



Annual Report  
*of*  
Institutional Progress  
*2007-2008*

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# University of West Georgia

## 2007-2008 Annual Report of Institutional Progress

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# Part A: Annual Progress in Assessing Institutional Effectiveness

**T**he University of West Georgia is committed to *Educational Excellence in a Personal Environment* and continues to grow throughout the 2007-2008 academic year. Fall 2007 opened with record-breaking enrollment of 10,677, an increase of five percent from fall 2006. The spring 2008 semester was the first ever spring semester in which we exceeded the 10,000 student mark with record-breaking enrollment – 10,111. Graduate student enrollment increased by nine percent over fall 2006 enrollment of 1,688.

The following are demonstrative of the University's continuing pledge to *Educational Excellence in a Personal Environment*.

### *Educational Excellence in a Personal Environment*

- The Princeton Review chose the University of West Georgia as a “Best Southern College 2008.” The listing in this prestigious annual publication marks the fifth consecutive year that UWG was acknowledged as an outstanding institution.
- West Georgia's online WebMBA program won recognition as one of the Top 25 Best Buys in the country by GetEducated.com and *The Princeton Review* listed Georgia WebMBA as a “top choice” for an online MBA for 2008.
- In the *James Top Political Science/Governmental Affairs Programs in Georgia* category, UWG ranked sixth out of 10 universities. The University of West Georgia was also awarded top 10 pick in three additional categories in the “Ranking Georgia's Colleges and Universities” publication and is mentioned as “an institution of note.”
- The University of West Georgia ranks near the top in enrollment numbers in the state for online courses and programs. The UWG Distance and Distributed Education Center increased its course selections and



programs and now accounts for 40 percent of all student enrollment in e-Core courses in the University System of Georgia. UWG was among the first institutions in the university system to offer online courses in the 1990s, and enrollment has increased from 250 students in 1997 to 3,700 in 2007.

### *Program and Need Assessment by Department*

Each of the academic divisions of the college conducts assessment activities on an ongoing basis.

In the *Department of Special Education and Speech-Language Pathology*, Speech-Language Pathology faculty used the Praxis and the Knowledge and Skill Acquisitions Standards (KASA) to update courses, enabling students to receive higher scores on the Praxis exams. In *Special Education*, faculty updated courses to teach essential content to comply with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards and to meet the new Professional Standards Commission (PSC) preparation rules.

Each fall at the annual *Department of Nursing Retreat*, faculty members review the Total Plan for Evaluation (<http://www.westga.edu/~nurs/Program%20%20Information/TPE%20Form%20approved%208-28-06.htm>) and data collected from the previous academic year. Measures are implemented to respond to areas where outcomes are not met. Nursing faculty continue to review student comments and implement changes. Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) satisfaction at graduation improved in fiscal year 2007 and faculty hope for even more improvement in fiscal year 2008. The Assessment Technologies Institute (ATI) testing policy modification in fiscal year 2007 resulted in improved first-attempt passing rates of 94 percent for the May 2007 graduating class on the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and 100 percent for the December 2007 Newnan graduating class.

In the *Department of Accounting and Finance*, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) Level II examination was used for assessing understanding of accounting topics for many years. However, annual examination updates were discontinued and some exam questions were no longer relevant. Thus, the Assessment Committee decided the examination had outlived its usefulness. The department has embedded assessment modules in Financial Reporting I (ACCT 3212), Managerial Accounting (ACCT 3232), Accounting Information Systems (ACCT 4241), Financial Reporting II (ACCT 3212), Income Tax Accounting for Individuals (ACCT 3251), and Auditing (ACCT 4261).

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## Institutional Effectiveness

The *Department of Chemistry* changed the design of the advanced lab courses (Advanced Lab I, II, and III) which had scheduling problems. This was improved by offering two more lab courses (Physical Chemistry Lab and Advanced Synthesis Lab). Also, in Advanced Lab I and II Instrumental lab exercises were removed and placed in the lecture-lab course, Instrumental Analysis (CHEM 4330K) since covering broad topics such as Quantum mechanics, Thermodynamics, and Instrumental Lab exercises proved to be too difficult for the students to cover in one lab course. The scheduling problems have decreased with the new arrangement and the teaching and learning outcomes will be assessed for the next several years before making any conclusions.

