



Gordon State College is an access institution, committed not simply to getting students in the door but to guiding them successfully to degree completion. **First Things First: Increasing Mastery in Quantitative and Communication Skills** has been developed to respond to institutional needs highlighted during the QEP topic search, to fulfill the college's mission, vision, and strategic planning priorities, to voice the opinions and hopes of the entire campus community, and to enhance student learning in significant ways. One of the college's priorities is "Access with Excellence"; the mission is to "provide an exceptional education through innovative teaching and engaged learning." The fulfillment of these two ideals creates a learner-centered environment in which students are retained and progress; in short, as the GSC vision declares, they "flourish." The **First Things First** topic was determined by a broad-based process that led to a focus on essential quantitative and written communication skills that are taught and built upon in "Area A Essential Skills," the University System of Georgia (USG) designation for the nine-hour credit block of college math and English courses within the core curriculum. As a USG institution, Gordon State College requires all students to receive credit for three courses within Area A (two English and one math). Institutional data reviewed during the topic selection phase highlighted the low success rate for courses in that area; additionally, faculty campus wide reported that even successful Area A students were not utilizing the learned skills in other courses.

The QEP's Action Plan includes a course-redesign initiative to enhance student engagement in Area A courses, since engagement has been shown to increase student success. A faculty survey administered during the QEP development stage narrowed the plan's focus to MATH 1111 College Algebra and ENGL 1101 Composition I and to eight particular Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). A review of literature and best practices led to the selection of John N. Gardner Institute's Gateways to Completion® process (G2C®) as the mechanism by which to achieve QEP goals, including annual improvements over SLO baseline percentages, pass rates in the two courses, and faculty pedagogies/academic policies and student behaviors that strengthen student learning and success. As a continuous improvement redesign plan, G2C is especially beneficial to **First Things First** because it provides a unified approach which works equally well with both subject areas; the purpose of the G2C initiative is to focus on courses such as MATH 1111 and ENGL 1101 in their capacity as foundational, "gateway" courses. Other elements of the Action Plan include the establishment of a **First Things First** Steering Committee to oversee the plan, the creation of a **First Things First** unit within the college's First Year Experience course, and the implementation of an ambitious professional development plan. Additionally, the QEP includes a thorough assessment plan (which includes both direct and indirect measures), a carefully designed organizational structure and timeline, and a solid budget demonstrating the institution's full support of the initiation, implementation, and completion of the plan.

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