April 17, 2020

The Teagle Foundation
570 Lexington Avenue, 38th Floor
New York, NY 10022

Dear Teagle Foundation:

On behalf of the private, liberal arts colleges in Georgia that currently educate more than 52,000 undergraduates, the Georgia Independent College Association (GICA) seeks a “Pathways to the Liberal Arts” planning grant in the amount of $20,000 to expand the current transfer student pipeline. The area of emphasis is “Strengthening transfer access to the liberal arts from two- to four-year colleges,” and 11 regionally diverse GICA member institutions, many serving Pell and minority students, have enthusiastically agreed to partner in this collaborative effort (see Attachment A for the list of institutions).

Students in Georgia often choose a 2-year institution because of cost factors and don’t consider private higher education because of the posted price and a lack of understanding of actual cost. They never get past the "sticker shock" to understand that private higher education is within their means. In addition, guidance received from counselors in high schools plays a role. Guidance counselors may steer low-income students to technical and community colleges because of cost.

With proper guidance, private higher education is accessible for many of these students and, with their smaller size, many of these students would be well-served by continuing their education in the smaller environment typically found at independent colleges. The transfer-in rate for students at GICA member institutions has hovered at 8% over the past five years. We hope to increase the transfer-in rate to GICA member institutions from public 2-year
institutions (specific growth goal to be determined in planning grant process). The independent college sector has much to offer students who choose to transfer, particularly those who began their college education at 2-year institutions.

GICA’s engagement in this work has been ongoing. In 2012, GICA worked with a subset of member institutions to formulate sector-wide articulation agreements. These agreements were with GICA members that represented two-year and four-year GICA members, and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). The agreements sought to accomplish the following:

1) Articulate which of 80 courses taught by one of TCSG’s 26 institutions would be accepted by a GICA member institution;
2) Determine which GICA member institutions would accept an Associate of Science degree as satisfying the General Education/Core requirements;
3) Provide assurance of automatic acceptance for a transfer student.

The TCSG agreement was revised in 2018 with the same goals. Currently, 21 GICA members participate in this agreement with only three institutions (Brenau University, LaGrange College and Wesleyan College) agreeing to an A.S. satisfying the General Education/Core requirements. In 2014, GICA and TCSG partnered to provide a day-long, intensive transfer student workshop. Over 60 participants from both GICA and TCSG institutions attended. A transfer student expert presented best-practice information and facilitated small group discussions as we sought to improve knowledge and practice regarding transfer students. The purpose of the training was to provide a foundational knowledge of transfer practices in order to support transfer students between TCSG and GICA.

At the same time as GICA worked on the articulation agreements and engaging students, the state of Georgia started a program called “GA-TRACS.” This system is an online portal for students to enter earned course credit information and, with a click of a button, determine which colleges will accept the credit. The technological infrastructure is a software program that the state manages. While GA-TRACS is free to public colleges, it costs just over $25,000 for a private college to join and approximately $2,200 annual for hosting/maintenance. Only a fraction of GICA’s members currently participate in GA-TRACS because it was cost-prohibitive.

These efforts are a good start to address and enhance the transfer pipeline, but they are only the beginning. Immediate needs to intensify the effort include:
- Strategy to broaden the private colleges accepting an A.S. as satisfying the general education/core requirements
- Creating a forum to discuss again with our TCSG partners, who now have a new Commissioner, further ways our sectors could partner to address the transfer pipeline.
Need has escalated in the last two years with the exponential growth in Georgia’s new $107 million Dual Enrollment program and the vast number of students choosing to participate in this program at a TCSG institution. GICA is seeking a $24,961 planning grant from The Teagle Foundation to further develop and strengthen our existing model. This award will enable GICA to convene the Transfer Steering Committee (see Appendix B for Committee member list) and our partners at TCSG and GA-AWARDS for an eight-month intensive conversation to answer the following questions (see Appendix C for the grant work plan):

1. How should the liberal arts transfer pipeline in Georgia look and function to serve students best?
2. What obstacles (including curricular barriers) are there to implementing the preferred model for transfer between community colleges and independent colleges?
3. What are the viable next steps for improving upon our current transfer student efforts?
4. How do participating institutions ensure sustainability of transfer-friendly policies and practices?