In the *Department of Economics*, faculty reviews assessment examination results annually to determine the economic literacy level of graduating majors. The Department's Assessment Committee revised the "assessment exam" in spring 2004 which relates more closely to the department's learning goals. The department also reviews the exit evaluations of graduating seniors. The department's greatest weakness (based on the spring 2008 survey) is the lack of internship opportunities. This perceived weakness will be addressed with department faculty, Career Services, and with the Dean of the Richards College of Business (RCOB).

One of the departmental goals has been to begin online offerings. This past year, the department made enormous strides in achieving that goal. During summer 2008, the first complete online economics course (ECON 4410, Money and Banking) will be offered. Five economics faculty completed the Distance Education Certification program during spring 2008. Plans are in the works to offer two additional courses (ECON 2105 and ECON 3402) during 2008-09.

The *Department of Geosciences* faculty reported that students came to advising appointments late and unprepared. A system was implemented for all Geoscience majors to receive an e-mail reminder to sign up for advising appointments and to come prepared (e.g., bring their advising folder to the appointment). This has resulted in earlier advising appointments and better preparation by students.

The capstone course prerequisites were not enforced electronically, allowing students who did not meet the prerequisite requirements to enter the course. Students failing to meet the prerequisites consistently performed poorly in the course; therefore, the prerequisites will be enforced in Banweb, ensuring that students meet minimum proficiency levels prior to enrolling in capstone courses.

In addition to aiding with capstone prerequisites, departmental faculty received instruction on using Banweb to electronically remove advising holds, override enrollment caps, and perform other "housekeeping" functions, thus streamlining these processes from the perspective of students, who previously had to see the professor and then the office manager in order to attend to these matters.

In the *Department of Physical Education and Recreation*, the goal of the teacher education program is to prepare professional health and physical education teachers. Frustrated with the lack of professionalism demonstrated by students in class, in field experiences, and including evaluations of affective behaviors in academic grades raised additional issues the faculty developed and implemented a nine item rubric with four levels to assess individual students on their professional dispositions each semester. A system was developed to conduct formative evaluations during week 6 and summative evaluations during week 13 of each semester. The rubrics are used to provide feedback to students about their dispositions, to counsel students toward stronger performance, and to identify students who are not appropriate for the teaching profession earlier in the program.

One departmental goal for the *Department of Management* is to "Maintain a current and relevant curriculum." Part of this assessment involves regularly reviewing curricular structure. Reviews of the Management Information Systems (MIS) curriculum have led to the offer of a programming class, a certification class, and a number of "management select" courses. In addition, given the importance of technology in the workplace, the department is moving toward an on-line minor program in MIS and a certification program.

Based on student feedback and RCOB initiative, the *Department of Marketing and Real Estate* developed a new online course in Principles of Marketing. This department developed five new online classes, two of which were offered during spring 2008 and three in summer 2008. The department continues to offer two sections of online Principles of Marketing each semester.

Exit interviews with graduating students, discussion with the board of advisors, and alumni surveys all indicated a need for more practical training and applications oriented instruction for our students. Based on this, the curriculum in several of the marketing elective classes and in the capstone class was revised to include outside class projects with local firms and students were encouraged to find internships with local firms.

Prior to recommendation for state certification, students completing their course work passed the Praxis II

examination in Administration and Supervision. *Educational Leadership and Professional Studies (ELPS)* uses the test results as an external tool for assessing overall program effectiveness. The overall pass rate for the ELPS student is ninety percent. A department sponsored Leadership Academy serves as a vehicle for direct contact and mutual learning and assistance with practitioners in the university service area. Formal partnership arrangements to train administrators was put into place with West Georgia RESA, Haralson County schools, and Pike County Schools. Additionally input from superintendents within the West Georgia RESA area was sought during the development of a new Masters and Specialist program. The number of students enrolled in the program increased due to recruitment and pending certification changes.

The *Department of Sociology and Criminology* recently completed a five-year review of its programs. From the review it was found that improvement in tracking graduates and eliciting information from stakeholders is needed. However, since the last five year review the following changes were made:

- Created several new courses in areas that prepare students for entry into the major.
- Created several new courses that allow undergraduate students the opportunity to pursue independent, as well as collaborative research projects.
- Added 'Statistics for the Social Sciences' as a major requirement for our majors.
- Substantially revised our Senior Seminar course to better prepare our graduates for entry into the job market and/or graduate school.
- Built a survey research center where students are taught the fundamental principles of the scientific method and elementary statistical analyses through the use of SPSS.
- Increased the number of faculty-student professional development activities. In fact, today more students are being included in faculty research activities in a single year than in the combined years of activities reported on our last five-year review.
- Increased the number of students presenting their original research at professional meetings.
- Increased the number of students participating in honor societies, as well as the number of students receiving honor awards.

