

## **Building a Bridge to College English**

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### **Project Category 2: Planning for Success in Gateway Courses**

#### **Project Overview:**

Using the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, this project aligns course standards and performance expectations in grades 11 and 12 with English 1101 and English 1102 (introductory English composition courses). Composition is not generally taught as a separate subject in Georgia public high schools, and so in consultation with a local high school teacher in a Title I school, the project will prepare material consistent with the work high school juniors and seniors can expect when they transition to college. At the same time, the project will develop and deploy materials useful to secondary schools as they integrate additional informational texts as a component of the CCGPS.

As Robert Tremmel (2002) has noted, “Writing teacher education for secondary teachers should not be a completely separate enterprise from writing teacher education for first-year composition.”<sup>1</sup> Tremmel’s observation suggests an avenue to increase college completion, and this project, through a series of lesson plans, teacher exchanges, workshops, and observations, seeks alignment of standards, objectives, assessments to ease the transition from high school to college. This alignment is important especially

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<sup>1</sup>*Teaching Writing Teachers of High School English and First-Year Composition*, Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

because the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate informational texts is vital to student success in all academic areas.

### **Impact on Completion:**

The project will boost course completion by developing a template for academic continuity between high school and college, especially in English/Language Arts. Through aligning expectations, standards, objectives, and assessments, students will make a smoother transition to college-level written work, and they will be better able to master the complex informational texts used in their courses. Writing is an important component of learning assessment, and so the impact on college completion will be significant: students will be able to deploy a set of tools for understanding academic informational texts, and they will be able to use a set of processes to make their thinking more clearly visible. Understanding the research and development processes of college-level writing and applying them in high school will help students earn higher grades and move through a post-secondary academic program more quickly.

### **Potential Lessons to Be Learned:**

One of the lessons of the project will be importance of helping college-bound students understand post-secondary academic expectations, particularly in relation to the writing and informational text sections of the CCGPS. More broadly, however, providing a level of continuity will help chart a course for additional collaboration of regional education communities. An additional project lesson will be to demonstrate the importance of this collaboration as a determiner of regional and individual economic strength. For example, Sabates, Harris, and Staff (2011) found in a study of 34 years of longitudinal data that “Youth [at age 16] who hold misaligned or uncertain aspirations [regarding education and occupation] show long-term deficits in employment stability and educational attainment, which in turn leads to lower wage attainments at age 34” (p. 959).<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, the lesson of the project will be that collaboration among regional educational stakeholders can improve the economic prospects of individuals within a region.

### **Concept Description:**

The English 1101 and English 1102 gateway courses are important to student success throughout college. When students are under-prepared to enter college academic discourse communities, they struggle since they are unsure of how to make their thinking visible to their peers and instructors. College-level writing requires a complex blend of writing and thinking, and while the CCGPS standards for grades 11 and 12 writing are substantial, expository composition is not generally taught at the high school level.

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<sup>2</sup> Ambition Gone Awry: The Long-Term Socioeconomic Consequences of Misaligned and Uncertain Ambitions in Adolescence, *Social Science Quarterly*, 92, 4.

Building a Bridge to College English has the potential to increase significantly the completion rate of Gordon State College introductory composition courses, for its goal is to close the gap in expectations and performance in student written work. Through aligning the CCGPS grades 11 and 12 writing standards with introductory college-level writing courses, students will be more likely to persist toward a degree.

Importantly, this project addresses Gordon State College’s Campus Completion Plan along several dimensions. It addresses Goal 1 (Degrees Conferred at Gordon State College) by creating materials useful to high school teachers in preparing juniors and seniors for college-level work. It also has the ancillary benefit of helping high school teachers address the CCGPS standards in writing and reading informational texts. The project also addresses Goal 2 (Increased Efficiency—One-Year Retention Rate, First-Time, Full-Time Cohort) and Goal 3 (Increased Efficiency—One-Year Retention Rate, Special First-Time Cohorts). As an access institution, Gordon State College faces particular opportunities with regard to English Learning Support students. Indeed, the graduation rate for students with Learning Support requirements is an area where the college has the potential to make broad improvement. Creating a bridge to college-level written work for these students in particular has the potential not just to move numbers, but to change people’s lives and transform the culture of Gordon State College’s service area.

This project proposal similarly addresses specific college completion goals with the plan. Goal 4 (Increased Efficiency—Graduation Rates for First-Time, Full-Time Cohort) and Goal 5 (Increased Efficiency—“Appropriate Next Step Measure”<sup>3</sup> for First-Time, Full-Time Cohort). The table below relates particularly to Goal 1 of Gordon State College Completion Plan; it lists the number of degrees Gordon State College hopes to award in the coming years:

**Table 1.**

<b>2011-2012</b>	<b>2012-2013</b>	<b>2013-2014</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
<b>579 (Actual)</b>	596	620	644	670	697
<b>%-Increase</b>	3%	4%	4%	4%	4%

These goals are ambitious, and they are based on Goal 3 of the plan, which involves improving overall retention. The table below describes Gordon State College’s retention goals for individual cohorts:

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<sup>3</sup> The “Appropriate Next Step” measure accounts for Gordon State College’s role as a transfer institution. Many students complete their degrees at other institutions after finishing core requirements. The “Appropriate Next Step” measure captures data in three ways: 1) it measures the number of students who graduate from Gordon State College or a sister institution with a two-year degree, 2) it counts students who transfer to a four-year institution, and 3) it calculates the number of students who enter one of the baccalaureate programs available at Gordon State College.

