



# Dalton State College

The *mission* of Dalton State College (DSC) is to provide a diverse student population with opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to attain affordable baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees, and certificates and to reach their personal and professional goals. Through challenging academics and rich collegiate experiences, the college promotes lifelong learning, active leadership, and positive contributions in Northwest Georgia and beyond.

In pursuit of that goal, DSC offers targeted four-year and two-year degrees and career certificate programs, along with a wide variety of activities that engage students in local community businesses and industries. Each of the College's five Schools (Business, Education, Health Professions, Liberal Arts, and Science, Technology, and Mathematics) forges important partnerships within the region in those areas that pertain to the schools' visions and missions. The ultimate objective is to inspire students to be active members within their professions and communities.

Dalton State College has expanded programs and maintained rigor in its academic offerings. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Dalton State has been named one of the most affordable public four-year colleges in the nation for the seventh consecutive year. Since 2012, DSC has attempted and succeeded in a number of initiatives to improve retention, progression, and graduation. More students are graduating each year, and the six-year retention rate inches upward, although slowly. Interestingly, DSC's Hispanic students' graduation rate far exceeds the average.

A new three-year Strategic Plan that would guide the campus from 2016 to 2019 was introduced in May 2016. Two of the four themes of the Strategic Plan mirror the same overall goals as Complete College Georgia: Student Success and Academic Excellence.

Enrollment trends over the past academic year have demonstrated a small increase. These include a 2.6% increase for fall 2016 and a 1.8% increase for spring 2017. Changes in student profiles indicate an overall upsurge in more traditional students (63% in 2006 to 80% in 2015) as well as a nearing of the percentage to classify DSC as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) with 24.8%. It is anticipated that Dalton State will reach the critical 25% for academic year 2018. In addition to the number of student registrants increasing overall, dual enrollment student registrations also demonstrated an uptick.

## **GOAL 6: SHORTEN TIME TO DEGREE COMPLETION THROUGH PROGRAMS THAT ALLOW STUDENTS TO EARN COLLEGE CREDIT WHILE STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL AND BY AWARDED CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING THAT IS VERIFIED BY APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT.**

### **STRATEGY 6.1: PARTICIPATE IN DUAL ENROLLMENT OR JOINT ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.**

Dual enrollment is especially valuable to Dalton State College because of the regional and commuter nature of the institution. Reaching into high schools to recruit for the dual enrollment program has become a viable pipeline for Dalton State College, and resulted in some early successes. These efforts have not only increased the number of enrolled students but, more importantly, increased the number of graduates.

Fifty-six students, representing 46.3% of the spring 2015 Move on When Ready (MOWR) high school graduates, enrolled at Dalton State in the fall of 2015. In the fall of 2016, 44 students, representing 26.67% of the spring 2016 MOWR high school graduates, enrolled at Dalton State after completion of high school. DSC will continue to track these students and increase efforts to retain the MOWR students post high school graduation.

During the 2016-17 academic year, there was a continuation of activities that were viewed to offer the greatest return. DSC's newly designated dual enrollment coordinator reached out regularly to local high schools. In doing so, dual enrollment sites were established at three additional high schools this academic year, and one additional high school has already committed for next year. DSC faculty instructors are utilized to teach on-site in the high schools to ensure the quality of instruction while also offering a personal presence and representation for classes at Dalton State. Additionally, Dalton State faculty members are encouraged to visit local high schools interested in dual enrollment either with admissions recruiters or on their own. Likewise, local high schools are encouraged to bring students to visit the Dalton State campus. Often these visits are customized based on interest in a specific academic program. One of the most successful strategies utilized is having every dual enrollment student meet every semester with the dual enrollment coordinator for advisement and registration. This strategy brings students onto the campus where they receive one-on-one attention. The coordinator also distributes textbooks from the MOWR office every semester; each student book order is prepackaged, thus providing yet another personalized service. Students return their textbooks to the office at the end of each semester, providing one last point-of-contact. Benchmarks for the success of the program include: 1) the number of dual enrolled students, 2) the success rate of dual enrolled students, 3) the percentage of dual enrolled students who return for a second year of classes and 4) the percentage of dual enrolled students who complete a credential at Dalton State.