The *Department of Media and Instructional Technology* used their assessment of goals and outcomes to improve the Masters in Education and the Specialist in Education in Media programs.

#### ***Master of Education (M..Ed.) Changes***

Students requested a reduction in the number of face-to-face meetings in the online courses.

- The hands-on instructional technology courses were reduced from two to three face-to-face meetings to one face-to-face meeting, except for MEDT 7461, Instructional Design.

Students in the M.Ed. programs requested the CEPD 6101 course, Psychology of Classroom Learning, be placed online to reduce students' driving time to campus and to make the class more accessible.

- Starting summer 2008 this course will be available to students online.

Students reported the course work in several media classes was too much to cover in one semester.

- School Library Media faculty restructured several courses to more evenly balance the content. MEDT 7465 – Materials for Children and Young Adults has been removed as a prerequisite course and the content merged into MEDT 6465. MEDT 6465 – was changed from Selections to Selection and Materials. MEDT 6463 – The title was changed from Technical Services to Cataloging and the objectives were changed to reflect revised content. MEDT 6467 – Technology for Media Services objectives were modified to reflect revised content. MEDT 6468 – Automating School Media Centers was added as a new course.

Students in the M.Ed. program in Instructional Technology requested more elective classes.

- Three new courses were added to the curriculum. MEDT 7472 – Introduction to Distance Learning, MEDT 7485 – Advanced Multimedia, and MEDT 7471 – Data Networks

Graduate students reported their dislike for using Foliotek because it limited the amount of multimedia materials they could upload.

- To enable students to post their multimedia files the department intends to purchase a server for the department where students can post their work. Student work will be linked to Foliotek to enable reviewers to access students' work in the program.

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## Institutional Effectiveness

### *Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) Changes*

Students in the Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) courses reported information on the electronic portfolio was not made available soon enough.

- Faculty revised the student handbook and placed it online with detailed information about electronic portfolio.
- New students attending the department's orientation will receive CDs that contain handbooks, selected tutorials, and orientation information.

Several Ed.S. students requested the CEPD 8102 course, Human Lifespan, be placed online to reduce their drive time to campus with the online program.

- In fall 2008, work will begin with the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology (CEPD) to offer an online section of CEPD 8102 for media students.

Specialist in Education students in the School Library Media track requested more classes focused on School Library Media.

- MEDT 7484 – Issues in School Library Media was added to the curriculum.

Graduate students made the recommendation to add an Doctorate in Educaiton (Ed.D.) program in Media.

- The MIT Department has started pursuing the Ed. D. program plan.

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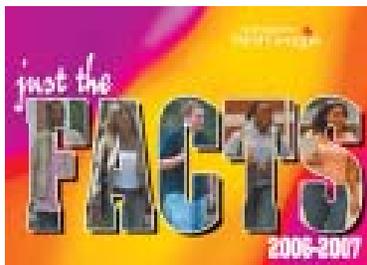
## Section B: Overall Institutional Health

The University of West Georgia began its second century with unprecedented growth and expansion. Proud to have been designated as a member of a new “robust tier” of doctorate-granting comprehensive universities created by the University System of Georgia to help meet its predicted enrollment growth of 100,000 new students by the year 2020. Because the state’s larger research universities cannot, for fiscal and capacity reasons, absorb all of this growth, institutions such as West Georgia will have the opportunity to enroll the increasingly larger numbers of high school graduates seeking traditional collegiate experience.

### *Public Relations (Bread and Butter Goal, 4. Public Relations)*

The *Department of Publications and Printing*, a division of University Advancement, won eight Print Excellence Awards in the state’s annual Printing Industry Association of Georgia competition.

The PIAG Print Excellence Awards competition is the state printing industry’s oldest, largest and most prestigious graphic arts awards program. Winning entries were selected from 1,135 entries submitted by 59 print and graphic arts companies.



