. In addition to state funding, our other primary source of funds to carry out our mission is tuition revenue. As mentioned above, fall of 2012 brought a dramatic drop in enrollment. This was followed by a small additional drop in fall 2013. These drops in two successive fall semesters are consistent with the pattern for similar institutions in Georgia and throughout the United States. The fact that our enrollment drops are in line with trends does not mean that this pattern is acceptable. We must steadily increase our enrollment over a period of years in order to remain viable.

In thinking about our enrollment strategy, it is important to keep two aspects of the strategy in mind: recruiting new students and retaining our existing students. Dramatic improvements are needed in both areas.

New student recruiting is coordinated by the Admissions Office. However, it is an area in which the entire College community must participate actively. Similarly, retention is coordinated by the Office of Academic Affairs. Again, it is an area for which the entire College community must assume ownership. Let's take one example. This spring, I will be making a tour of high schools in our region to talk personally with the students about college readiness. This tour will be ineffective if it is simply a series of high school visits by a guy in a suit. Students need to hear the perspective of the entire College community to appreciate this important concept --- college readiness. I will be asking many of you to help me on this tour and it will not be effective without your help.

Similarly, acceptable enrollment increases will not be achieved unless we make leaps forward in the area of student retention. Every faculty and staff member at the College has a responsibility in this area. The appearance of our buildings and grounds, public safety, the activities and organizations available to students, the counselling and tutoring and advising services available to students and every other aspect of our operation each have a direct and immediate impact on retention. Each one of us must remind ourselves about this important responsibility each day.

## **3. Increase capacity for student housing**

OK, so there is a pattern developing here. This item on the spring 2014 work list is also closely related to #1 above. Simply put, the College's ability to expand enrollment is dependent, in large part, on the availability of adequate student housing in Swainsboro/Emanuel County and our financial health depends in significant part on our ability to expand enrollment. During spring, working with the USG to finalize new student housing plans is a priority.

Our current residence halls were built using a PPV (public private venture). We have been working aggressively with the USG on a new approach to residence hall funding known as P3 (public private partnership). This initiative has been approved in concept by the BOR for the entire USG and I anticipate, but am not certain, that it will be finally approved soon.

Under the P3 initiative, instead of issuing bonds to finance construction as was done with the PPV, private developers will build new student housing at a number of USG institutions and will acquire some existing student housing at those institutions. All of this will be done with private funds (not bond proceeds). The housing built or acquired by the private developers will then be operated by the private developer under a long term agreement with the institution of higher education. As designed, the residence halls would run on a day to day basis much as they do now (e.g., our housing personnel would run the residence halls and our police officers would patrol the residence halls, etc.). However, the financial risk would be on the developer. I am extremely hopeful (but not yet certain) that this P3 initiative will add 200 beds of capacity to EGSC's student housing in the near future.

#### **4. Increase external funding**

I know this is getting repetitive, but this item is closely related to #1 also. Starting to sense a theme here?

The percentage of the budget of state institutions of higher education funded by state dollars (see #1) is declining nationwide. Georgia is no exception. This trend is going to continue.

In addition, the willingness of students and their families in the U.S. to make up the difference by paying increased rates of tuition is at an all-time low. This is not going to change either. Increasing tuition regularly at rates higher than the rate of inflation in order to compensate for decreasing state funding is simply not an option (see #2).

Once we understand the dynamics of this situation, the next step becomes a bit of a no-brainer. If institutions of higher education plan to thrive, they must take the initiative to raise more of their budget from external sources.

For research institutions, external funds may be raised by indirect cost recovery from externally funded research. That is not a viable option for a teaching institution like EGSC. For all institutions, external funds may be raised by private donations. This is an option for EGSC and it is an area in which we must improve dramatically.

Increasing private donations is a huge challenge for institutions like EGSC. There is not a strong culture of private fundraising at institutions in our sector of higher education. At private institutions and at large public research institutions, it is an article of faith that private fundraising is essential to success and is the responsibility of each and every staff and faculty member. Institutions in these sectors are accustomed to continually being in the midst of planning for or carrying out a new capital campaign. That is now our future as well.

This is the reason that EGSC has embarked on a mission to raise \$1,000,000 in each of the next five years. I will be personally devoting a big part of my time to this effort in the coming years. Raising funds requires personally meeting with many potential donors to understand their desires about funding College activities and then tailoring funding proposals to match those desires.

I ask all of you to consider this activity (external fundraising) to be part of your day to day working life as well.

#### **5. Plan for new facilities to accommodate a growing college.**

I do not anticipate major additions to physical facilities in the upcoming year. However, the plans outlined above will require additional facilities in the near term. As student housing expands, there will be a need for additional activity space and student services and activities space. A major priority, therefore, will be working with the USG to identify the needed spaces and to identify sources of funding to build these spaces. Two obvious needs are: (a) Expansion of the Academic Building in Swainsboro; (b) Expansion of the Student Center in Swainsboro.

In addition to meeting these needs in Swainsboro, planning for facilities needs in Statesboro is essential as well. We have to address two very basic problems:

- a. We are too far away from Georgia Southern University, in my opinion. Transportation between GSU and ESCS Statesboro is expensive and time consuming.
- b. We do not have room to expand in our current location. Currently, our own building is near capacity and we offer a relatively high percentage of our classes on the GSU campus.

