



Introduction

The Vision and Purpose of the GC Book

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The chapters in this book reflect a situated analysis of the General College (GC), which is a flexible set of models that co-exist programmatically to support learners from diverse backgrounds who enter college with a variety of academic achievements, social skills, and workforce talents. This book essentially provides a historical look at the college's foundation with a more contemporary "snapshot" of the college's theoretical and curricular frameworks from the vantage point of faculty and staff members who write directly about their own classrooms and experiences. The goal of the chapters and ultimately the book collectively is to demonstrate how, as a group, the individual members of the GC professional community work together to provide an educational model that supports the widest range of students possible.

This is a highly developed, sophisticated, and somewhat complex approach to undergraduate education as the end goal of all individuals in the college is to move students successfully from GC to their desired major at the University of Minnesota. This includes not only providing success in academic skill development but also success in the social and economic purposes of education, such as developing engaged citizens, socially and culturally aware people, and skilled workforce employees. The notion of the General College presented at this time demonstrates a set of activities and ideas that support student learning in higher education, with an emphasis on drawing upon the expertise of recent theoretical and curricular approaches that provide the best means for transitioning undergraduates, specifically including those who were formerly underserved by their social contexts and educational institutions.

The General College includes curricular approaches and theoretical frameworks that reflect a type of programmatic coexistence, a "loosely coupled" system, where various disciplines of the college interact and design

approaches for their academic content area to embed skill development into their core areas. The educators all share concepts, such as supporting transitions, providing skill development, and preparing student learners for future academic courses and social activities such as work or civic engagement. GC educators address student motivation, skills, cultural awareness, social and academic literacies, and mastery of content areas. They may vary in their theoretical frameworks in terms of how their own courses, outcomes, and assignments are implemented and conceived. As the frameworks are diverse across the GC program, they may overlap or present divergent models for engaging students in the day-to-day activities of GC courses. However, in this diversity, they also complement each other to provide the widest range of supports for students who take the sequence of courses to prepare for their transition to a future major at the university. In other words, the GC model as presented in the examples in this book presents a variety of activities and approaches that, when operating together across the disciplines toward a central mission, complement each other as students move through the program. This is the most innovative approach possible, and the GC program has a historic legacy of providing flexibility and a comprehensive set of courses that best fulfill this mission and GC's role within the greater university community.

An important and central concept in the GC model is the notion of the "GC community," a phrase commonly used by faculty, staff, students, and alumni to describe their sense of location and role within this college. This phrase, while existing partially as college lore and popular vocabulary, certainly reflects a strongly held belief by many members of the college constituencies that GC is more than just an educational concept and curricular approach. There is a kind of cohesiveness and progressive coexistence at the core of this concept. This feeling of being within a community as an educator is more than a fuzzy notion of feel-good educational practices. GC has strength and cohesiveness as a comprehensive educational program, and the fact that the faculty, staff, students, and alumni refer to this college as a community of sorts by using the phrase "GC Community" is an affirmation of a central sense of identity, ownership, and agency that people hold related to its central mission, function, and day-to-day practices and outcomes. This book's chapters collectively attempt to identify some of the components of this educational community, both as it plays out in practice and as it is exemplified in the spirit of the purpose and goals of the college in higher education.

GC is also a unique program in the nation; it is a leader in research for issues of access and student success, such as transfer, retention, and graduation. The goal of this writing project is to finally capture this model at a point

in time that reflects its historic origins and also its future innovations. The General College, like any forward-thinking educational program, is always evolving to serve its students and meet the needs of the greater context within which it exists. Thus, the model remains diverse, complementary, and flexible in its parts. Higher education programs serving undergraduates in this century must be highly adaptable and responsive to their student populations. Members of GC have always understood this, and the chapters in this book will demonstrate a shared awareness of the diversity of its staff, students, and the most appropriate and contemporary approaches in higher education that can serve the needs of all students in this society.

The section introductions throughout this book will explain how each set of chapters by GC faculty and staff authors collectively define the work of GC in several areas, such as history, multiculturalism, skill development and course content, student services, theory and research, and assessment. This book's publication, dedication of its authors, work of its editors, and support of GC's administrators centrally reflect the concept of how the GC community works together toward common goals and educational change for the broadest group of students.

An Introduction to the General College

Jeanne L. Higbee and Dana Britt Lundell

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the General College and provide a brief overview of its programs and services as well as a profile of its students, faculty, and staff.

The General College (GC) is a freshman-admitting college of the University of Minnesota (UMN). Founded more than 150 years ago, the University of Minnesota is both a selective research institution and a public land-grant university with a strong tradition of teaching, research, and public service. The University is dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth; to the sharing of this knowledge through education for a diverse community; and to the application of this knowledge to benefit the people of the state, nation, and world. The UMN Twin Cities campus, situated in the state's major urban site, enrolls more than 45,000 students each fall.