A prestigious Best of Category Award went to the Just the Facts mini-publication printed for the *Office of Institutional Research and Planning*. Awards of Excellence were announced for four other university publications and two outside printing projects. The university is allowed to accept limited amounts of printing for government and nonprofit agencies, schools and other Board of Regents entities.

### *Campus Infrastructure (Bread and Butter Goal, 10. Campus Infrastructure)*

Fall 2007 marked the beginning of both the University of West Georgia’s second century and a time of unprecedented growth for the institution. The land gift of **246 acres** from the city of Carrollton will facilitate expansion on the north side of campus and will play a vital role in UWG’s ability to sustain quality growth within the University System. The City of Carrollton will also benefit from the deal, since improved vehicular access from the north side of campus. On campus, signs of construction were everywhere, and multiple new facilities and renovations began such as:

- A 9,000-seat intercollegiate athletics complex and football stadium. A 12-member Stadium Development Committee planned the engineering and construction with a ground-breaking in spring 2008. By 2009, the UWG Wolves should be playing football on campus for the first time in the institution’s history.



*Expansion and distinction mark the beginning of UWG’s second century.*

The athletics complex will eventually include a women’s soccer facility, a women’s varsity softball field and additional soccer and football practice fields. Parking for the complex will be fully utilized throughout the week for commuter students. A road and bridge will eventually be constructed that will directly connect the land to the main campus.

- In fall 2008, construction began on the Health and Wellness Center that will be used for instruction, convocation and sports. The center will be built in two sections, the largest section will have five basketball courts and can be converted to a 7,000-seat arena for commencement ceremonies and sports events. The second section will house academic offices and primary classes for the *Department of Physical Education and Recreation*. A state-of-the-art human performance lab, weight training and aerobics areas and a 75-person

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## **Institutional Health**

stadium-seating classroom will occupy this part of the building. The \$24 million building is scheduled to open in January 2009 prior to spring semester.

- The Callaway Building, home to the *Department of Geosciences* is adding an additional 30,000 square feet of space for laboratories, classrooms, lecture halls and offices. This will allow the department to increase from approximately 21,500 square feet to more than 51,000 square feet.

### ***The University Experience***

#### ***(Bread and Butter Goal, 5. The University Experience)***

#### **New Laboratory Classroom for the College of Education Undergraduates**

The University of West Georgia opened a new instructional laboratory and classroom for the College of Education (COE) undergraduate students designed to improve science and mathematics teaching methods in the elementary and middle school classroom. This helps to support the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG) statewide initiative to increase the number of college students earning science and mathematics degrees and the number of teachers proficient in those disciplines.

The new facility is one of the COE strategies to enhance science and math instruction in the classroom. The laboratory is funded through the Partnership for Reform in Science and Mathematics (PRISM) grant and comes at a time when national and statewide attention is focused on improving Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics or (STEM) teaching and learning programs in the classroom.

#### **Customer Service**

The Graduate School saw a 7 percent increase in enrollment, sustaining growth for the second straight year. A common comment visible on the Graduate School/Financial Aid Survey is that graduate students feel they do not receive good customer service. Graduate students' needs fall outside the normal 8am to 5pm office hours. In addition, students do not have orientation session as the undergraduate students do; therefore often miss vital information.

In an effort to provide admission and enrollment assistance to graduate students the Graduate School and the Office of Financial Aid hired a Financial Aid Counselor. This position is housed in the Graduate School but responsibility for the financial aid portion falls within the Department of Financial Aid. The counselor is available after hours and has "satellite" locations to be more accessible to graduate students; steps were taken to provide information specific to their needs.

Other comments and areas for improvement cited on the survey are parking and outside scholarships. This has led to creating special parking areas for Graduate Assistants and the Financial Aid website was updated to include information on specific scholarships. Each scholarship is researched by a member of the Customer Service Team before it is posted on the website.

Finally, the Graduate School secured additional funding for Graduate Research Assistants and increased the number of Graduate Student Research Fellowships. A Benchmarking Task Force is evaluating UWG's Graduate School with regards to peer institutions and will report in spring 2009. Due to an evaluation of "back-office" processing of applications, the Graduate School has begun a contractual relationship with Hobson's to more fully automate the recruitment and admission processes in the office. The Graduate School continues to scan all applications, which resulted in faster turn-around time for departments making admission decisions. This means that we can inform students in a more-timely manner concerning admissions decisions.

