

## **East Georgia State College**

### **President's Update**

#### **Thanksgiving Day 2013**

It's Thanksgiving Day and Joyce and I are in the car en route to a gathering of friends. I have the luxury of being able to spend the next three hours composing this update since Joyce has agreed to drive. To say the very least, I am thankful for that.

#### **Thanks for All You Do for EGSC**

The most important message I can convey today is my thanks. The work done at East Georgia State College changes lives for the better each and every day. Please understand how much your contributions to that important work are appreciated.

In addition to saying thanks, my travel time today gives me the opportunity to think aloud with you about the climate in which the College's work is taking place. My plan is to start with the national climate, move on to the Georgia climate and conclude with the climate in our own region.

#### **A National Perspective: The New Normal in Higher Education in the United States**

I have worked in higher education, first as a faculty member and now as an administrator, for about a quarter century. That is, in the big picture, a brief period of time. Nonetheless, my observation is that the rapid pace of change over the next five years will make the pace of change over the last twenty-five years appear to have been a plodding pace.

Writing my thoughts about this "new normal" in higher education is going to require some discipline. I have been thinking about this a great deal, the situation is complex and it is changing at warp speed. Having noted that, here is my best attempt at a brief summary.

The economy, to no one's surprise, is a driving force behind this new normal. The country has endured a long period of economic distress, including high unemployment levels. During this period, the cost of a college education has risen at a rate greater than the rate of increase in the overall cost of living. This and other factors have led to loud calls for increased accountability in higher education, demands for limits on tuition increases, greater focus on retention and graduation, and increased attention to alignment of the college curriculum with workforce demands.

During this period, the percentage of the total cost of education funded by the states has fallen across the U.S. It appears likely that flat tuition rates and declining state support are the new normal.

This "perfect storm" has created severe financial pressures on institutions of higher education. A growing number of institutions, particularly smaller private institutions, are struggling to remain financially stable. Institutional closings and consolidations are becoming more common. Many institutions are experiencing troublesome increases in student loan default rates.

As financial pressures have grown, the pace of change in educational technology has accelerated. In particular, potentially disruptive technology, such as MOOCs (massive open online courses) and adaptive learning systems, are being introduced at a rapid rate. This technology creates some opportunities, such as the possibility of improved learning and greater efficiency. Similarly, it creates challenges such as the high costs of adaptation and potential threats to traditional governance structures in higher education.

As institutions of higher education are racing to meet these challenges, the burden of federal regulation on colleges and universities has increased dramatically. Literally on a daily basis, new regulations and administrative responsibilities are being introduced leaving faculty and staff with their hands on their hips and gasping for breath.

When I contemplate this new normal, I tend to think back to my own years in college or even to my many years as a faculty member and yearn for a return to the good old days (or to what I imagine them now to have been). Then reality hits. That's a fond memory, Bob, but you don't get to go back there now. The simple reality is that higher education is going to change dramatically in the next few years. Although exhausting, the change does not have to be negative. In many ways, it creates new possibilities for those with an open mind to change. I prefer to be out in front of it having a positive impact on the new normal rather than sitting back and bemoaning the fact of change.

### **A State Perspective: The Outlook in the University System of Georgia for FY 2015**

The University System of Georgia is certainly not sitting back and waiting to see how these forces of change will play out. In the last couple of years, eight USG institutions merged into four. Just last month, the merger of two more institutions was announced. In my opinion, signs point to more consolidation activity in the not too distant future.

In addition to consolidations, the USG is moving to a new "performance based funding" model. Fiscal Year 2015 will be the last year of the "enrollment based funding model." This means that, instead of primarily rewarding the number of students sitting in seats in class, the USG will be rewarding institutions based on how many of those students come back for the next year of class, graduate and get jobs.

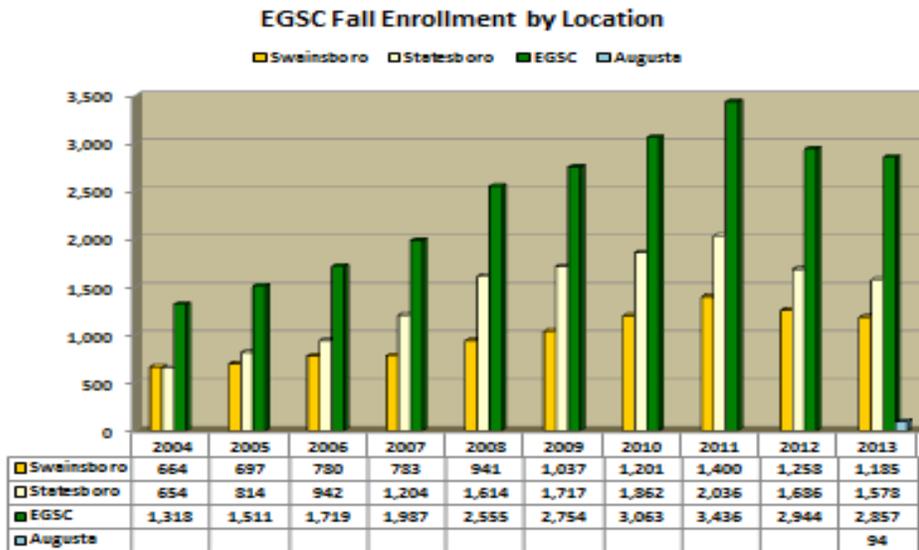
This performance based funded comes on the heels of the Complete College Georgia plan. That statewide plan seeks to dramatically increase the number of the state's college graduates by 2025. All USG institutions have spent a great deal of time over the last couple of years developing Complete College Georgia plans --- plans to create a roadmap to higher retention rates, higher graduation rates and increased college readiness. Performance based funding means it's now "put up or shut up" time. Attainment of the goals in those plans is what will be rewarded in the new performance based funding system.