The General College houses one of the oldest developmental education units in America. As defined by the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE; 1995),

Developmental Education is a field of practice and research within higher education with a theoretical foundation in developmental psychology and learning theory. It promotes cognitive and affective growth of all postsecondary learners, at all levels of the learning continuum.

Developmental Education is sensitive and responsive to the individual differences and special needs among learners.

Developmental Education programs and services commonly address preparedness, diagnostic assessment and placement, affective barriers to learning, and development of general and discipline-specific learning strategies.

The General College was founded in 1932 to provide a more general education than previously offered by the University of Minnesota to a broader range of students in terms of both academic and demographic profiles. Stu-

dents enrolled in GC could earn an associate of arts degree or a certificate to enhance employability, and later a baccalaureate degree. Historically GC has served many student populations that traditionally have been underrepresented in American higher education, including adults returning to school, students who are parents, students of color, students who are recent immigrants to the U.S., students with disabilities, and students who are considered by regular admissions standards to be underprepared for university course work. In 1986, following the advent of Minnesota's network of community colleges, the Regents of the University of Minnesota decided that the mission and focus of the General College should change. Degree and certificate programs were phased out. Since 1991 GC's role has been to prepare students who do not meet regular admissions requirements.

In 1996 members of the University's central administration proposed the closing of the General College, so that resources could be diverted to other initiatives. GC was required to defend its mission within a selective research university. As indicated in Chapter 6, a ground swell of local support prevented the closing of GC. A new president, Mark Yudof, took over the helm of the University of Minnesota, and a team of external evaluators lauded GC's many accomplishments in providing access to the University of Minnesota. Several years later Governor Jesse Ventura once again proposed eliminating GC, not realizing that GC generated revenues equal to more than six times what it cost the state (Facts and Figures, 2004). More important, however, is the role that GC has played in providing access to the University of Minnesota to students from populations that traditionally have been underrepresented in institutions of higher education in Minnesota and the rest of the nation. Further information regarding GC's history and mission is provided in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 19, and 22.

As we are completing the final editing and revisions of this book as a whole, the General College is once again in a state of transition. A University task force recommended to President Robert Bruininks that the college be closed and that some of its functions be relocated as a department in a reenvisioned College of Education and Human Development. These recommendations were forwarded by the President to the Board of Regents in May 2005, and the Board of Regents voted to accept the recommendations on June 10, 2005 (*Transforming the University of Minnesota*, 2005).

Goals

The General College's goals are closely linked to its primary mission (see Foreword) of providing access, as follow:

1. *Promote multiculturalism.* GC facilitates the understanding and celebra-

tion of individual and cultural differences at every level of the educational experience. The GC Multicultural Concerns Committee (MCC; Ghere, 2003) actively engages in numerous projects that are both educational and transformative. Through initiatives like the MCC Multicultural Scenarios Project (Jehangir, Yamasaki, Ghere, Hugg, Williams, & Higbee, 2002) and the Multicultural Awareness Project for Institutional Transformation (MAP IT; Higbee, Miksch, Jehangir, Lundell, Bruch, & Jiang, 2004; Miksch, Bruch, Higbee, Jehangir, & Lundell, 2003; Miksch, Higbee, et al., 2003), which is discussed further in Chapter 7, GC faculty and staff members have endeavored to explore multicultural issues and assess GC's commitment to providing an equitable and welcoming multicultural learning and working environment.

2. *Foster skill development.* The GC model embeds skill development in credit-bearing core curriculum courses without the loss of content and without compromising quality. Students are able to progress toward graduation rather than being required to enroll in courses that are considered precollege level. The only GC courses that do not bear credit toward graduation are in mathematics, as discussed in Chapters 10, 14, 15, and 23.

3. *Expect excellence in teaching.* General College faculty and instructional staff members put teaching first. This emphasis is apparent in faculty members' teaching portfolios, which include a reflective statement of teaching philosophy and how it is implemented in the classroom. In addition to tenure-track and tenured faculty, GC is highly selective in its employment of professional teaching specialists and graduate student teaching assistants. Student evaluations further support the high caliber of teaching in GC.

4. *Provide academic support.* The Student Information Center, Academic Resource Center, Supplemental Instruction, learning communities, and professional and peer tutors provide services to complement the classroom experience. These services will be described further in Chapters 19 and 20.

5. *Enhance student development.* Counselor advocates and the Transfer and Career Center provide advising and counseling to assist students with academic and career decision making.

6. *Encourage civic engagement.* Students, faculty, and staff are involved in community service through individual and classroom activities and college-wide efforts like the African-American Read-In.

7. *Conduct research to guide teaching.* Faculty and staff conduct extensive research that is directly linked to improving instruction. In addition, through the Center for Research on Developmental Education and Urban Literacy (CRDEUL), the college has been influential in leading national discussions and disseminating information about theoretical perspectives and current research to developmental educators and learning assistance professionals throughout the U.S.