### ***External Funding***

#### ***(Bread and Butter Goal, 8. Regional collaboration for economic and community development)***

A top priority of UWG is to increase external and private support. External grants and funding sources continue to help maintain and expand programs and services of the University, as well as to ensure the professional development of personnel. The *Office of Sponsored Operations* reports that external funds increased by 26 percent from \$1,909,258 in FY2006 to \$2,396,349 in FY2007 and is staying competitive with respect to proposals and amounts awarded over the past year.

- \$73,886 was awarded by the Georgia Department of Education for UWG's participation in the Mathematics and Science Partnership (MSP) program.
- Curriculum and Instruction received \$30,000 from the National Writing Project Corp and the US Department of Education for the Cherokee Rose Writing Project.
- The Department of Geosciences received \$319,300 from the Carroll County Board of Commissioners for the Watershed Long-term monitoring Project and \$38,815 from the Carroll County Water Authority for the Snake Creek Watershed Project.
- The Alice Huffard Richards Fund granted, for one year, \$100,000 for IMPACT (Improving Motivation, Performance and Attitudes of Children and Teachers) to enhance teaching and learning in science and mathematics.

The University of West Georgia Foundation also receives private dollars that fund scholarships and fellowships for students, recruiting outstanding new faculty, providing travel and research support for current faculty, and buying classroom and lab equipment, as well as books and other materials.

### **UWG's Economic Impact**

The University of West Georgia's impact on the state and local economies totals more than \$310 million, according to a new study released by the University System of Georgia (USG). The Board of Regents confirmed that UWG continues to be a key economic engine for the region and the state. West Georgia is listed as one of the top ten institutions for economic contribution to its surrounding community, contributing 2,867 jobs and adding millions to the local and regional economy in personal services, construction expenditures and student spending.

West Georgia has been designated as a comprehensive doctoral institution, one of four in the state. UWG offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, specialist and advanced certification programs, distance education courses and an award-winning WebMBA degree.

More than 10,000 students are enrolled at UWG and its satellite campus in Newnan with approximately 2,300 living on the Carrollton campus. UWG offers summer camps that attract hundreds of school children and teenagers, and conferences, such as the Water Resource Conference and the Learning Festival, that host hundreds of professionals from throughout the southeast. Cultural events bring hundreds of visitors to Carrollton throughout the academic year.

The economic impact study is part of the Intellectual Capital Partnership Program, an initiative of the BOR. The economic report updates a similar study conducted in 2004 that placed the university system's economic impact at \$9.7 billion. For more information and to view the report, go to [http://www.icapp.org/pubs/usg\\_impact\\_fy2007.pdf](http://www.icapp.org/pubs/usg_impact_fy2007.pdf).

### ***Governmental Relations/Advancement (Bread and Butter Goal, 7. External Relations)***

- The Crystalline-Rock Hydrogeology Research Station was established in the late 1980s and still serves the campus and the community in a time of drought. The ground water research facility has catapulted West Georgia to the leading edge of applied groundwater research of crystalline rock aquifers in the southeast. The research station, rare in an undergraduate program of study, not only provides unlimited teaching and

research opportunities to faculty, students, and professionals at the United States Geological Survey, it also plays a major role in developing water supplies in the region.

- The *Department of Sociology and Criminology* opened its new state-of-the-art Survey Research Lab. Along with the University of Georgia and Kennesaw State University, UWG is one of only three institutions in the state to offer the services of a survey research lab. The lab will benefit community businesses and organizations and will be accessible to faculty, graduate and undergraduate students. The lab may conduct surveys ranging from gender related issues to surveys for mass communication purposes. Unlike other labs of this caliber, was developed, in large part, with funds generated by faculty within the department.
- The *Department of Special Education and Speech Language Pathology* held speech and hearing screenings at local businesses and for faculty, students, staff, and others. Faculty provided in-services and consultations for school districts.
- With little feedback from students in regards to placement into full time entry level positions after graduation, the *Department of Career Services* in spring 2008 began exploring more assertive options for connecting with the alumni. The department is individually telephoning, emailing, and using social networking sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook to give the department specific connection with the alumni. Information being requested is: security of entry level position, company firm logistics, and entry level salary. If alumni are in need of career guidance or services they are directed accordingly.