### **A Local Perspective: The Role of EGSC in the Economic and Social Health of Our Community**

As a relative newcomer to this incredible region of the state, I am struck each day by two seemingly contradictory observations. The first observation is the depth of the pain which the region has suffered as a result of the economic situation. It is painful to see abandoned store fronts, residential areas in disrepair and residents out of work. The second observation is how well the community is poised to recover and thrive. A few things I notice each day are: the potential of our beautiful downtown area; the infrastructure for recreation which is already in place (e.g., beautiful parks); the capacity of our airport; our proximity to the major transportation corridor (along I-16) from the port of Savannah to inland areas; the presence of a full range of excellent institutions of higher education in our region (technical colleges, state colleges, research universities); and the resilience and resourcefulness of the residents.

These daily observations cause me to think about the role the College can play in the next economic chapter for the region. As our capacity to house more students in residential housing increases, as we reach out to students in the area who have completed some college but have no degree, as we reach out to military personnel and former military personnel and their families, as we convince more and more of our high school students to go on to





Over a significant number of years, enrollment and credit hours trended upward, reaching a peak in fall of 2011. Consistent with both national and state patterns, enrollment and credit hours then fell in fall 2012 and fall 2013.

The reasons for the recent decrease include the following:

- New admission standards required by the University System of Georgia. A significant number of students, who formerly would have been admissible, are no longer admissible.
- New satisfactory academic progress standards required by the federal department of education. A significant number of students, who formerly would have been able to stay in school despite making scant progress toward a degree, may no longer receive federal student financial aid.
- The economy. A significant number of students simply cannot afford to attend college.

The College's long term health requires that we take aggressive steps to reverse this declining enrollment trend. Our strategy to do this has many components. However, the two fundamental elements of this strategy are quite straightforward:

1. We must increase the expectation levels and college readiness of students in the region. Far too many bright students in this region do not have an expectation of attending college. Additionally, far too many bright students in this region are not academically ready for the academic rigors of college.
2. Once students choose to attend college, we have to do a much, much better job of retaining and graduating those students.

This spring semester, the College will reach out to high schools in the region aggressively to increase awareness and expectation levels of students in the region about college. For example, I will be devoting several weeks this spring to making tour of high schools in the region to talk with students about the importance of college. I will be accompanied by students, faculty and staff in making this high school tour.

Once students do choose to attend college, there must be many more acceptable places for them to live in Swainsboro. During the last year, the College has been working closely with the University System of Georgia on a new initiative to increase residential capacity. This initiative takes a new approach for Georgia. Instead of relying on bond financing, this initiative encourages private developers to invest in student housing and then manage that housing under a long term agreement with the educational institution. Although the deal is not yet

final, I am optimistic that approximately 200 new beds will be available at EGSC for fall 2015 as a result of this initiative.

Yet another key element in our strategy to increase enrollment is enhancement of our partnerships with Georgia Southern University in Statesboro and Georgia Regents University in Augusta. These partnerships are win-win-win arrangements. Students win because they get a great start at a great price at EGSC and then transfer seamlessly to GSU or GRU to earn a baccalaureate degree. GSU and GRU win because the pipeline of well-prepared students to those institutions is increased. EGSC wins because our enrollment in Statesboro and Augusta increases.

As the above strategies bring more students to EGSC, the College's Complete College Georgia plan outlines our strategy for retaining and graduating students at a higher rate. The linchpin in that multi-faceted plan is our Academic Center for Excellence. Intrusive advising, tutoring and mentoring by talented professionals are what really produce academic dividends.

### **The Importance of Private Fundraising to the Future of EGSC**

At this point, it is important to recognize an obvious and major stumbling block --- money. It costs a lot to recruit and retain students. Bemoaning levels of state support for higher education and low levels of state support for institutions like EGSC relative to other institutions may be therapeutic, but is it not effective. What will be effective is working really hard to increase levels of private giving to the College.

In the past, major fundraising campaigns have been strategic linchpins for elite private institutions and large public research institutions. However, they have been more of an afterthought for community colleges and state colleges. That must change.

The new normal will require that institutions like EGSC create a culture of private fundraising. That is the reason that the College has initiated a 5-year, \$5 million fundraising campaign. Meeting this goal is essential to the College's long-term financial health.

### **Thank You for Your Support of the September 2013 Events at EGSC**

As I think about the challenges and opportunities facing the College, some of which are outlined in this message, I am optimistic and excited about the future of the College and the opportunity to work with all of you in achieving our shared goals. I am, also, thankful for all you have already done. An excellent example is the level of support you provided for the events held by the College in September. Over a course of 3 days, thousands visited the College to participate in fundraising campaign kickoff, convocation, investiture, Bobcat Dash with a Splash, 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and parents/families/alumni day (including the Bobcat Regatta). Many of the participants in these events were visiting our campus for the first time. All left with a positive impression of the college as well as optimism about the College's future. Your support was essential to these successful events. Thank you!

Our car is now rolling into the familiar outskirts of Athens. There is a lot more to say, but Thanksgiving dinner awaits and it's time to hit "save" and move on to dinner and friends.

Wishing you a peaceful holiday season,

Bob Boehmer  
President  
East Georgia State College