

Weekly Notes by East Georgia State College President

January 18, 2013

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Importance of Open Lines of Communication

Since arriving at East Georgia State College in early 2012, establishing open lines of communication with each of you as well as carefully listening to your input have been among my top priorities. As a next step towards maintaining these lines of communication, I am writing this message as the first in a series of brief weekly notes about the College. In stark contrast with this first message, these will usually be brief. Each will be posted on the College's website under the President's Office section (see President's Weekly Notes on the menu on the right side of the page).

http://www.ega.edu/index.php/offices/presidents_office/the_president

Written weekly notes are, of course, only one communication tool among many. Even more important are the continuing opportunities for face-to-face communication. During 2013, my regularly scheduled meetings will include:

- Faculty Senate
- Staff Council
- Student Government Association
- Vice-President for Academic Affairs and Division Chairs
- Cabinet
- Senior Administrators (all directors and vice presidents)
- Foundation Trustees
- Attendance at Meetings of Board of Regents
- Attendance at Meetings of USG Presidents.

In addition to these regular meetings, periodic informal meetings with academic and administrative units have been extremely helpful to me during 2012. Your

insights have greatly advanced my understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing the College. I hope that, during 2013, you will continue to invite me to meet with you in informal settings to discuss these important matters.

Also, it was my privilege to be able to teach a course fall semester. I plan to do that each fall. In addition to being enjoyable and fulfilling, teaching helps keep me in direct contact with the needs of students, faculty and staff just as it did during my prior 23 years of teaching at the University of Georgia.

What is on my mind at this time?

These weekly notes will, generally, address the question “What issues about the College are on my mind now?” I hope that some of you will find this to be a useful way to stay in touch with major issues facing the College. Please let me know if these postings accomplish that.

Vision

This is a time of unique challenge and opportunity for the College. The challenges include the current national and state economic climate, the current state budgetary situation, nationwide pressures to maintain low rates of tuition and student fees, declining enrollment rates nationally and statewide, inadequate preparation of many high school graduates for college, need to increase retention and graduation rates dramatically, calls to alter instructional delivery methods and times of classes to respond to changing learning styles and schedules of non-traditional students, rapid and expensive changes in learning technology, emergence of MOOCs, and dramatic changes in the modern workplace (necessitating corresponding changes in the curriculum). This is, quite obviously, only a short list of the emerging challenges --- there are many more.

Despite the fact that the list of challenges may seem daunting, it is my personal belief that the opportunities presented to the College trump the challenges. As an access institution, our mission uniquely positions us to respond to these challenges. Our location as the only access institution inside the triangle formed by Savannah, Macon and Augusta, creates a strong base of demand for what we do best. As an institution with a mission focused on teaching, we have years of experience in working with students who are often underprepared. There is a unique and

extremely positive relationship between the College and the community we serve. Finally, we have a passionate, committed, experienced and talented faculty and staff ready to meet the challenges.

Seizing these opportunities will require EGSC to demonstrate the capacity to respond to the new environment for higher education. Although we will remain committed to our core principles, we must anticipate change and respond to it.

Enrollment, Retention and Graduation at EGSC

Since this is the first week of the semester, enrollment trends are at the front of my mind this week. Enrollment for many USG institutions, EGSC included, dropped significantly in fall 2012 (as compared with fall 2011). Once final numbers are in, it is likely that we will see a similar drop for spring 2013 (as compared with spring 2012). A high percentage of colleges and universities across the U.S. are having a similar experience.

It is hard for all of us to face this enrollment drop since the College has grown dramatically since its formation in the 1970s through the present. This decline has resulted from many factors, including the following:

- The economic climate is simply making it harder for students and their families to afford college. Across the nation, some are asking “Is college worth the cost?” I believe the clear answer is “yes,” but not all agree and this is creating some downward enrollment pressure.
- More rigorous standards for federal student financial aid have resulted in some students not qualifying at the beginning of their college career or later losing that aid because of failure to make satisfactory academic progress.
- New statewide standards concerning admission to USG institutions (minimum test scores) appear to have caused some students not to apply, and have resulted in other students not completing the application process by taking required Compass tests. Similarly, new statewide standards concerning exit from learning support have resulted in dismissal of some students who have failed to meet those standards.

These downward enrollment pressures will continue and likely increase. However, I believe that the College will be able to overcome these challenges by a series of steps including: working even more closely with high schools to prepare students for college and for the application and financial aid process; expanding and further personalizing student recruiting efforts; expanding our ability to make our programs accessible to military personnel and non-traditional students; expanding on-line and hybrid (mixed on-line and face to face) programs; offering courses at times creating more convenience for students with employment and family responsibilities; creating new degree programs (associate and bachelors level) that meet emerging workforce needs in targeted areas; and offering programs in other locations of high demand.