### ***Information Technology Services (Bread and Butter Goal, 9. Information Technology Services)***

The *Department of Information Technology Services (ITS)* was re-organized from a distributed structure to a centralized one. This process began fall 2007 and by spring 2008, all 59 ITS staff were placed into the new organization. The re-organization was accomplished without disruption of service delivery to the campus. A number of changes are continuing to take place, including the development of a formal project management process, a new service desk with increased focus on customer service, and an increased concentration on staff development. All of these changes will allow IT to be delivered to the campus in a much more efficient and effective way.

Example: since the campus wireless network was first deployed over five years ago, a client has been required in

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## **Institutional Health**

order to connect to the network. This client has changed over time from a commercial product to a free open source solution, but the process of installing and configuring the client has always been a burden on our users. This year ITS responded to user suggestions that a clientless option be developed, and deployed a wireless network option that does not require any software to be installed. While there are many commercial applications that provide this functionality at considerable cost, ITS systems and networking personnel used a combination of open source and commercial software to provide this service for under \$2,000.

### ***Faculty Achievements***

#### ***(Visionary Goal: Faculty-Directed Student Research and Professional Activities)***

The following are accomplishments in learning and teaching, students and faculty were recognized during fiscal year 2008:

#### **Faculty:**

- The Board of Regents awarded Dr. Sharmistha Basu-Dutt, associate professor of chemistry the 2007 Teaching Excellence Award and the First-Year Student Advocate Award from the EXCEL Center for Academic Success.
- Dr. Muriel Cormican, associate professor of German, received a national recognition from the College Board and the Educational Policy Improvement Center. Her course “German Composition” was identified as one of the top 10 German courses in the nation in a study of higher education courses.
- Paul Guest, poet and visiting professor of English at UWG, is a recipient of the prestigious 2007 Whiting Writers’ Award. Guest is one of 10 emerging writers of exceptional talent and promise to receive the prize of \$50,000 this year.
- Dr. Said Sewell, associate professor of political science and planning at UWG, received an African American Male Initiative Best Practice Leadership Award from the University System of Georgia for his nationally recognized programs on campus.
- Dr. Philip Novack-Gottshall, assistant professor of geosciences, and UWG graduate Adam Lanier published their research in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America.

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## Section C: Summary of Major Institutional Accomplishments in the Preceding Year

**T**he University of West Georgia, during 2007-2008, continues to focus on improving and advancing the strategic planning process and to implement programs and policies in accordance with the University System of Georgia and University goals.

### *Planning Structure and Process*

In March of 2007, the Institutional Studies and Planning Committee (ISP), a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, was charged with revisiting and re-presenting a Strategic Plan for the University. Based upon feedback from staff, faculty, and administrators, the committee agreed that the current Strategic Plan should be redesigned in order to provide a clearly defined vision of the University.

The ISP Committee began a careful review of the previous planning documents in order to build upon them and in order to develop a new strategic plan that could at least move toward a singly defined vision. Consequently, this plan will carry forward a great deal of the sentiment and goals of the previous strategic plan but with a few significant differences.

Perhaps the most significant difference between this plan and the previous one can be explained by the committee's adherence to a principle of pragmatism or realism. The committee members in their attempt to craft a definition of the University also wanted to stay grounded in what it is the University actually does and does well, and that it has done well for much of its history. The answer came in the concept of liberal arts-based professional preparation. The majority of the students that we graduate and that succeed in some form of satisfying employment are products of West Georgia's long standing high quality liberal arts programming that informs and inspires and sustains professional curricula in nursing, education, and business. This goal is actually an elaboration of one of the 2000 Visionary Goals, the fifth one dedicated to professional preparation.

Unwilling to leave out any attempt at innovation goals, the committee began to formulate a second part of this goal – a total integration of co-curricular programming. This is not what we do now, but what we wish to do. Over the last few years, UWG has developed the beginnings of a substantial first-year program and there have been some other co-

curricular developments. In fact, one can point to the Advanced Academy and the Honors College as being developed according to co-curricular lines. Overall, however, these projects have not come about as a result of any University-wide systematic planning. Our committee thought that the University could yoke together these efforts under an office or small committee and develop a uniform version of co-curricular experiences for every year of undergraduate life (thus, instead of first-year programming, we talk about student-level programming) and an integration of graduate studies, where possible, to the issues, concerns, and education of undergraduates.

