

## **Strategic Planning Phase II**

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# ***Improving the University Experience***

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**State University of West Georgia  
Division of Student Services  
planning document**

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## Background

The Faculty Senate of the State University of West Georgia adopted recommendations from a campus-wide University Strategic Planning Committee in December 2000. This included 11 "bread and butter" goals, defined as those goals that UWG (faculty, staff, and students) must reach if UWG is to be an excellent comprehensive state university, and 5 "visionary" goals, for UWG to achieve national recognition within five years. The full report is available in the UWG *Factbook*: [http://www.westga.edu/~factbook/fb2000-01/factbook00\\_01.shtml](http://www.westga.edu/~factbook/fb2000-01/factbook00_01.shtml)

During Spring semester, 2001, a subcommittee of staff, faculty, and students, considered Bread & Butter Goal #5, *Improving the University Experience*, and made 14 recommendations.

The subcommittee addressed the following from the Strategic Planning Document:

***We must improve the quality of the university experience for both commuter and residential students if West Georgia is to fulfill its mission. To improve recruitment and retention, we must change the sense of many students that UWG is just the place where they take classes.***

- *Give students a reason to stay at UWG on weekends.*
- *Continue improving the programming and facilities of the University Center.*
- *Tie commuter students into the life of the campus.*
- *Continue to encourage cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender diversity in students, faculty, and staff, and to work to ensure that equal opportunities and resources are available to all.*
- *Develop students' ties to UWG so that they want to stay until they earn their degrees rather than transfer to other USG institutions. (from B & B Goal #2).*

*Note: 5d (off-campus transportation) and 5f (stadium feasibility) were not addressed by this subcommittee.*

## **Report of the Subcommittee on Bread & Butter Goal #5 Improving the University Experience**

### **Introduction:**

Substantial research in the last 25 years has indicated that students benefit when they are engaged in both the academic and social life of the campus. The following observations guided the subcommittee's work:

- The “university experience” as perceived by students includes university-sponsored events, campus services, and student organizations, as well as activities and services in the Carrollton community. The subcommittee took a broad approach to improving the university experience, to include weekdays as well as weekends, and to include programming and facilities beyond the UCC.
- It is unlikely that a few large events/activities will attract the majority of students. In addition to being diverse, today's students live in a world of malls and megastores, 24-hour services, cable, and the Internet, and are accustomed to many choices in their lives. Students should have a wide variety of activities available for them.
- We need to take advantage of synergy – events and services sponsored by a variety of campus units and individuals which can build off each other. Our goal is to infuse the campus with a sense of both fun and of intellectual activity.
- Rather than making a separate recommendation regarding “cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender diversity,” the subcommittee concluded that final plans for implementing all recommendations should provide opportunities for diverse students. Plans should also encourage interaction among diverse students.
- Rather than making a separate recommendation regarding “commuter students,” the subcommittee discussed the complexity of our student body, and concluded that final plans for implementing all recommendations should provide opportunities for the following subgroups:
  - traditional-age students living on campus
  - traditional-age students living in off-campus student housing
  - traditional-age students living at home
  - non-traditional students, and
  - graduate students.

### **Overview of Recommendations:**

1. Develop a comprehensive approach to assess student involvement.
2. Working with a diverse core group of active student organizations and departments, identify eight weekends for 2001-2002 and plan activities which will involve students for those weekends.
3. Significantly enhance the intramural sports program.
4. Develop methods to encourage units in both Academic Affairs and Student Services to actively coordinate activities and programs.
5. Develop a coordinated, comprehensive approach to publicizing events and activities to all students, faculty, and staff.
6. Establish a “great speaker” series whereby the university commits to bring at least one outstanding speaker to campus each year, with related programs and activities sponsored campus-wide.
7. Coordinate and expand leadership development opportunities currently offered to students by Student Activities, Residence Life, the Freshman Center, ROTC, and others.
8. Enhance community service opportunities for students.
9. Develop a formal plan to regularly educate staff and faculty from throughout the campus about the diverse characteristics, backgrounds, and concerns of our students.
10. Establish a Maple Street/Campus association (of merchants, students, and staff) to consider development in ways that will benefit both students and the community.
11. Explore the possibility of establishing a Greek row.
12. Establish a “Traditions Project” to begin identifying and developing traditions, rituals, and celebrations which will enhance the sense of connection and pride for current students and alumni.
13. Develop a plan for expanding student on-campus employment opportunities.
14. Enhance the quality and availability of facilities for student activities.