DSC's baseline year of 2011 when 98 students enrolled for 799 credit hours with a successful course completion rate of 98.6% is used as the benchmark for the present enrollment. In fall 2016, 378 dual enrollment students registered for 2878 credit hours with a successful course completion with a grade of C or better at the rate of 93.4%. In spring 2017, 376 students registered for 3007 credit hours with a successful course completion with a grade of C or better at a rate of 94.5%. Additionally, 78/84 (92.9%) of the non-graduating students from spring 2016 returned to Dalton State during the 2016-2017 academic year. Most importantly, nine dual enrollment students earned an associate degree in spring 2017. Some of these degree conferrals occurred just prior to the students graduating with their high school diplomas.

The College has already achieved the initial goals set for 2020 of increasing the dual enrollment population and credit hour production by 100% and increasing the number of dual enrolled students who complete a credential at Dalton State. With this achieved, attention will be turned to increasing the percentage of dual enrollment students who take classes on the Dalton State campus. Currently, 64% of DSC's dual enrollment population takes courses on campus, while the other 36% are taught at five local high schools. The present goal is to increase on-campus enrollment to 75% of total enrollment. It is known that students who engage with the campus early in their college careers are more likely to be retained and graduate from the institution than those students who take college courses at off-site locations.

Two major drivers have contributed to the success of the dual enrollment program at Dalton State College. One has been the employment of a full-time dual enrollment coordinator who serves as the advisor for dual enrollment students as well as the point-of-contact for the service area high schools. Changes in the funding of the dual enrollment program have also impacted enrollment in a positive manner. Students incur no cost and can enroll in courses year round, thus incentivizing them to register and take more credit hours. The strategies implemented to achieve Strategic Goal 6.1 appear to be working in a positive manner and will continue to be monitored for outcomes.

#### PRIMARY CONTACT

The primary point of contact for the dual enrollment program is Casey Graham, Move on When Ready Coordinator who can be reached at [cgraham@daltonstate.edu](mailto:cgraham@daltonstate.edu).

### **GOAL 4: PROVIDE INTENTIONAL ADVISING TO KEEP STUDENTS ON TRACK TO GRADUATE.**

#### STRATEGY 4.4: ESTABLISH CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO MAY NEED SPECIAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE SEMESTER.

As noted with the dual enrollment program, student advisement plays a critical role in assuring that the most appropriate students are enrolled in those courses that are required to move them forward in their journey towards completing a college degree. The role that intrusive advising plays for all students at Dalton State is crucial to their academic success. DSC's advising team consists of eight professional full time advisors who are individually designated to work within one (or in some circumstances two) of the five academic schools (Business, Education, Health Professions, Liberal Arts, and Science, Technology, and Mathematics). These advisors report to the Deans of the respective school for which they advise students. However, even with this model, commonalities in advising, especially with first and second year students, exist across the campus. The advising team meets twice monthly during the fall and spring terms and are coordinated by one of the advisors on the team. Meetings with key personnel that represent essential offices for students (Registrar, Bursar, Student Solutions, Career Counseling, etc.) are arranged throughout the year to update advisors on any changes and ensure that they receive the most up-to-date information. Advisors share challenges and solutions to working with the population represented at DSC. As students move into their majors, faculty advisors take over the role in the majority of the schools.

An attempt at using software to monitor student progression was undertaken by adopting a predictive analytics program, specifically EAB. However, it was concluded after several years that this was not the best means of following the unique DSC student. The software was not easily adaptable for the population of students at DSC. Approximately 42.6% of students at Dalton State were seeking Associate degrees and were not recognized by the EAB analytic. Because DSC served a student population that was not necessarily experienced with high school/college preparatory classes, the EAB risk indicators were often misleading. In addition, the professional advisors either did not utilize EAB as an advising tool, or used only the note-recording feature. Since the size of the student body at DSC is approximately 4800-5000 students, it was determined that other systems could be employed using existing software, thereby saving substantial fiscal resources. Advising time could be used for more individual outreach as opposed to computer logging of data. The system developed in house could easily accomplish the necessary tasks in a more efficient user-friendly manner. The most important aspect of advising is to identify those students having academic difficulty as soon as possible and follow them closely to assist with any interventions.

To that end, an academic alert system was designed, adopted and piloted during the 2016-2017 academic year. This homegrown system was supported by Banner and connects with DegreeWorks and was designed by the DSC IT department in codes that work with Banner. It was therefore accessible to all academic advisors. The alert system was instituted for a subset of freshman and sophomore classes; faculty who taught the classes in question were trained on how to use the system. The professional advisors worked with the Office of Computing and Information Services incorporating the procedure into the current DSC student information system. The result was a user-friendly methodology that faculty and advisors developed to support teaching and advising efforts.