As the ISP Committee was developing the earliest version of the strategic plan in spring of 2007 the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia revealed a draft of the central office's own strategic plan. The ISP committee quickly took note of the Board of Regents plan and incorporated it into the UWG strategic plan where important, useful, or necessary. This phase has been a helpful one and supplemental to the planning overall process. The UWG strategic plan will be submitted and approved in fiscal year 2009.

The faculty and staff at the University of West Georgia are focused on efforts to improve retention and graduation rates. Several specific programs have been designed to improve student retention and to increase the likelihood for successful program completion. The following is a brief summary of the accomplishments of these programs:

### *Enrollment Management (Bread and Butter Goal, 2. Enrollment Management)*

The major structure responsible for overall institutional retention, progression, and graduation enhancements is the Strategic Enrollment Council (SEC). The SEC is chaired by the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, and has as members all other divisional Assistant/Associate Vice Presidents, the Dean of the Graduate School, and many Critical Functional Area leaders. The SEC reports to the Strategic Enrollment Executive Committee consisting of the Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and Student Services, as well as the Associate Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management.

The original goal of the SEC was to update the campus Strategic Enrollment Management Plan. However it was determined that it would be prudent to wait on the System Strategic Plan and the West Georgia strategic planning process to proceed with the Enrollment Plan. The West Georgia Strategic Plan will be completed in 2008-2009 with

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## **Institutional Accomplishments**

implementation starting in FY2010. In the interim, campus functional areas, supported by the Strategic Enrollment Council, have moved forward with many initiatives with the intent to increase enrollment and enhance institutional retention and graduation rates.

### ***Retention, Progression, and Graduation***

In 2006, 2007, and again in 2008, UWG received a \$350,000 grant from the Georgia Board of Regents to increase retention, progression, and graduation. This grant fundamentally changed the nature of the Graduation Task Force, and UWG decided to place administrative responsibility for RPG on the Strategic Enrollment Executive Committee. The Executive Committee is responsible for disseminating the RPG funds and providing overall direction for RPG initiatives. Such direction includes developing appropriate RPG goals and assuring that individual projects meet their intended goals.

### ***Academic Intervention***

The RPG Grant from the Board of Regents allows us to develop and implement some very active interventions aimed at increasing both our retention rate and graduation rate.

Retention research shows that the more interaction students have with faculty outside of the classroom, the higher their retention rates will be. To take advantage of this dynamic, one intervention that we started even before we received the grant resources from the Board of Regents was the Faculty Orientation Leaders initiative. For our New Student Orientation program during summer 2007, we hired 21 faculty to engage with students and parents during the program outside of their normal roles and duties. Throughout the four programs for residential students and two programs for commuters, faculty engaged with students and parents in a number of ways. Since many of these faculty also had other roles in the program (academic advisors, program presenters, etc), this provided a way to put the faculty "face" on our Orientation program. Faculty Orientation leaders engaged directly with parents of new students during a one-hour discussion session where they discussed faculty expectations, common student mistakes, and the student-faculty relationship. We wanted to send a message to students and parents that faculty care and are involved with new students. Beyond the Orientation program, this initiative has provided a way for faculty to get involved in RPG initiatives outside of their particular discipline and has led to the beginnings of a culture shift because of the groundswell of support from faculty for RPG programs and services.\

In 2008, the Faculty Orientation Leader program was restructured into the RPG Guide program. RPG Guides are faculty representatives from each academic department whose sole charge is to provide services to students in their

department leading to retention, progression, and graduation. RPG Guides continue to be involved in Orientation by leading Parent groups and conducting student advising. However, their roles now go far beyond that. RPG Guides developed and implemented their departments RPG plan; they participate in periodic planning and training events surrounding first year experience programs and graduation enhancement initiatives; and they are their department's primary academic advisor. The RPG Guide program has created a single point of accountability within each academic department so that communication and connection to other campus resources flows more smoothly.

The Strategic Enrollment Executive Council's decisions about how to distribute limited RPG funding have revolved around making the biggest difference at the fastest possible pace. To determine where these differences could be made, we have completed quite a lot of institutional data analysis that has guided our decisions. For this reason our interventions are very diverse and share resources across the campus. Several core areas have shown great promise in terms of increasing retention rates and graduation rates. Although it cannot be said that any one intervention is "causing" rate increases, it is common belief that the combination of interventions is making a significant difference in a very short time.

