

Thinking Forward: Foundations for a Lifetime Learning College at Georgia Tech

Like no time from the past, the world and its social, health, financial and political ecosystems are undergoing tremendous stress and turmoil. The state of public higher education across the globe is not immune to these stresses, despite the past evidence that higher education has played a role in creating leaders who can potentially solve many of these challenges. Never has there been such an enormous need for higher education to create leaders, but likely it must use new mechanisms to achieve outcomes that are unprecedented and urgently needed. Georgia Tech has 100+ years of non-degree education, 40+ years of distance learning, 9+ years of at-scale online Master of Science experience, and more recently, remote instructional delivery experience during Covid.

How might Georgia Tech, using its current and future knowledge from a century of innovative educational programs, initiate such reform?

Problems to Solve

There are several issues confronting higher education, and leading the challenges are the perceptions and reality from the public and commercial sectors about higher education's value. The following items can be attributed to this perspective.

Relevancy – many people, legislatures, and organizations struggle to see how many parts of higher education are relevant to the jobs needed in today's working world.

Affordability – the increase in the cost of living has left many learners – at all stages of life – unable to afford public higher education and career upskill/reskill training and career pivots.

Access – the structure of when and how our education is delivered presents challenges for a population of people who are not residential on our physical campuses.

Budgetary pressures – while the State of Georgia has done a remarkable job of investing generously in higher education, budget pressures are unlikely to disappear given the importance of investing in public needs such as life safety, healthcare, and K-12 education.

Viewpoints – upskilling, retooling, re-educating are needed by all parts of the workforce, not just blue-collar jobs. The advent of new digital technologies is impacting all roles¹.

These issues point to an expansive mission for public higher education, especially for research universities. How can the public research universities get new knowledge in the hands of people and organizations more quickly and more affordably, making higher education relevant for everyone?

Higher Education's Changing Public Mission

¹ <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/shifting-skills-moving-targets-remaking-workforce>

While the State of Georgia has done better with public funding for higher education than many other U.S. states, nonetheless, overall rising costs may prevent many individuals from obtaining access to higher education and decrease our ability to meet the needs of all citizens. Further, while the USG has been able to control tuition costs and we have been able to offer affordable, accessible degree options like the OMS programs, we also need to future-proof.

Further, and especially at research universities, the creation of new knowledge and the impact of digitization on all career fields are increasing at an incredible pace. Both trends are happening at a pace that limits the initial knowledge and experiences, obtained in the foundational years of higher education, to remain relevant throughout one's entire career. We must help people retool, unlearn, relearn, and build their skills and knowledge in ways that are very different from today's structures, both in terms of delivery, admission, and financing, and in terms of credentialing. The resulting lifetime educational needs are especially important as the State of Georgia seeks to invest in corporate expansion such as the electric mobility industry, FinTech, film and so many others – a diverse workforce across multiple levels of talent will make Georgia distinctive.

Thus, the new mission must address access by all people, of all ages, of all ethnicities, enabling them to be prepared and succeed through their lifetimes. Degree credentials will still be important, but not sufficient as the only learning credential along one's lifetime.

Potential Solution

We need to envision and create a new learning environment made for the digital world, not one that tries to extend the physical work and learning world into the digital. We need to look at financing, cost analysis, pricing, and policies to enable such a new world. The components of teaching, research, and service need to be working together to get the most from the new ideas. Thus, a bold solution would be the formation of a new college – at the **intersection of pedagogy, technology, and business models** – to offer learning at all credential levels, credit-based programs, and professional development (non-credit) programs across the lifetime of an individual, K-grey.

A college focused on lifetime learning will, as expected at a research university, be a catalyst for fundamental and applied research in the arena of how technology can expand the essence, quality, and utilization of knowledge and skills for people learning. This is a 'yes/and' approach. It does not give up our roots of traditional high school age individuals going to college to launch their careers but engages a broader set of stakeholders who need education in new ways, over a lifetime, and further adds new knowledge that elevates the learning enterprise for the traditional students. As we know, Georgia Tech possesses many of these components already, but they are distributed across the university.

Personnel. We have groups of faculty members who teach in both the distance, professional masters, and OMS credit programs, as well as in the non-credit professional development programs. We have developed a small, but important resource in learning design, enabling faculty to engage in the best learning exercises for the desired outcomes. A bold endeavor needs faculty dedicated and focused on this vision, not as a second objective to their primary responsibilities or alliances. This is not an education

college – **it is the future of what can be for higher education and is about enabling successful learning by individuals.**

Financial. To accomplish this vision, new sources of revenue will need to be cultivated and obtained. The OMS programs have proven there is an appetite for new kinds of educational programming delivery formats with new price points. More and more, we hear requests for shorter duration programs, but just as meaningful – where the learners **always feel like a member of our learning community.** No other university has corporate and governmental organizations, alumni and the public engaged in new learning, thinking, and doing as envisioned here so they can be the best possible employees throughout their careers and members of society and as engaged participants of the university.

Organizational. To enable this vision, not only does one need the right personnel and financing, but it also needs the right structure. Most everything being considered here are activities and strategies that typically fall within a college. We currently have in-house expertise for business and contractual services, marketing and enrollment management, student engagement and other services, among other capabilities.

The creation of a new college also gives an opportunity not just for a faculty/staff home, but also a place for two newer components – creating a common academic home for learners and secondly, a central story that enables philanthropy on behalf of Georgia Tech raising awareness and image.

In the medical school model, the medical colleges create new knowledge for the healthcare professionals and the hospitals provide a clinical setting. Working together, the problems besetting people are seen firsthand by those doing the research and those caring for patients are enabled by the fruits of new ideas and procedures. In a similar manner, Georgia Tech could create such an ecosystem focused on lifetime careers, education, research, advising/mentoring, services that enables the citizens and organizations of our state to be the benefactors of this new thinking, enabling them to find solutions to the most pressing global problems and in so doing, improve higher education and thus the human condition.

Summary

Now is the time for Georgia Tech to embrace bold, new innovative educational thinking. Georgia Tech is well known and respected for its leadership in taking bold steps in educational innovation. The world needs creative solutions to complex problems. Georgia Tech has a new university strategic plan that calls for access, innovation and leading by example as three of its themes. While there are still many questions to be answered and much more work to be done, making decisions that enable this one-of-a-kind direction for the future Georgia Tech will continue to allow us to lead the world of **public** higher education, for today and tomorrow's learners across their lifetime, forever amplifying its impact, yet another one of the new strategic plan themes.

This opportunity that presents itself, is a **time to act on our learnings and to lead into the future as only Georgia Tech can do; maintaining Georgia's best place to do business with the world's best talent base.**