**Table 2.**

<b>First-Time Cohorts</b>	<b>Actual 2010 to 2011 Retention Rate</b>	<b>Goal 2011 to 2012</b>	<b>Goal 2012-2013</b>	<b>Goal 2013-2014</b>	<b>Goal 2014-2015</b>
<b>Full-Time Freshmen</b>	46.3%	54%	56%	58%	60%
<b>Part-Time Freshman</b>	35%	40%	42%	44%	46%
<b>All Learning Support</b>	38.7%	45%	47%	49%	51%
<b>Full-Time Transfer</b>	46.9%	54%	56%	58%	60%
<b>Part-Time Transfer</b>	60.1%	62%	64%	66%	68%
<b>25 and Older</b>	53.9%	56%	58%	60%	62%
<b>Federal Financial Aid</b>	45.8%	50%	52%	54%	56%

The English 1101 and 1102 composition sequence, of course, are part of Area A, essential skills. Thus improving the completion rate in those courses should significantly enhance Gordon State College's access mission and help it reach its degree completion targets in the coming years.

The table below describes shows the percentage of students who passed entry-level writing courses at Gordon State College with an A, B, or C:

**Table 3.**

<b>Writing Course A, B, C Pass Rate</b>	<b>Spring 2011</b>	<b>Fall 2011</b>	<b>Spring 2012</b>	<b>Fall 2012</b>
<b>ENGL 0099</b>	46.4%	53.2%	50.0%	77.3%*
<b>ENGL 1101</b>	59.3%	63.5%	62.5%	65.0%
<b>ENGL 1102</b>	68.0%	61.8%	67.2%	58.3%

\*In fall 2012, Gordon State College implemented a new freshman index for admissions.

### Professional Development Model:

As an element of Gordon State College’s Campus Completion Plan, the project employs a professional development model based on communication among the various stakeholders in the local education community. The implementation proposal includes representation from four distinct groups: 1) a Gordon State College faculty member who specializes in rhetoric and composition (Dr. Wesley Venus), a Gordon State College faculty member with a background in public school education and who teaches Learning Support English Courses (Professor Susan Hendricks), an English/Language Arts teacher from Lamar County Comprehensive High School (Ms. Leslie Ann Williams), and a Gordon State College Teacher Candidate who is also a parent in Pike County. Gordon State College is in Lamar County, a Title I area, and it borders Pike County; all three schools (Pike County High School, Lamar County Comprehensive High School, and Gordon State College) are actively collaborating on dual enrollment programs. The collaboration of the group will produce an alignment among introductory college composition courses and junior and senior level English/Language Arts classes. In addition, the group will produce lesson plans to foster the alignment while emphasizing approaches to informational texts, a new focus of the CCGPS. The group will conduct teacher workshops and exchanges in order to implement the program.

The potential lessons are manifold. First, college-bound high school students and their teachers will have a better understanding of the expectations of post-secondary written work. Second, by emphasizing the analysis of and response in writing to informational texts within the CCGPS, the project provides a set of strategies teachers can deploy to help their college-bound students make a smooth transition to college. Third, the teacher exchanges and workshops will improve communication among various stakeholders in Gordon State College’s service area. This model paves the way for other secondary/post-secondary partnerships designed to improve degree completion rates throughout Georgia.

### Project Plan:

The phases, activities, milestones, and time of completion are described in the table below:

**Table 4.**

Phase	Activities	Milestones	Completion Time
1	Complete grant application and consult with stakeholders	Submission of grant proposal	April 8, 2013
2	Meet with to project team to align course objectives between 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade CCGPS and introductory English courses	Aligned objectives in 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts and college composition courses	September 30, 2013
3	Observations of high	Team meeting to discuss	October 10, 2013

	school English/Language Arts and college composition classrooms	specific desired learning outcomes	
<b>4</b>	Creation of lesson plans paying particular attention to specific learning outcomes	A body of lesson plans completed addressing the CCGPS for 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade writing and 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade informational texts	October 30, 2013
<b>5</b>	Implementation of lesson plans in 11 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> grade English/Language Arts classes and college composition courses	Completion of assessments within the lesson plans	November 30, 2013
<b>6</b>	Assessment of results	6. a) Gather data regarding fall semester performance (as measured by pass rates) in both high school English/Language Arts classroom and college composition courses; 6. b) Team meeting to make any changes necessary to lesson plans and/or implementation	January 30, 2014
<b>7</b>	Workshops and sharing of results	Results will be presented at the annual Gordon State College Teaching Matters conference as a workshop and made available electronically to all teachers at Gordon State College and in local school districts	March 30, 2014

## Project Goals

The goals of the project are outlined in the table below:

**Table 5.**

<b>Writing Course A, B, C Pass Rate</b>	<b>Fall 2012</b>	<b>Fall 2013</b>	<b>Spring 2014</b>	<b>Fall 2014</b>	<b>Spring 2015</b>
<b>ENGL 0099</b>	77.3%	79.0%	81.0%	82.0%	83.0%
<b>ENGL 1101</b>	65.0%	66.0%	67.0%	68.0%	69.0%
<b>ENGL 1102</b>	58.3%	63.0%	66.0%	67.0%	68.0%%

The baseline for the target pass rates are based on the based pass rates for each course in fall 2012 since spring 2013 numbers are not yet available.

Success in these courses will, in turn, contribute to the larger goals contained in the Gordon State College's Campus Completion Plan, outlined in earlier tables.

The success of the project will be measured as described in Table 6. The course completion rates in English 0099, English 1101, and English 1102 will increase, validating the professional development model that the project created and set in motion. Additional validation will be derived from an improvement in Gordon State College's overall retention rate and in the number of degrees awarded.

Working with local education stakeholders to close the gap in expectations between secondary and post-secondary written work has the potential to impact the success of students in all of their courses. Aligning the introductory college composition courses with the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade CCGPS for writing and for informational texts, developing materials, and then making them available offers significant, sustainable benefits. If the project is successful, it will provide a cost-effective means to improve college completion in USG colleges and universities.