

Opinion

Letting Our Products Make the Case for the Two-Year Transfer-Oriented Institution

By J. Foster Watkins
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In the era of accountability in higher education and the developing concerns under the "Workforce 2000" concept, Gainesville College and possibly many other colleges may not be making our contributions to the "workforce" widely known and understood. While we continue to work on a comprehensive assessment/evaluation plan for the institution, we have access to a lot of quantifiable data as well as experiential information which might help us make the case that Gainesville College is educating people from all ranges of life who will live and work in Northeast Georgia.

Among the available data are:

- Beginning students who responded on the Entering Student Survey over the last five years come to us with an expectation that 85-90 percent of them will continue their education beyond Gainesville College.
- Exiting students through their responses on the Sophomore Questionnaire indicate that 80-85 percent of them still plan to continue their education.
- Transfer data generated within the Georgia State University System indicate that our transfer student perform above the system averages at their receiving institutions, with North Georgia College, the University of Georgia, Georgia State University, and Southern College of Technology being the primary recipients of Gainesville College transfer students.

- Alumni survey responses reveal that more than 80 percent of former students continued their education, and more than 90 percent are living in Northeast Georgia.

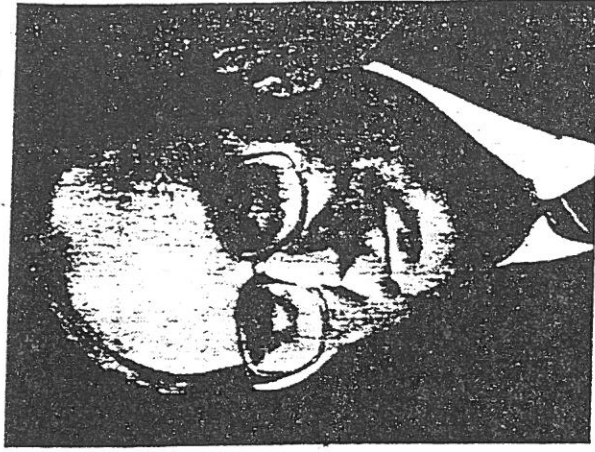
Phil Jackson, columnist with the Gainesville Times, did some work for us in this area when he utilized information in the last issue of our quarterly alumni publication. In one of his columns he identified some alumni who went into teacher education and the role the college is playing in that area. In response to an inquiry from a reader that pointed out that Gainesville College prepares students for fields other than education, he wrote a subsequent column that featured 11 alumni who had been mentioned in the "We Heard That..." column who were working in various fields — from auditing to micro-lab technology to managing a supermarket.

As I travel throughout the region on behalf of the college, I often find that the presidents of civic clubs and the Chamber of Commerce officers are alumni of the college. I rarely buy medicine from a pharmacist who is not a product of the Gainesville College/University of Georgia pharmacy career ladder. The managers of local food stores that I frequent are our graduates, and the employee handling the cash register in the checkout line is usually one of our current students. As one who took advantage of the drop in interest rates recently and refinanced my home, my loan officer, the local loan processor, the attorney who handled the closing, and the banker were all Gainesville College alumni.

A recent discussion with a major area employer revealed that nearly 100 of his more than 500 current employees had educational ties to Gainesville College. At one time, 39 percent of the employees of a large regional banking institution in Northeast Georgia also had connections to the college. The list could go on.

In my efforts to identify the uniqueness of Gainesville College, as I discuss it in Northeast Georgia, I always attempt to leave the audience with an understanding that the college is Northeast Georgia's college through its open admissions, ability to meet the educational needs of a wide range of students in a cost-effective way, ready accessibility, and caring atmosphere. As the data cited indicates, we have been and will continue to be working with people who are going to live and work in the area, and who will make a difference in the area's quality of life.

Not only are we doing so with our traditional academic programs, we are also contributing to the lifelong learning needs of the area through our comprehensive Continuing Education/Public Service offerings. Approximately 10,000 Northeast Georgians will participate in the CEU (official continuing education credit) programs, primarily job-related professional growth activities. Another 45,000 will participate in personal enrichment efforts of a career, avocational, or leisure-time nature through the public service use of our facilities.



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In summary, the message is straightforward. Gainesville College is broadly educating its students and preparing them to live productive lives as responsible citizens of Northeast Georgia. At the same time, it is also contributing to the economic development of the region through the raising of the educational and productivity levels of those who work in the area.

Our alumni and those of other institutions similar to ours can help us make this message more clear at all levels as they come in contact with future students, members of the state legislature, and other business and governmental figures who in some way influence the future of their alma maters. I am sure that similar statements can be and are being made by my colleagues who serve as presidents of such institutions across the country.