

GC Journeys: Building a High-Impact Practices (HIPs) Based Institutional Initiative

Jordan Cofer
Georgia College & State University

Author Biography

Dr. Jordan Cofer is a Professor of English and Associate Provost at Georgia College. He is the chair of LEAP State Georgia and is the author of *The Gospel According to Flannery O'Connor*, and co-author of *Reconsidering Flannery O'Connor* and *Writing the Nation*. He has also published works in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *The Kansas City Star*, and others.

In 2018-2019, Georgia College (GC) launched *GC Journeys*, a signature initiative focused on high-impact practices (HIPs) that was years in the making. By working with faculty, collaborating on the initiative development, engaging the campus, supporting innovation, and measuring success, institutions can build a similar institutional-based initiative.

Step #1: Build Faculty Buy-In

The most important aspect of any institutional HIPs-based initiative is to generate faculty buy-in. Ideally, faculty would be co-architects of the initiative, helping build the program in tandem since it is largely the faculty who will be offering high-impact experiences. **Without faculty support, offering HIPs at scale is impossible.**

GC Journeys asks all Georgia College students to complete five HIPs during their undergraduate program of study, while also embedding the AAC&U Essential Learning Outcomes into the curriculum. This initiative was completely driven by a small group of faculty who, after attending the AAC&U High-Impact Practices Summer Institute, came back to campus and formed a cohort. Soon, they had faculty and staff involved and the support of academic administration. They formed a committee and started holding townhall meetings, which led to the birth of GC Journeys.

Most initiatives do not always spring up organically. However, in Georgia College's case, interested faculty were encouraged by eager administrators; hence, anyone thinking about developing an initiative based around HIPs would be wise to engage a diverse cross-section of faculty and administration early in the process.

Step #2: Building A High-Impact Practices Program

Once the general framework was established, the core committee working on this initiative began outreach with several different constituents: academic advising, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and academic departments. Each department worked to develop integrated experiences for students, with an ultimate goal for all students to have access to five HIPs.

The reason GC decided on five HIPs is that research shows students who undertake multiple HIPs have increased rates of graduation and retention, as well as demonstrated post-collegiate success. This is especially true for students from underserved backgrounds. According to Finley and McNair (2013), the average college student completes 1.3 HIPs during their college career (p. 7).

Deep Learning Experiences by Cumulative Participation in High-Impact Practices (HIPs)

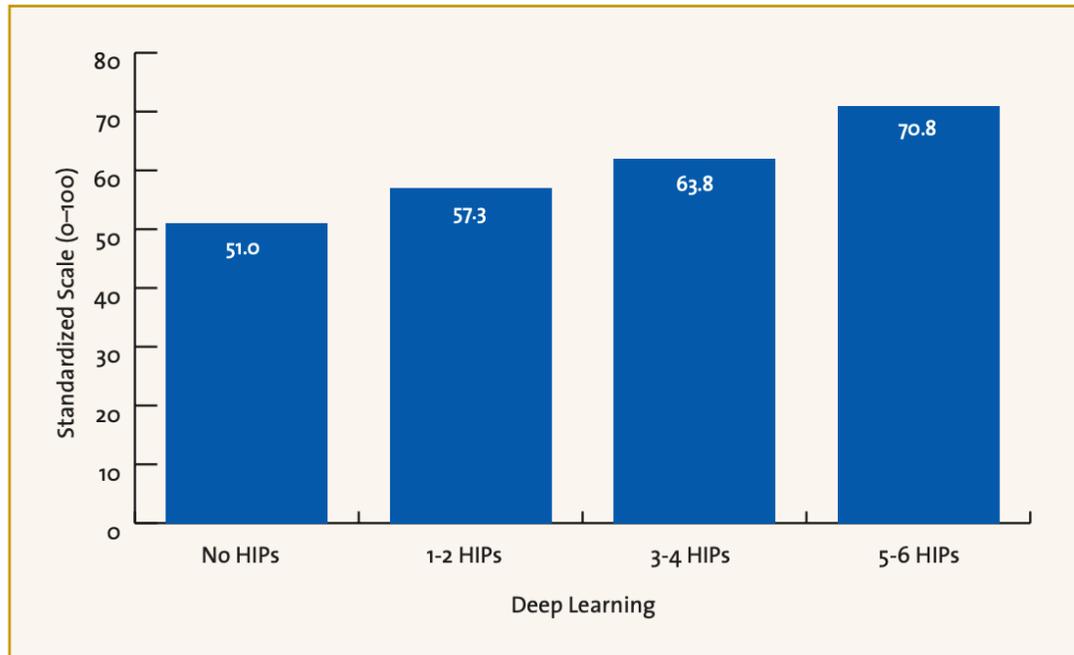


Figure 1: From Finley & McNair (2013, p. 10).

While five HIPs seemed ambitious, departments embedded as many HIPs into the degree program as possible. Ultimately, three HIPs were chosen to be embedded in each student’s degree program and students would choose two more. As part of GC Journeys, all students—regardless of major—will complete a first year experience, a capstone course in their major, and finally an institutionally developed option called “Career Milestones.”

GC
JOURNEYS

Your journey starts with...

-  THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE (FYE)
-  CAREER PLANNING MILESTONES
-  CAPSTONE COURSE IN YOUR MAJOR

+ choose 2 from...