This discussion of enrollment brings me and area in which dramatic improvement is needed: retention and graduation of these students. The College's recently adopted Complete College Georgia Plan lays out a series of strategies and action steps to improve retention and graduation. Similarly, it establishes measures to enable us to continually evaluate our progress.

One major step taken in this direction during the last year was the creation of an Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) at both Swainsboro and Statesboro. This exciting step forward was made possible by targeted state funding enabling us, among other things, to hire a full-time Director of Learning Support, a Director and Assistant Director of Advisement, and part-time advisors. These new positions, combined with our talented library staff and academic support personnel (former Academic Instructional Resource Center personnel), resulted in the creation of a Learning Commons area on each campus. Many faculty, in addition to their other teaching duties, have been holding office hours in the ACE.

All of this would simply be words in the President's Weekly Update but for the fact that this infusion of energy and talent has already produced results. On any given day during fall 2012, as I walked to my class, I could see the beginning of these results – more students spending more time in the library and in ACE working with faculty, advisors, tutors and librarians. At the end of the semester, I learned that these individual interactions produced measurable progress in success rates in individual courses. Ultimately, this will result in improved retention and graduation.

Development of Unique, Targeted Degree Programs

I strongly encourage creative proposals for new programs which meet needs in targeted areas. In my opinion, new degree programs should meet needs not being met by other institutions in the state; or should meet needs which are in such high demand that there are not sufficient spaces in other programs in the region. For this reason, there are several degree programs now moving through the internal approval process which are designed to meet these standards.

For example, Darton College now offers an excellent associate's degree program in nursing on our Swainsboro campus. We are considering the feasibility of a bachelors nursing program offered by EGSC which would focus on rural health and provide a RN to BSN bridge. As another example, we are considering the feasibility of a bachelors degree program focused on the needs of firefighters seeking to attain the management and leadership skills necessary for promotion and career advancement. As yet another example, we are looking at a bachelors program designed to prepare students for middle grade math and science teaching.

Identifying new degree programs and obtaining approval to offer these programs from the USG will require us be data-driven. We will need to methodically examine workforce needs and student demand in order to support these proposals.

The Importance of the Physical Campus to Achieving our Goals

As we develop and expand on-line offerings, we should not forget that our physical campus is a critical component of our success. Each day as I arrive on campus, I have the privilege of enjoying the beauty of the campus. It is important for us to remind ourselves regularly that the beautiful and secure environment we enjoy results from the work of our plant operations and public safety personnel. Don't forget to take the time to recognize their efforts and talent.

This physical campus should encourage and support interaction among faculty, staff and students. It should invite and encourage the community to come to campus to interact with our faculty, staff and students. It should inspire young people to begin planning and preparing for college. Accordingly, I am regularly looking for ways to continue to improve our physical campus. A couple of examples may be appropriate here:

- A small group has been making great progress in facilitating an art explosion at both Swainsboro and Statesboro. This Art on Campus project features student and faculty works, local work and work featuring the region. I believe this project has already contributed significantly to improvement of our learning environment.
- Another small group has already established a 5 kilometer cross-county course on the Swainsboro campus. Plans are already underway to expand this to 10K. This project has already brought many young people and their families to our campus. The value of exposing these students to our campus is very high.

Over the summer of 2012, our plant operations department made other major improvements to campus with limited funds. For example, a Learning Commons area was created in Swainsboro and Statesboro. This includes the creation of the new Academic Centers for Excellence, new coffee shops (Common Grounds I and II), and moving of the Heritage Center to its new location inside the Library at Swainsboro. During this academic year, use of those areas has increased dramatically on both campuses.

Engaged Students Excel Academically

All of these changes to the physical campus are intended, in part, to encourage students to spend more time on campus. Whether these students are in the ACE working with a tutor, in Common Grounds reading in preparation for class, in the JAM Center participating in a student organization meeting, or, the more opportunities we create for students to engage, the more likely they will succeed academically.

Obviously, the physical campus is only the first step in engaging students. Our Student Activities and Housing personnel and faculty and staff advisors then spend countless hours at irregular times working with students to create more opportunities for engagement. Perhaps you have noticed how well our SGA officers have represented the College at public events, the dramatic improvement in the cheering squad at our basketball games, or the excitement of young people participating in Science Olympiad or Second Grade Experience or similar events.

We need to intentionally expand these opportunities for engagement as the College grows.

This brings me to what I believe is a very important long-term strategy for the College. One very important vehicle for student engagement is service. Whenever possible, service should be intentionally connected with the academic program of the individual student. No student should graduate from the College without a well-developed sense of responsibility to use their education to serve the community. Accordingly, in the near term, we will be developing a “service seal of distinction” to recognize students who, during their career at EGSC, meet these standards of service.