Several interventions from 2007-2008 warrant mention.

An enhancement that we have been able to make due to RPG funding is to dramatically increase student involvement in First Year Programs. Historical data analysis has shown that First Year Programs at West Georgia have a statistically significant effect on retention rates. Students in these programs are much more likely to be retained beyond their first year and have higher graduation rates. At UWG First Year Programs include Learning Communities; Freshman Seminar Classes; the FYRST program (First Year Residents Succeed Together), a residential academic support and mentoring program; HOPE Mentorship, Multicultural Achievement Mentoring, First Year Mentoring, and the Honors Program. As late as Fall 2006 only half of our incoming students participated in these programs, but in Fall 2008, 96 percent of incoming freshmen were involved with at least one First Year Program.

Results from the Fall 2007 cohort show that all of these programs have had a dramatic effect on retention. Students without a First Year Program were retained at 66 percent whereas students in a First Year Program were retained at 78.33 percent. These gains led to an overall retention rate jump of almost 5 percent in a two year period. Currently the overall retention rate for all first time, full-time, degree-seeking students is 75.01 percent up from 72.76 percent just one year ago.

Academic intervention is very important to achieving gains in Retention, Progression, and Graduation rates. In 2007-2008 we have focused on developing a breadth of services to make sure that each student doesn't fall through the "net."

In 2007 we began focusing on at-risk students—at the time, and even before, they step foot on campus. Based on information received from our Orientation Survey (called the New Student Profile), we provide direct intervention in areas students self-identify. When students indicate they may have difficulty in a particular academic content area or academic skill (study skills, time management, etc), staff members call them and provide specific, targeted interventions that are customized to that particular students. Since the survey is completed at Orientation, we are able to intervene with the student at a much earlier stage—not waiting until they fail a test, or until we know their mid-term grade when it may be too late to save the term. Results are not in yet, but it is clear that students appreciate the outreach, and we expect that there will be a benefit in terms of overall student success leading to higher retention rates.

We have also implemented an intervention, in the second term, for students that fall into academic difficulty and are placed on academic probation. Probation students are required to meet with an academic advisor, and to complete a series of academic support presentations that are aimed to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to get back on track. These services were available, but not required in the past, and to the extent that students took advantage of them they were successful. However, making the intervention mandatory will provide these services to a greater number of students, thereby increasing the academic success of students who have fallen into academic difficulty.

Fully realizing that intervening in the first year will enhance our retention rate but not affect our graduation rate for several years, we have also put in some very direct initiatives designed to focus on graduation rates. Based on the micro-analysis of graduation data, and additional ongoing analysis of students who have been at UWG for at least 4 years, we have charged RPG Guides to complete graduation checks and investigate the reasons a particular student has not graduated. The RPG Guides work with our Degree Audit personnel and academic advisors to provide guidance and intervention to get that student graduated by the end of their sixth year. Where possible, and appropriate, faculty and department chairs will analyze degree audits to determine the quickest way to graduation—sometimes allowing course substitutions and independent study opportunities if the situation warrants. Though this process we are hoping that the direct connection with students will not only be supportive, but will show that we care about student success and are using resources to directly affect the student experience.

### *Non-Academic Interventions*

Although the majority of our RPG interventions are academic, three such programs are aimed to the non-academic support of students.

In fall 2007, the university continued to offer an online program designed to develop a better relationship with the parents of our new freshman students. The program, called Family Connection, is part of our Education Dynamics suite of programs, and it seeks to create a partnership with parents in the transition of their student to college. The purpose of developing this parent module is to engage parents in the knowledge about UWG's programs and services so that they can provide that information when the student needs it. Parent participation was high with more than 50% of the parents of new students engaging in the program. We have renewed the program for a third year, and it will be the centerpiece of our programming and communication for parents as we continue to serve them through our Parent Association.

In Fall 2008 we started planning for Commuter Student programming. This group of students has the lowest retention rate of all sub-groups of students, and it is necessary that we provide programs and services to connect them to campus and help increase their involvement. We will be developing a specific location on campus that will act as their "home away from home." The Commuter Lounge will provide a needed space on campus to hang out between classes, and have several computers and study carrels and tables for group or individual study. It will also have an area with a television, refrigerator, and other amenities that would enhance the social aspects of commuter life. We are hopeful that this will engage commuter students to the extent that retention and graduation rates will rise.