Rather than acquiring land near our current building to expand, would it be better to move to a location closer to the GSU campus? At this time, my thinking is that a long term plan to move closer to GSU would be best for EGSC, best for GSU and best for the Statesboro community. However, this is a major step and this must be explored in depth this semester to see if my instincts are correct. Undertaking that decision making process is a high priority for spring semester.

In addition to these needs in Swainsboro and Statesboro, planning for EGSC facilities needs in Augusta is essential. We started programs with around 95 students this fall and it appears that enrollment will go up again in Augusta in spring 2014. This pattern, in my opinion, is likely to continue and accelerate and we will need expanded space to serve these students. As Georgia Regents University (GRU) undertakes its master planning process, we must stay in close contact with GRU to understand the way to meet our physical facilities needs in a way that also meets the needs of the Augusta community and GRU. Doing that is a high priority for spring semester.

## **6. Expand distance learning opportunities.**

The above financial realities obviously mean that we must use technology to operate more efficiently. Also, changes in the way students learn, the availability of new technology and the entry of new learning tools (e.g., adaptive learning technology and MOOCs) and the entry of new institutions of higher education into the market, all demand that EGSC aggressively expand online learning opportunities.

Expanding these opportunities must be done strategically. Accordingly, the adoption of a strategic plan for online education is a priority for spring 2014.

Key questions include:

- a. What is our target market for online programs?
- b. Which specific programs should be offered online?

- c. Should all of these online programs be offered in "traditional" online format or should we offer some as MOOCs in other emerging formats?
- d. Should we develop courses and programs using our own resources or should we partner with other institutions and organizations to do this?

#### **7. Becoming more flexible in evaluating prior experience for award of academic credit.**

Becoming more flexible does not mean lowering standards. However, it does mean we must develop the capability to address prior experience of our students in a consistent fashion to determine whether to award academic credit for that experience. Similarly, we must have open minds about awarding credit based on competency (as opposed to awarding credit based on seat time).

Decisions about awarding credit for prior experience and based on competency are important and complex. A strategic plan for prior learning assessment and competency based award of credit is essential. I will need your advice and input in developing that plan. Getting that process underway is a priority for spring of 2014.

#### **8. Enhancing collegiality.**

A college campus should, in my opinion, provide a model working environment. The manner in which faculty and staff work together on a day to day basis to create the best learning environment possible and the manner in which faculty and staff interact with our students and potential students should provide a model to students as they develop working habits which they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

This is an area in which we need to improve. During spring 2014, a priority for me is to identify specific strategies which will improve collegiality and service excellence.

#### **9. Adopt of plan for long-term viability of athletic programs.**

Prior to my arrival at EGSC, a new athletic program was initiated. I think this was a wise decision and has had a major, positive impact on the learning environment. Nonetheless, we are at a crossroads with the athletic program.

The athletic program now operates almost entirely on student athletic fees. That fee income simply does not produce enough revenue to operate four sports (men's and women's basketball, baseball and fast pitch softball). Additional sources of revenue must be identified.

The following are possible additional sources:

- a. Raise the student athletic fee. Following a positive student vote, a proposal to do this was submitted to the USG. We are awaiting a decision.
- b. Raise funds from private sources. There is a small amount of money now raised to support athletics. However, this will need to be increased.

In addition to raising additional revenue, it is also possible to integrate athletics even more fully into the life of the College. One way to do this is by hiring athletic personnel in dual roles. For example, some coaches now teach in addition to coaching. This strategy has been

abused at some colleges in the U.S. by hiring coaches into positions for which they are not qualified or by hiring coaches into positions without real duties. This does not now and has not taken place in the past at EGSC. It will not take place in the future. However, we must look for even more opportunities to employ athletic personnel in positions outside athletic department when there is work that needs to be done and the athletic personnel are qualified for the positions.

In addition, the long-term viability of the athletic program demands that a strategic plan for athletics be developed. Developing that plan is a priority for this semester.

#### **10. Enhancing service excellence.**

The College went through a period of dramatic growth for over 10 years. This growth was not accompanied by a corresponding growth in human resources to address the needs of the growing student body.

As a result of enrollment growth exceeding faculty/staff growth, the following took place:

- a. It became common for individuals to wear multiple hats on campus (i.e., take responsibility for more than one area); and
- b. Key roles, which are common on most college campuses to meet student needs, were simply not created. For example, we did not have a director of student conduct until recently.

This did have some positive outcomes. Perhaps the best example is the culture which developed at EGSC about rolling up our sleeves and getting things done. I am continually amazed when a short-term need arises. The attitude is always that everyone pitches in to get the job done. It is rare for someone to say "that is not my job."

This positive attitude has had some unintended outcomes. For example, processes developed in some areas at the College on an ad hoc basis designed to meet the needs of the moment. These now need updating to meet current needs.

As a result, I am going to be asking many units to evaluate how they do their work on a day to day basis and reorganize their processes in a manner designed to improve service. For example, I have been working with the Student Affairs Division to do this and I anticipate significant improvements in that area as a result of the thoughtful work the Student Affairs division has been doing to evaluate its processes.

I look forward to working with you in 2014 as we strive collectively to carry out the mission of the College and achieve our strategic goals.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Boehmer  
President  
East Georgia State College