The process was simple, timely and easy to use. The pilot year for the alert system focused on a select group of targeted freshman and sophomore classes, primarily math, science and several other general education requirements. All alerts

were generated by faculty who taught courses selected for the alert program. As of now, the program does not work with any of the gradebooks instructors may be using for their courses as none of these are Banner based. The system currently allows for only one type of email to be generated by all alerts to each student who receives alert submissions. Multiple or different emails cannot be supported by the alert system, so the emails summarize only the academic alerts.

Over 500 alerts were submitted for fall and spring combined, of which 398 were unduplicated. Results for the combined fall and spring terms indicated that 38% of those placed on alert were successful in either increasing midterm to final grades, remained the same or succeeded with no midterm grade. Approximately 40% of those who received an alert withdrew from the courses. The percentage of students who failed the course for which they received an alert was 26%.

Alert emails to students included instructions for the student to seek help from his or her academic advisor. The advisors in turn, reached out via email or telephone to students who received alerts. These alert emails were particularly helpful when generated in time for advisors and students to have conversations before the last day to withdraw from classes without academic penalty. By advising prior to withdrawal without academic penalty, students were given the opportunity to potentially increase their GPAs and possibly prevent probation or suspension status. This activity kept them on track to complete their degrees albeit possibly at a slower rate.

For DSC, the alert system resulted in conversations with students about the importance of attending classes, submitting homework on time, time management, realistic degree plan choices, and graduation requirements. Student support services like tutoring, supplemental instruction, career development and counseling were discussed with students and often utilized after encouragement from advisors and instructors.

Advising surveys distributed each fall and spring term demonstrated how DSC students depended on their advisors to guide them through appropriate degree programs that supported their individual abilities and goals. The SmartEvals system was utilized to measure the confidence and satisfaction of students for both professional and faculty advisors. Results from the 2016-2017 survey indicated that 70% of responding students felt their advisors provided them with accurate information regarding degree progression and course requirements. 80% of responding students felt that their advisors were easily accessible and knowledgeable about advising policies and procedures while 75% felt that their advisors offered career option information corresponding to specific majors.

The plan for the upcoming academic year is to continue and expand the Academic Alert system to include all 1000+ and 2000+ level classes and to analyze the data extracted from Banner for the alerts. This first usage of an alert system supports the notion that the more attention paid to struggling students by instructors and advisors, and the earlier the intervention takes place, the greater the likelihood that freshman and sophomore students will adapt to the demands of college.

In addition to the expansion of courses in the alert system, plans for the future include a joint venture between advising and the career development office to coordinate a majors fair in fall 2017. This will be an opportunity for students to explore other degree programs offered at DSC and to communicate with faculty who teach in those programs.

#### **PRIMARY CONTACT**

The primary contact for the advising team is temporarily assigned to Pat Chute at [pchute@daltonstate.edu](mailto:pchute@daltonstate.edu) due to changes in the advising team.

### **GOAL 7: INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD OF DEGREE COMPLETION BY TRANSFORMING THE WAY REMEDIATION IS ACCOMPLISHED.**

#### **STRATEGY 7.1: ENROLL STUDENTS NEEDING REMEDIATION IN GATEWAY COLLEGIATE COURSES IN ENGLISH AND MATH WITH CO-CURRICULAR LEARNING SUPPORT.**

As part of the state colleges sector in the USG, Dalton State serves as a gateway to higher education and thus offers ways for students to become ready for college work. DSC has done so on its own initiative through its highly successful Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) for SACSCOC accreditation and through participation in initiatives from the USG, that is, the move toward emporium and co-curricular courses for students needing remediation.

The QEP, titled "Getting on the Write Path," began in 2012 with its approval by the SACS visiting team. The focus was to use various best practices to improve outcomes in ENGL 0098, which at that time had about a 50% first-time success rate. These best practices included smaller class sizes (20 for the first two years and 18 for following three years); required visits to the Writing Lab; learning communities with First Year Experience courses; a team of designated instructors who worked together and experienced faculty development as a cohort; required use by instructors of the learning management system; computer-assisted writing instruction; and biweekly progress reports for students, among other innovations. The following outcomes were observed as a result of the processes put in place:

- Improvement of pass rates for ENGL 0098 went from 54% to 80% in just one year (AY 2013).
- Improvement of average pass rates over five years from 54% to 90.7% (Fall 2016) and 80% (Spring 2017).
- Over the five years of the QEP, the percentage of students who exited 0098 and completed ENGL 1101 with a C or better exceeded the percentage of students overall who completed ENGL 1101, indicating that those who complete 0098 have an increased opportunity to be successful in subsequent English courses.