These questions will be answered through a process focused on increased faculty collaboration from both public two-year institutions and GICA member institutions in designing articulation agreements between institutions to simplifying the transfer process for students. GICA’s previous transfer efforts were developed with registrars and chief academic officers, primarily. The Teagle grant will broaden our Steering Committee to involve more faculty. This type of collaboration would assist faculty in understanding, from both the 2-year and 4-year perspective, how the curriculum design provides a meaningful experience in transferring from a public 2-year institution to an independent, liberal arts 4-year institution.

To aid in this planning grant, GICA will utilize National Student Clearinghouse data to inform the work of the Steering Committee. Initial data collected from NSC will be used to set benchmarks against which to measure progress. The metrics could include number of students who transfer in from TCGS, primary transfer feeders, their majors at TCSG/independent college, the average number of credits they transfer in, current rates of baccalaureate attainment and time to degree, the percent of TCSG transfer students who are AS completers, graduation rates for students who transfer from TCSG colleges with or without AS degrees, and the top liberal arts bachelor’s programs that transfer students from TCSG colleges seek. The Director of Research for GICA will collect and maintain this data.

In addition, the steering committee will seek to determine high-need occupation fields, particularly in the state of Georgia. Sources for this information would include the Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook and the Georgia Department of Labor Occupations Outlook. Based on those findings, the steering committee will discuss potential liberal arts degree pathways from TCSG to GICA institutions for students in those fields.
It is important to note that these 11 institutions committed to participating on the Transfer Steering Committee are “early adopters.” In 2018-19, more than 415 students transferred from a TCSG institution to one of these 11 institutions. As is typical with a GICA collaborative initiative, a subgroup of member institutions will work to put a plan in place that will then be implemented among any remaining member institutions desiring to participate. GICA is hopeful that of the three HBCU member institutions, two of the three will ultimately participate (one HBCU is on the Transfer Steering Committee). GICA is pleased that many of the committed institutions educate a diverse student population.

The vision for success for the Transfer Steering Committee will be to produce a plan that sets the stage for:

1. A defined general education course pattern for potential transfer students to follow to improve transfer success. These course patterns could be tailored for particular majors that have been identified as serving high-need occupations or based on student interest.
2. Increased participation by GICA members in the TCSG articulation agreement.
3. Increased participation by GICA members in accepting an A.S. degree as satisfying General Education/Core requirements.
4. A more refined approach to transfer students in order to better serve that population to increase graduation rates, especially those with significant barriers including low-income students, first-generation students, and students of color.

A.S. degrees at TCSG institutions require the completion of a minimum basic core of 30 semester credit hours of collegiate-level general education. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas: I. Language Arts/Communications; II. Social/Behavioral Sciences; III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics; IV. Humanities/Fine Arts. Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession. A minimum of 15-30 semester credit hours shall be required in technical areas.

TCSG also offers an A.S. in General Studies that allows students to earn general education credits that will transfer towards a four-year degree. Components of the general education core must include at least one course from each of the following four areas: I. Language Arts/Communications; II. Social/Behavioral Sciences; III. Natural Sciences/Mathematics; IV. Humanities/Fine Arts. Courses included in this general education core component must present a breadth of knowledge to promote intellectual inquiry and reinforce cognitive skills.
and affective learning opportunities for students, and not narrowly focus on those skills, techniques, and procedures specific to a particular occupation or profession.

The Steering Committee will meet in Atlanta at GICA’s office. In order to increase faculty involvement, each Steering Committee member from a campus and TCSG, will convene a small group of key faculty to help inform the work of the Committee. These group meetings will give the Steering Committee an opportunity to share data, share Steering Committee ideas and solicit feedback. Funds will be used to cover planning and strategy for productive outcomes, transportation costs of the Transfer Steering Committee, honoraria and travel for expert attendees, and food during the meetings. Additionally, each campus will receive a small meeting stipend to be used when convening the faculty small groups (ex. Provide lunch or snacks.

The timing is right in Georgia to look again at our student transfer efforts. Thank you for asking GICA to apply for this planning grant opportunity. GICA’s highly competent staff stands ready to implement the planning grant should we be selected.

If you wish to engage in further discussion, please contact me at 404-233-5433 ext. 701 or sbaxter@georgiacolleges.org.

Sincerely,

Susanna L. Baxter, Ed.D.
President