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COST Advisement Center celebrates one year of helping young students achieve excellence

JANUARY 22, 2008

It is billed as a 'one-stop shop' for freshmen in the Allen E. Paulson College of Science and Technology (COST) at Georgia Southern University.

The COST Advisement Center helps young students achieve academic and personal excellence by carefully planning and closely monitoring their first year in the classroom.

Under the direction of coordinator Lisa Vance and supervisor Mary Boyd, the center features a staff of eight faculty advisors, two professional advisors and a representative from the University's Office of Career Services.

'Moving from high school to college can be tough for some students,' Vance said. 'Our goal is help COST students make this transition as smoothly as possible.'

Located on the second floor of the Chemistry/Nursing Building, the COST Advisement Center is celebrating its first anniversary in Spring 2008.

'The first two years of a student's academic career are critical,' said Boyd, who is the chair of the Department of Chemistry. 'The advisement center helps these young students get on the right track toward their degree, and it makes sure they know about all of the career options that are available to them.'

The COST Advisement Center is an example of Georgia Southern's commitment to increasing the number of students who graduate with a bachelor's degree in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields.

This commitment is a response to several prominent studies, including one by the National Academy which revealed that America's advantages in science and technology have started to disappear, thanks in large part to a lack of people who have post-secondary training in these disciplines.

To address the situation, COST began a project called ASPIRES, which stands for Advisement and Scholarship Promoting Inquiry-based Research Experiences in STEM.

Funded in part by a \$1 million grant from the National Science Foundation, ASPIRES features five initiatives that seek to improve graduation rates by increasing the retention of STEM students and improving academic achievement in introductory math and science courses.

The project also addresses the Board of Regents' priority initiative to enhance student progress, which is known as Retention, Progression and Graduation (RPG).

One of the ASPIRES initiatives called for the implementation of a centralized advising center to guide COST freshmen and coordinate activities with Career Services, the Academic Success Center, and the Minority Advisement Program.

‘We wanted to move to a more centralized model,’ said Boyd, the project director and principal investigator for ASPIRES. ‘By integrating all of the University’s resources into one location, we can make the students aware of the many services that are available to them.’

Under the old system, each freshman who had declared for a COST major was assigned to a faculty member in the department of their major. Thus, most faculty members were responsible for advising various numbers of students.

‘That system worked well for advising students regarding course selection for their major and other degree requirements,’ Boyd said, ‘but it didn’t focus on the other aspects of their academic careers, and it didn’t encourage them to think about career opportunities at an early stage of their college studies.’

The first group of freshmen who used the COST Advisement Center in Spring 2007 are now sophomores. They have been assigned to faculty advisors within their major departments, and these advisors will guide the students through the rest of their academic careers.

However, the freshmen who entered Georgia Southern in Summer and Fall 2007 and all future first-year students will use the COST Advisement Center for both their freshman and sophomore years. Once they become juniors, these students will be assigned to a faculty advisor within their major departments.

The COST Advisement Center includes faculty advisors from the Departments of Biology, Chemistry, Construction Management and Civil Engineering Technology, Geology and Geography, Mathematical Sciences, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Technology, and Physics.

There are also two professional advisors who can counsel students from any department. The center served 623 students during the recently completed fall semester.

‘Each advisor is responsible for all of the majors in his or her department,’ Boyd said. ‘This ensures that all of the students within each department are getting consistent advisement.’

The center operates under a concept known as ‘intrusive advising,’ which is designed to promote a more confident, disciplined and successful student.

Each student is required to meet with their advisor at least twice every semester, and the center monitors their academic progress.

‘Our advisors try to form a bond with their students,’ Vance said. ‘They don’t just hand them a list of classes to take. They talk to the students, listen to their problems and concerns, and answer any questions they may have.’

The students are also encouraged to make an appointment with Wallace Brown, the experiential employment coordinator in Career Services. He spends part of each week in the COST Advisement Center, providing interested students with a plethora of information about internships, cooperative education positions, job-shadowing programs, and graduate school opportunities.

'A lot of students don't even think about Career Services until they're seniors,' Brown said. 'What's we trying to do through the COST Advisement Center is make sure that students are aware of what we can do to help them as they proceed through the academic curriculum.'

'It's never too early to start thinking about what you want to do when you finish college. I'm here to let the students know what their options are.'

In an effort to measure the effectiveness of the COST Advisement Center, students are asked to respond to a couple of surveys. Future retention data will provide additional insight into the center's performance.

'We've had very positive feedback from our students,' Vance said. 'As time goes on, we'll continue to evaluate what we're doing and how we can do it even better.'

For more information on the COST Advisement Center, visit http://cost.georgiasouthern.edu/Advisement_Center/Advisement_Home or call (912) 681-0649.

Georgia Southern University, a Carnegie Doctoral/Research University, offers more than 120 degree programs serving nearly 17,000 students. Through eight colleges, the University offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs built on more than a century of academic achievement. The University, one of Georgia's largest, is a top choice of Georgia's HOPE scholars and is recognized for its student-centered approach to education. Visit: www.georgiasouthern.edu

Southern Conference on Children is Jan. 26

JANUARY 22, 2008

MEDIA ADVISORY

This is a reminder that Georgia Southern University will host the 21st annual Southern Conference on Children on Saturday, Jan. 26.

Approximately 700 childcare professionals and parents from throughout the region are expected to attend the conference, which will run from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. in the Nessmith-Lane Continuing Education Building.

The conference is geared toward childcare center directors and personnel, pre-school and pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers and paraprofessionals, family childcare providers, and the parents of young children.

Thomas Moore and Shirley Garrett will be the keynote speakers. Moore's talk is titled 'Celebrating What We Learn from the Children We Teach.' Garrett's talk is titled 'Teach from the Top of Your Lungs and the Bottom of Your Heart.'

The workshop topics will include:

- 'You Can Handle Them: How to Discipline So Kids Will Learn'
- 'Applied Behavior Analysis and Teaching Children with Autism'
- 'Prevention of Childhood Obesity by Creating a Healthy-Weight Environment'
- 'Shifting the Responsibility of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention from Children to Adults'
- 'Teaching Science/Nature to Young Children Made Easy'

Members of the media are invited to cover the Southern Conference on Children. For more information, including the complete conference schedule and a list of all of the workshops, visit <http://ceps.georgiasouthern.edu/conted/scoc.html> or call (912) 871-1755.