## **Detailed Recommendations:**

### **1. Develop a comprehensive approach to assess student involvement.**

**a. Develop and administer a very simple measure of student involvement** (5-10 questions on key measures of involvement), to be administered to a representative sample Spring 2001 and each Spring thereafter. Measures should include attendance at out-of-class cultural, educational, and athletic events; and membership in student organizations. Demographic data should assess the experience of diverse students.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Institutional Research & Planning

Timeline: April 2001

Assessment: This will provide baseline data about the number of students and their level of involvement, which can serve as an indirect assessment of the success of many of the other recommendations.

**b. Explore the use of nationally used instruments of student involvement.** Participation in some national projects may be prohibitively expensive, but they could provide valuable benchmark and planning information for the future. The Vice President for Student Services and Director of Institutional Research and Planning should review available instruments and projects and make recommendations to PAC about our participation.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Institutional Research & Planning

Timeline: Fall 2001

Assessment: Completion of report to PAC

**2. Working with a diverse core group of active student organizations and departments, identify eight weekends for 2001-2002 and plan activities which will involve students for those weekends.** Activities may include on and off-campus events, as well as expanded hours for key university services as necessary. Student groups and campus departments which are already active and involved will be targeted and included in the implementation of this recommendation. By coordinating several activities, we will create a synergy which will lead to broader involvement over time.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee

Timeline: 2001-2002

Assessment: Participation, focus groups. Results from early weekends will be used to improve later weekends; results from initial year will be used to plan subsequent year.

**3. Significantly enhance the intramural sports program.** The intramural sports program already involves a large number of students (36,000 annual participations). It is the most visible use of student activity money for many students. It allows for interaction among diverse students, faculty, and staff. Recent research from other institutions indicates that participation in intramural and recreational activities positively contributes to academic success. UWG facilities lag behind many institutions with which students and prospective students compare us. This recommendation includes immediate, short-term, and long-term enhancements:

- a. **As soon as possible, install lights on the outdoor fields to allow expanded student participation.**

Who Responsible: Facilities

Timeline: By Fall 2001

Assessment: Participation numbers

- b. **Short-term, identify and make other physical improvements** (such as improved scoreboards, card-readers, etc.).

Who Responsible: Coordinator of Intramurals

Timeline: 3-year plan

Assessment: Participation numbers, satisfaction surveys, academic success of participants

- c. **Long-term, work with student leaders and campus planning staff to explore the feasibility of constructing a student recreation complex on campus.**

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Campus Planning

Timeline: Complete exploration by December 2001

Assessment: Completion of analysis and report. If the analysis is favorable, the report should include recommendations for implementation strategies.

**4. Develop methods to encourage units in both Academic Affairs and Student Services to actively coordinate activities and programs.** UWG brings a wide variety of diverse activities to the campus during an average year, but the activities are often targeted for a fairly narrow audience. Many of these events might appeal to a broader audience, if they were coordinated. Any time a faculty or staff member brings a guest lecturer to campus, for example, s/he should identify what other units would be interested in co-sponsoring the event, helping publicize the event, or sponsoring complementary events.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Timeline: 2001-2002

Assessment: Student Involvement Assessment; survey of sponsoring units

**5. Develop a coordinated, comprehensive approach to publicizing events and activities to all students, faculty, and staff.** A quick survey of units offering out-of-class programs to the campus revealed a wide variety of publicity approaches, but they were inconsistent and not comprehensive. There are no places where students can consistently go to find out what is happening on campus. The challenge of “information overload” must be recognized in implementing this recommendation. This recommendation is designed to develop a system which faculty, staff, and students can easily take advantage of, and to infuse the campus with a sense of the diversity of events taking place.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee, Public Relations

Timeline: 2001-2002

Assessment: Student Involvement Assessment; survey of sponsoring units

**6. Establish a “great speaker” series whereby the university commits to bring at least one outstanding speaker to campus each year, with related programs and activities sponsored campus-wide.** Events should be sponsored and supported by a consortium of diverse groups.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee, Vice President for Academic Affairs designee

Timeline: 2001-2002, beginning steps; full implementation by 2002-2003

Assessment: Attendance (numbers and diversity). Results from each year will be used to plan subsequent year.