As we think about student engagement and service, it is also important to think about the importance of the Student Conduct Code and the College’s academic honesty standards. These are not simply rules printed in the College Catalog. These are standards designed to develop a pattern of conduct which students will carry for a lifetime. In addition, these standards are a key element in the safety and quality of our learning environment. During the last year, the College created and filled a new position – Director of Student Conduct. I know that all of you will join with me in working with our Director in this important area.

The Importance of Connection Between Community and College to Achieving our Goals

EGSC was created in the 1970s (Emanuel County Junior College) because of an unusually strong base of community support. The land upon which the College was built and the original buildings on campus were the direct result of that support.

This community/College connection is part of the College’s fiber. Maintaining that connection is a key to our future success.

The Sudie A. Fulford Community Learning Center is located at the gateway to our Swainsboro Campus. It represents this community/College connection.

Since its opening, countless grade and high school students have visited the Center and have left with a higher level of excitement about education. We will build on this over the years to come as we seek to find creative ways to enhance our

relationships with schools in the region. For example, the Magnolia Midlands Georgia Youth Science and Technology Center has recently been moved from the Academic Building to the Fulford Center to contribute to that effort.

The Importance of Collaboration with Other USG and DTAE Institutions in Meeting Student Needs

The technical colleges in the region are our partners in finding ways to create pathways to academic success for students in the region. During the last year, both Southeastern Technical College and Ogeechee Technical College have worked with us in this important area. We look forward to many collaborations with them over the years to come.

SACSCOC Visit Concerning Level Change

As you all know well, we added “State” to our name in 2012. Even though we are saving money by not changing all the signs and stationary at once, this name change represents a big step forward for the College. In fall 2012, our first upper-division students began working towards their bachelors degree in biology. We now have a Department of Biology within our Division of Math and Sciences; and a Biology Department Head.

A great deal of work is underway right now to prepare for the visit by SACSCOC in February 2013. A team of peer reviewers will come to campus to review the extensive documentation prepared in support of this level-change, the labs and other physical facilities necessary to offer a bachelors degree program, the Library, learning support and student services for upper division students, the faculty credentials and the policies and procedures of the College. The College has committed substantial resources to this new degree program and prepared extensively for the upcoming visit. We are looking forward to this opportunity for a dialogue with this team about our outstanding new biology program.

Expansion of Housing Options

The enrollment of the College cannot remain static or decline if we are going to thrive in the long run. A major constraint on our growth is the lack of suitable student housing alternatives in the Swainsboro area.

I am spending a good deal of time in an effort to identify means to expand these housing options. The Foundation Trustees and local government bodies are key partners in this effort. All strongly believe that the expansion of high quality housing options is in the long term best interest of the College and the community.

As evidenced by the Selig Center's annual report concerning the economic impact of the states colleges and universities on their regions, EGSC is a major economic force in our region. Expansion of student housing would significantly enhance that impact.

The College's physical master plan calls for the construction of additional residence halls (2) adjacent to the current residence hall. Building those additional residence halls will likely require that bonds be issued at the state level, that the USG approve the use of bond proceeds to construct the buildings, and that residence hall fees be committed to retiring the debt over a 20-30 year period. This is a long-term strategy to increase residence hall space, but is not likely to provide additional bed space in the next couple of years.

The construction of student housing near campus by a private developer near campus under an agreement with College concerning the responsible management of the housing is another option. This approach could, if approved by the USG, present an approach which would increase bed space at an earlier point in time. We are investigating this option aggressively.

These two approaches --- additional residence halls on campus and private housing development --- are not mutually exclusive alternatives. In the long run, both approaches will need to be utilized to meet long-term demand.

State Budget

During FY 2012-2013, all state agencies were directed to take a 3% permanent budget cut. This cut was applied to all USG institutions including EGSC.

I do anticipate that an additional cut (perhaps an additional 2%) from the FY 2013 budget will be directed before the end of FY 2013. However, neither the cut nor the amount has been announced at this time.

The College will meet with the Chancellor and others at the USG offices in late February to discuss the College's FY 2014 budget. A significant amount of preparation for that budget presentation is now underway.

The College's actual FY 2014 will be announced to the College later this spring. Once that budget is announced, I will share my thoughts with you concerning the impact of that new budget on the College.

As we are preparing for our budget hearing with the USG and awaiting the word concerning the FY 2014 budget, I will be meeting with the heads of the EGSC units concerning their individual budget. The key question at each meeting will be "How do your unit's goals and plans advance the strategic goals of the College and what specific funds do you need to achieve those goals and plans?"

Statesboro Programs

Currently, students at EGSC Statesboro take individual courses to prepare for transfer to Georgia Southern University or other institutions. However, at the present time those students cannot typically earn an EGSC associates degree at that location.

It is extremely important that students at EGSC – Statesboro have the ability to earn an associates degree. In 2012, we requested and obtained from the USG the approval to offer associates degrees in Statesboro.