The USG, in its move toward co-curricular remediation, gave DSC an extension on changing its English and Reading approaches to remediation until the end of the QEP, which was Spring 2017. In the Fall 2017 semester students will be placed in co-curricular English (0999). Those with EPI scores between 3032 AND 4059 will be placed in ENGL 0989. This procedure is consistent with initiatives within the mathematics program that were incorporated in 2013.

The co-curricular support math courses, Math 0997, Math 0998, and Math 0999, support credit classes, Math 1001, Math 1101, and Math 1111, respectively. The co-curricular mathematics courses are taught in an emporium model, meaning there is no formal face-to-face class instruction time for these support courses; however, a designated computer lab with 36 computers is open and staffed 50 hours per week along with the Math Lab to offer assistance to students with their work in these courses.

Students in the co-curricular math courses are encouraged to attend an initial orientation session, which provides instructions for navigating through the course. Students are offered access to videos and PowerPoints covering each concept in the credit course and are required to complete a set of assignments to at least the 80% level. Students are instructed and encouraged to work on their assignments as those sections/concepts are covered in their credit class. Instructors facilitating the classes send out regular emails with updates on proper progression, which serve to help guide students through the assignments in a timely manner. Instructors facilitating the classes are available in the Math Lab (along with a designated computer lab) over 50 hours per week. Students can satisfy all course requirements remotely. In order to earn a satisfactory grade in the course, every assignment must be completed to at least the 80% level. There are approximately 20 assignments in each of the support courses.

In the second year of full implementation (AY 2015-2016), success rates in co-curricular learning support mathematics were consistent and somewhat improved. Students who were required to take both courses (that is, the learning support level students) had success rates in both classes as follows: MATH 1001, 61%; MATH 1101, 75%, and MATH 1111, 74%. Success rates (A, B, or C grades) for the entire population of students taking Area A math classes were

- MATH 1001 (18/35) 51%;
- MATH 1101 (181/284) 64%;
- MATH 1111 (450/747), 60%.

These results indicated that the students who took both classes concurrently did significantly better than the overall group of freshmen math students. The co-curricular students benefited from being required to attend both classes. To indicate the popularity of the Math Lab, during 2015-16, 973 students made 5636 visits to the Math Lab, totaling 10,0612 hours. The number of visits represents a 16% increase over the previous year, and the total hours represent an 18% increase over the same previous year.

More recent statistics (2016-2017) are still promising but not as outstanding. Yearly fluctuations in entrance standards and the educational background of incoming students, and the fact that not all students in the math class are necessarily in the same incoming freshman cohort, are mitigating factors.

	Spring 2016	Summer 2016	Fall 2016	Spring 2017
<b>MATH 0997/1001</b>	64%	--	38%	67%
<b>MATH 0998/1101</b>	60%	100%	48%	49%
<b>MATH 0999/1111</b>	61%	68%	52%	44%

Ultimately the question is whether the change in learning support moves students toward graduation. Since these changes occurred less than six years ago, those numbers cannot be defined. However, this chart shows a snapshot of the number of students in certain learning support classes in Fall 2014 still enrolled at DSC in Fall 2016. The numbers below are slightly better than our general population's retention rate in the junior year.

	Fall 2014	Fall 2016
<b>ENGL 0098</b>	62	41 (66% retention rate)
<b>Co-curricular math</b>	192	94 (49% retention rate)

**PRIMARY CONTACT**

The primary contact for English remediation through the QEP is Dr. Jenny Crisp, QEP Director, at [jcrisp@daltonstate.edu](mailto:jcrisp@daltonstate.edu). The primary contact for math remediation is Dr. Lee Ann Nimmons, Chair of Math Department, at [lnimmons@daltonstate.edu](mailto:lnimmons@daltonstate.edu).

**GOAL 8: RESTRUCTURE INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

**STRATEGY 8.1: EXPAND COMPLETELY ONLINE OPPORTUNITIES**

As noted earlier, the majority of students at Dalton State are commuter students challenged by the need to juggle work, family, and school responsibilities. Expanding online opportunities offers students more flexibility and often enables them to enroll in an increased number of credit hours, as it eliminates the need to schedule time on campus. DSC began addressing this need in 2011 when the College became an eCore affiliate in the USG and was later approved to join the eMajor program in 2013, offering the B.S. in Organizational Leadership, with a concentration in Health Care Administration. In early 2015, DSC was permitted to collaborate with Georgia Southwestern State University on an online Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice

eMajor; later in the year DSC was approved to offer its own four-year degree in Health Information Management Systems. The College will offer upper-level coursework online in conjunction with lower division eCore courses to create a fully online program in Health Information Management.