-  INTENSIVE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES
-  MENTORED UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH
-  COMMUNITY-BASED ENGAGED LEARNING
-  INTERNSHIPS
-  STUDY ABROAD/STUDY AWAY

Where will your journey take you?

Figure 2: GC Journeys infographic (<https://www.gcsu.edu/gcjournneys>).

Additionally, academic advisors serve as a “touch point” for GC Journeys. The advisors create a degree map and help students decide which HIPs they will take during their time at GC. Advisors also ask strategic questions about GC Journeys and keep track of student responses in their advising notes.

Step #3: Engage the Bus Driver

Once Georgia College developed a plan, the next step was to engage *everyone* across the campus. The best mechanism was a low-stakes 30-minute information session geared toward a generic audience. These sessions were offered monthly and anyone who attended was certified as a “GC Guide” (and received a sticker). Using an institutional push, everyone from admissions to housing staff to faculty attended these sessions. One activity was a role play in which one attendee explains GC Journeys to the other. In this session, the Associate Provost was partnered with a campus bus driver, who explained that he wanted to be able to explain GC Journeys to students on his route. This was a pivotal moment, the message of GC Journeys was penetrating past administration and faculty, rather most of the campus was “on board.”

Step #4: Supporting Innovative Pedagogies

In order to support GC Journeys, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) offers scaled faculty development. Aside from the monthly information sessions, the CTL and Director of GC Journeys offer two separate 90-minute workshops: *High-Impact Practices* and *Essential Learning Outcomes*. Additionally, the CTL runs multiple HIPs Faculty Learning Communities. Finally, the CTL offers extensive multi-week courses for faculty.

Additionally, GC Journeys offers financial support for faculty leading HIPs in the form of small project mini-grants. These grants vary in range and can be used to buy small supplies, off-set travel, etc. The below table demonstrates some of the faculty development participation.

	Sessions in 2019–2020	Attendance
GC Journeys Info Sessions	6	103
Transformative Experiences Workshop	10	158
Essential Skills Workshop	12	151
HIPs Learning Community	4	8
Design for Transformative Learning (course)	Semester-long course	71

Figure 3: GC Journeys Faculty Participation

Step #5: Measuring Student Success...

Finally, it’s important to design a way to track and assess HIPs on campus. With GC Journeys, each department submitted a plan of how they would integrate HIPs into their curriculum. Meanwhile, the Director of GC Journeys worked with each department on this plan to ensure that all students have an embedded capstone experience. The Associate Provost and the Registrar worked closely with department chairs to create a curricular tagging system. For a HIP to count, it must receive a “course tag,” and to receive a tag, it must meet the operational definitions, which were written by faculty. To help, GC Journeys created resources for faculty and chairs to work together to assure the experiences are high-impact.

This system has led to multiple external assessments (NSSE, the University of Indiana HIPs Quality Study, the NASH Taking HIPs to Scale project), as well as internal assessments. Ultimately, designing the initiative with tracking and assessing in mind, has made the initiative easier to sustain long term.

Undergraduate Research								
	High experiences for performance	Demand time & effort	Substantive interaction w/faculty & peers	They help students engage across differences	They provide students with rich feedback	Structured opportunity to reflect & integrate	Opportunity to apply & test learning in new situations	Public demonstration of competence
National	++	++	++		+	+	++	++
GC	++	++	++		+	++	++	++

Figure 4: From Indiana University HIPs Quality Study, 2020

The end result of this assessment work is that, so far, GC’s HIPs are largely accessible to students, the students are on par or exceeding the national averages in quality, and the HIPs are making a difference in the students’ educational experiences.

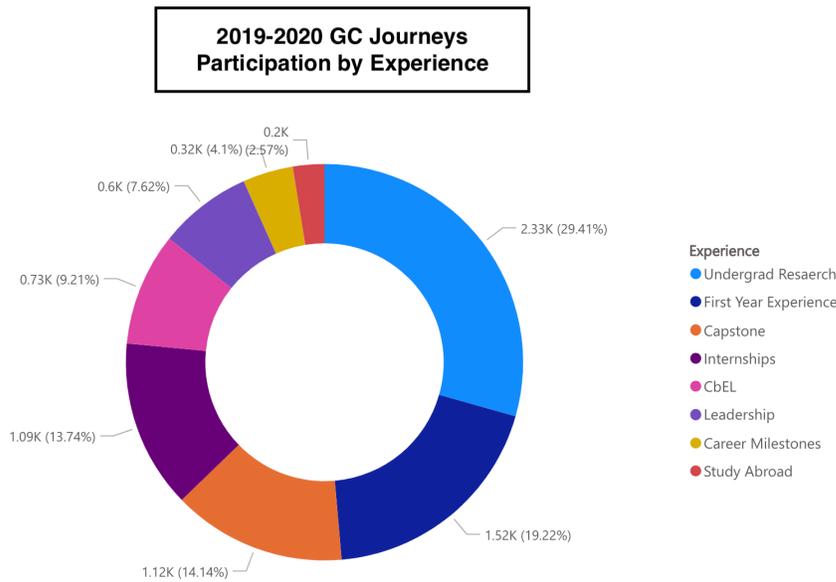


Figure 5: GC Journeys Student Participation (2019-2020)

References

Finley, A., McNair, T. (2013). *Assessing Underserved Students’ Engagement in High-Impact Practices*. AAC&U.