**7. Coordinate and expand leadership development opportunities currently offered to students by Student Activities, Residence Life, the Freshman Center, ROTC, and others.** Consider developing a Leadership Certification program.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee

Timeline: Development in 2001-2002; implementation in 2002-2003

Assessment: (a) Completion of plan. (b) Assessment by student participants. (3) Success of student participants.

**8. Enhance community service opportunities for students.** Ideas to consider include a full-time Volunteer Services Office, an XIDS class on Service Learning, and a day when UWG gives back to the community in highly visible service activities. Expansion of opportunities will help students develop ties to the institution; publicity of student involvement will enhance town-gown relations.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee

Timeline: Development in 2001-2002; implementation in 2002-2003

Assessment: (a) Completion of plan. (b) Assessment by student participants.

(c) Assessment by community members served. (d) Count of articles in local newspaper.

**9. Develop a formal plan to regularly educate staff and faculty from throughout the campus about the diverse characteristics, backgrounds, and concerns of our students.** A better understanding of students will assist in planning programs and services. This plan can be fairly simple and include regular, brief publications; web page links; and presentations to selected groups.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Institutional Research & Planning

Timeline: Fall 2001

Assessment:

**10. Establish a Maple Street/Campus association (of merchants, students, and staff) to consider development in ways that will benefit both students and the community.** This group can discuss commercial development, beautification, transportation, co-sponsorship of activities, student behavior issues, and other related needs.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Vice President for University Advancement

Timeline: 2001-2002

Assessment: Assessment by members. Establishment and achievement of goals.

**11. Explore the possibility of establishing a Greek row.** Some fraternities have expressed interest in establishing a fraternity row in order to enhance their activities and sense of community. Removal of the fraternities from Maple Street could also improve UWG's image in Carrollton. Construction of a Greek row may be neither desirable nor feasible, but the university needs to at least explore the possibility.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee

Timeline: Fall 2001

Assessment: Completion of report. If the analysis is favorable, the report should include recommendations for implementation strategies.

**12. Establish a "Traditions Project" to begin identifying and developing traditions, rituals, and celebrations which will enhance the sense of connection and pride for current students and alumni.** Use the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2006) as a theme/focus for this project.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services designee, Alumni Affairs

Timeline: Initial plans Fall 2001, full implementation by 2006

Assessment: College and University Community Inventory



**13. Develop a plan for expanding student on-campus employment opportunities.** On-campus employment benefits both the student and the institution, and national research indicates that it can increase retention by helping students feel more connected to the institution. Enhancement of the Student Research Assistant Program could also help the university achieve the Visionary Goals. Because this is not an inexpensive proposal, the university should develop a long-term plan and strategies for achieving this.

Who Responsible: Career Services

Timeline: Complete plan by December 2001; full implementation by 2006

Assessment: Establishment & achievement of goals

**14. Enhance the quality and availability of facilities for student activities.** The UCC is inadequate to serve the needs of current and future students. There is inadequate meeting space and space for special events. The design of the facility does not encourage interaction among students and other building users, and it does not lend itself to becoming the type of “gathering center” and “information center” provided by traditional student union buildings. Other campus facilities are also inadequate to meet student needs, because many are restricted to academic use, or the expenses and regulations effectively prohibit use by student organizations. This recommendation includes both short-term and long-term recommendations.

**a. Short-term: Establish policies and procedures which will expand the availability of on-campus facilities for events sponsored by student organizations.** While some restrictions are necessary to protect facilities and support academic uses, increased access will enhance the sense of campus life. Policies and procedures must be developed which will serve the needs of student organizations as well as academic departments.

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Timeline: August 2001

Assessment: Number of events by student organizations in 2001-02; satisfaction by facilities managers and student leaders

**b. Long-term: Work with student leaders and campus planning staff to explore the feasibility of constructing additional space on campus, which will provide meeting spaces for student groups, space for special events for students, and space which encourages interaction among all members of the university community.**

Who Responsible: Vice President for Student Services, Campus Planning

Timeline: Complete exploration by December 2001

Assessment: Completion of analysis and report. If the analysis is favorable, the report should include recommendations for implementation strategies.