In addition, the faculty is being encouraged to develop more completely online and hybrid courses, especially those at the 3000 and 4000 level and those 1000 and 2000 level courses that are not available through eCore. Restoration of an Instructional Technologist position in Spring 2015 has facilitated the college’s ability to train faculty in online course development.

Additionally, the campus’ Online Education Committee revised rubrics, approval processes, and registration processes for online courses to ensure quality and better student retention in those courses. Finally, in fall 2015, faculty members were given the opportunity to apply for \$1,200 grants to develop new online and hybrid courses. However, due to funding constraints, this initiative is unable to continue for the upcoming academic year. The Online Education Committee also completed an extensive survey in Fall 2015 to gauge the interest in online courses from DSC students.

As an institution, there has been steady growth in the access students have to online and hybrid opportunities and in student enrollment in these formats. The chart below summarizes the activity in AY 2016-2017, including Summer 2016:

eMajor enrollment duplicated	eMajor enrollment, unduplicated	eCore enrollment, duplicated	eCore enrollment, unduplicated	DSC Online courses enrollment, duplicated	DSC Online courses enrollment unduplicated	Hybrid courses enrollment, duplicated	Hybrid courses enrollment, unduplicated
666	161	962	524	1471	503	2483	1719

Therefore, 5582 students (duplicated) or 2907 (unduplicated) took advantage of online or hybrid opportunities in Summer 2016 through Spring 2017. These numbers compare favorably to duplicated headcount for all online and hybrid opportunities in Fall 2015 of 2337 and in Spring 2016 of 2395 (total 4732). Numbers of sections have grown accordingly. Moving forward, Dalton State will turn its attention to the development of upper division online courses in all disciplines.

**PRIMARY CONTACT**

The primary point of contact for online programs is Dr. Barbara Tucker [btucker@daltonstate.edu](mailto:btucker@daltonstate.edu).

**GOAL 8: RESTRUCTURE INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND STUDENT SUCCESS**

**GOAL 8.2: IMPLEMENT ALTERNATIVE DELIVERY MODELS SUCH AS HYBRID INSTRUCTION, FLIPPED CLASSROOMS AND EMPORIUM-MODEL INSTRUCTION**

The Committee on Academic Excellence (CAE) supported instructors using Flipped and Hybrid Delivery Methods and encouraged others to consider these formats towards the achievement of goal 8.2. In addition to addressing the goal, this programming aimed to improve instructional excellence in all course delivery formats. The following activities supported this initiative:

- 8th Annual Teaching and Learning Conference featured presentations and a keynote speaker focused on the evidence-based methods. 97 Dalton State faculty across all five academic schools (56% of our FT Faculty) participated in this one-day conference. Feedback indicated implementation of one or more evidence-based techniques.
- Monthly Teaching Workshop Series – 8 monthly workshops resulted in the following outcomes: 73 Faculty (42%) participated in these workshops across all five schools, with pre- and post-test data indicating faculty met the learning objectives of each session.
- Three Faculty Learning Communities focused on the following books:
  - “What the Best College Teachers Do” by Ken Bain.
  - “Start Talking: Engaging in Difficult Dialogues in Higher Education” by University of Alaska Anchorage.
  - “Mindset” by Carol Dweck.

In addition, the CAE in conjunction with Academic Affairs, Student Services, and Enrollment Management launched an initiative that guided faculty in adopting High Impact Practices (HIPs). Research indicates that students who experience one HIP within their first year, and then a second at another time have a greater possibility of being retained to graduation and achieving better grades in other courses (Kuh/AAC&U 2008). In addition, these outcomes are more significant in underserved populations including students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, minority populations and low SAT/ACT scoring students, which represent a majority of DSC’s student body. The goal of this initiative is to direct faculty in HIP course redesign and to increase the availability of opportunities to engage in High Impact Practices over time with a view to increasing retention rate and reducing the DFW rate. A Course Redesign Rubric and Handbook was developed to guide faculty in redesign and implementation in courses. Additionally, a program of monthly education events was provided.

The amount of outreach and follow up to ensure completion of projects and engagement of more faculty in this area resulted in dividing the overall responsibilities for the Committee on Academic Excellence into one that addressed the broader issues of classroom management and a separate committee for HIPs. Both committees will monitor faculty engagement and output in the various areas over the next year.