SACSOC approval is, also, required before these degrees may be offered. We have formally notified SACSCOC of this USG approval. We will file a "prospectus" with SACSCOC later this spring. We are making excellent progress towards this important goal and I will keep you posted as the SACCOC process moves forward.

Another issue of a very different kind is important to all of you who go to EGSC Statesboro regularly. That issue is the lack of cell phone service inside our beautiful new EGSC Statesboro facility. I am currently working closely with the cell phone providers to understand the technical nature of the problem and the solution. In fact, I have a meeting at EGSC Statesboro later today to address that issue.

I will keep you posted about this since I know that the ability to make calls and receive calls on cell phones at this campus is very important for many reasons. I cannot promise a particular solution or a timetable for implementation. However, you can be assured that this is a very high priority for me.

Capital Campaign

The EGSC Foundation is a key to the long-term success of the College. It has been a key to our past success. For example, the Foundation was the linchpin in the construction of our current residence hall. In addition, each of you is familiar with one or more of the many scholarships provided by the Foundation. There are many more examples of the great work done by our Foundation.

The next major step in the growth of the Foundation will be a capital campaign. Typically, capital campaigns are conducted over a multi-year period (five years is common). In most cases, there is what is known as a “silent phase” during which a very high percentage of the goal is committed by a relatively small number of large donors. This is the approach which will be followed by our capital campaign.

Due to the changing environment for higher education, a campaign of this type is central to our long term success. State funding for higher education is declining across the country. The pressures to keep tuition and fees low are real and long-term. In order to meet our goals, it is imperative that we supplement state funding and tuition/fee revenue with private funding.

As this campaign develops, I will keep you posted. The goals for campaigns of this type, of course, vary dramatically based on the size, mission and history of the institution. Some are in the billions. I believe that a goal of around \$5,000,000 for EGSC is a reasonable and achievable goal.

Athletics

Our athletic programs are just a few years old. Already, they are representing the College admirably across the state, competing extremely well and exposing many potential students to the possibilities of an EGSC education.

What many of you may not know is how athletics are funded at EGSC at the present. Many institutions with long-time athletic programs enjoy multiple sources

of athletic revenue – large private donations; major gate revenues; significant licensing revenue. These sources of revenue do not exist at the present at EGSC.

EGSC students currently pay an athletic fee. That fee represents almost the entire athletic budget. In other words, the strong performance of our teams is being accomplished at the present with quite limited resources.

Due to the strong performance of our existing teams, I receive quite a few inquiries about the possibility of additional teams. There are additional athletic programs which would be a natural fit at EGSC. Above, I mentioned the new cross county course. Programs for women and men in cross county appear to be a natural fit as we look to the future. Similarly, consider how well women's and men's programs in golf, tennis and soccer would fit into our college's plans.

These programs have the potential to further enhance our learning environment. For example, these programs bring students to our campus from a wider geographic area. Also, these programs broaden the college experience available to our students.

Decisions have not yet been made to add additional athletic programs. However, the potential benefits are major and strong and careful consideration will need to be given to this possibility over the coming months.

Governance

I will begin and end this message with the concept of a climate of communication. In 2012, with the leadership of key faculty members, a Faculty Senate for EGSC was established. Also, the President's Cabinet was created. Each will operate transparently through a series of standing committees. A Staff Council has been in place for a number of years as is a Student Government Association.

In addition to these key governance structures, I have created several very important task forces to address critical issues facing our College community.

These are:

- Military Friendly Campus Task Force
- Task Force Concerning Situations Presenting Threat of Imminent Harm

- African American Male Initiative Task Force
- Student Loan Default Rate Task Force

I have asked each of these task forces for recommendations within their area of responsibility. As those recommendations are finalized, I will share those recommendations with you.

We will not always agree. However, this structure will enable us to have healthy debates in a collegial fashion. I look forward to continuing to work with all of these groups to make EGSC an even better learning environment.

Concluding Thoughts for Today

Clearly, both the opportunities and the challenges facing us in the coming years are significant. It is invigorating to contemplate the future that awaits the College if we take advantage of these opportunities and meet these challenges. Doing that will require each of us to make extraordinary efforts to communicate clearly and regularly. I hope that this weekly update will contribute to maintenance of a climate which encourages that communication.

In closing, it is important for our community to step back regularly from our intense work schedules and remind ourselves that EGSC is a special place. It is unique and special because of the extremely high level of commitment of staff and faculty to providing students with a high quality education with a personal touch. It is, also, unique and special because of the College's close relationship with the community. Please know that the commitment and service of each of you is deeply appreciated. Please take time out of your busy schedule to express your appreciation to a member of the local community for their support of EGSC.

I wish you and your families a happy new year and look forward to working with you for many years to come as we meet these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities.

Sincerely,

Bob Boehmer

President

East Georgia State College.