#### PRIMARY CONTACT

The primary contact for the Committee on Academic Excellence is Dr. Marina Smitherman, [msmitherman@daltonstate.edu](mailto:msmitherman@daltonstate.edu). The primary contact for the High Impact Practice initiative is Dr. Brian Hibbs [bhibbs@daltonstate.edu](mailto:bhibbs@daltonstate.edu).

### SUMMARY

The five years during which Dalton State has participated in Complete College Georgia, 2012-2017, have been years of immense and constant change at the institution. A new president arrived in January of 2015, and a new Provost/VPAA arrived in July 2016. Several new baccalaureate degree programs were instituted to attract and meet the needs of more students; for example, Logistics and Supply Chain Management (School of Business); Communication and Psychology (School of Liberal Arts); Respiratory Therapy, Health Information Management, and Nursing (School of Health Professions). In addition to these, the College has added credentials such as in Education (Autism) and Math (Actuarial Science), and has fully participated in eMajor through the collaborative B.S. in Organizational Leadership and B.S. in Criminal Justice.

These additional programs form one prong of DSC's approach to helping to create more college completers. Another prong is to improve student services and access. Through Move On When Ready, hundreds of local high school students have been able to complete thousands of hours of college classes, and some have even earned two-year degrees concurrently with their high school diplomas. Secondly, advising and early alert initiatives have been piloted. While predictive analytics did not prove to be a good fit for DSC, a home-grown early alert system begun in 2016 is allowing the advisors to intervene with students who encountered academic difficulty and to help identify the best strategies for them. The Office of the Dean of Students expanded tutoring services, as have academic departments through centers and labs.

A third prong is to improve internal curricular opportunities. These first include more online/hybrid courses and the support systems to sustain their development and use. This has included hiring a dedicated instructional technologist, offering development grants, and implementing review standards for online/hybrid courses. Second, remediation reform has been expedited through a highly successful QEP focused on learning support English; with the end of the QEP period (2017), English and Reading learning support will join Mathematics as co-curricular programs. Students are freed from a restrictive learning support policy and moving forward to credit classes. Third, there has been a concerted effort to invest in robust faculty development programming including a yearly conference, visiting experts, a High Impact Practices program, and an institutional Scholarship of Teaching and Learning publication.

An additional area where specific DSC faculty members have sought to help progression is their success with obtaining Affordable Learning Georgia Grants. As of Spring 2017, 11 of these grants have been awarded to faculty, saving DSC students hundreds of thousands of dollars in textbook costs. Faculty members in Biology, Mathematics, Psychology, American Government, learning support English, Communication, Education, and Sociology have been awarded and subsequently implemented the grants. These disciplines represent four of the five Schools of the College. The projects ranged from full scale creation of textbooks to compilations of open source readings to adoption of OpenStax or other Open Educational Resource (OER) texts. Since most of these OER materials were adopted or prepared for core courses, a majority of students have been positively affected by the cost savings. Research, specifically by Hilton et al (2015) shows that OERs are at least as good, if not better, in meeting learning outcomes, and in most cases this has proven true at Dalton State. Research from the USG has supported this conclusion as well. Tying this effort directly to retention would be difficult at this time, but the positive student feedback supports the notion that students who have multiple economic challenges can continue toward achieving a degree if they know that costs are reduced. Notably, the students have first-day access to the materials, whereas with expensive traditional textbooks that is not always the case.

According to the reports from faculty filed with the Affordable Learning Georgia program, DWF rates in the core courses using OERs have improved. For instance, two SOCI 1101 professors saw a decline in DWF rates from 29.8 to 25% from Fall 2014 to Fall 2015. Early analyses by the two Psychology 1101 professors who were awarded an ALG grant to use the OpenStax book reveal that their students' overall exam scores are higher than those for courses requiring traditional textbooks taught by the same instructor. In the case of COMM 1110, a required public speaking course, from Summer 2013 to Spring 2016 (when a publisher's text was used), the pass rate was 78.23%; in AY 2016-7, the pass rate was 87.2%. These are just three examples of how the grants and use of low-cost materials are making a difference in the ability of DSC students to succeed in specific courses. However, it must be noted that for first generation students, success in one particular course is just one in the multitude of factors in their lives that might influence eventual graduation.

Dalton State's strategic plan will lead the institution forward to other initiatives that will attract and retain students, such as an Honors Program, partnerships with the local community, and strengthening programming and teaching for first- and second-year students.