8. *Promote student involvement and leadership.* Through its academic programs and extracurricular activities, such as the GC Student Board and positions for student representatives on GC standing committees, the General College encourages student participation in planning and decision making.

These goals are integrally linked to GC's efforts to retain students and enhance opportunities for their success. The General College endeavors to develop the skills, build the confidence, and provide the educational experiences across the curriculum that enable all students to maximize achievement. Access without retention is an empty promise. GC seeks to prepare students for successful transfer to degree-granting colleges of the University of Minnesota, and ultimately to graduate.

Admissions

An integral aspect of the mission of the General College is to serve the higher education needs of the State of Minnesota. In particular, GC provides a means of access to the state's flagship research university for students who would otherwise be denied entry. Rather than relying only on high school rank and standardized test scores, the admissions process for GC also includes consideration of essays and letters of recommendation that provide insights into such intangibles as motivation and other factors that cannot readily be measured by more traditional admissions criteria, especially among students from traditionally underrepresented groups. The student body of the General College should reflect the population of the major metropolitan area in which it is located. For example, the Twin Cities are home to significant populations of Native Americans and recent Hmong and Somali immigrants, as well as other people of color, in proportions not as yet reflected in the University of Minnesota's general student population.

One policy that differentiates the General College from many other developmental education units at other universities in the U.S. is the decision not to limit admission to a group of students whose standardized test scores, high school rank or grade point average (GPA), or other admissions criteria place them immediately below the standard cut-off. GC does not focus its selection process on the "narrow misses." Instead, GC welcomes a wide range of students from diverse backgrounds. It would be a relatively easy task to improve GC's retention statistics by changing the college's admissions policies, but GC recognizes that graduation rates are not the only way to measure student success. The entire university community benefits from the contributions of a diverse student body.

Each fall GC admits more than 800 new first-year students and typically serves between 1400 and 1800 first- and second-year students each semester.

GC accepts students whose Academic Aptitude Ratings (AAR; i.e., two times ACT composite score plus high school percentile rank) do not meet the admissions standards of the University of Minnesota's other freshman-admitting colleges. For fall 2004, 4,838 prospective students applied for admission to the General College, and GC made admissions offers to 1,815 to meet a target enrollment of 875. GC also served 939 continuing students and 15 transfer or new students with advanced standing (i.e., having college credits previously earned through Advanced Placement [AP] testing and other programs). GC's first-semester students accounted for approximately 16% of the University of Minnesota's incoming freshman class. First-year students enrolling in GC in fall 2004 had a mean high school percentile rank of 54.35, with a range from 2 to 99, and a mean ACT composite score of 19.70, with a range of 11 to 31. The mean age was 19.38, with a range of 17 to 52. Of the 875 new freshmen in GC, 89% were from Minnesota, and 74% were from the greater Twin Cities metropolitan area; 8% were student athletes. Of all students enrolled in GC during fall semester 2004, 48.2% were students of color, including approximately 22% African American, 2% American Indian, 20% Asian American, 5% Chicano or Latino, 49% Caucasian, and 3% for which data was missing.

Curriculum

The General College is unique among postsecondary developmental education units in its focus on providing developmental education within the framework of an entire core curriculum of credit-bearing courses. The GC curriculum includes courses in the physical and biological sciences, logic, statistics, art, film, drama, literature, speech communication, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and law and society, in addition to the mathematics and composition courses traditionally offered in developmental education programs. GC offers 13 courses that meet the University's cultural diversity graduation requirement, and 14 that count toward the writing intensive requirement. All students at the University of Minnesota are required to complete four courses that bear the writing-intensive designation beyond freshman composition.

The only "precollege" courses that fit the more traditional model for developmental education that are offered within GC are prerequisites in mathematics, which are described further in Chapter 14. Throughout the curriculum, skill development is embedded within content, rather than being provided through "stand-alone" reading and study strategy courses. Curriculum Transformation and Disability (CTAD; Higbee, 2003), funded through a U.S. Department of Education grant, has trained GC faculty and staff to

provide a universally accessible learning environment that does not isolate students with disabilities. Thus, GC students are earning credits toward graduation while developing the skills necessary for (a) transfer to one of the degree-granting colleges of the University, (b) retention at the institution, and (c) success beyond college. GC offers challenging course work, a supportive environment, and small classes in which students have access to their teachers. More specific information about some of the courses in the GC curriculum is provided in other sections of this book.

Personnel

As of fall 2004, the staff of the General College consisted of 35 tenured and tenure-track faculty members; 54 professional and administrative (P&A) staff members, some of whom are teaching specialists; 48 civil service and bargaining unit staff members; and 34 graduate teaching and research assistants. Of the faculty, 12 are female, and 23 are male. With the addition of three new faculty hires for fall 2005, the faculty will be 26% people of color, including four African Americans, four Asian Americans, one American Indian, and one Latina. The P&A staff of 38 females and 16 males is approximately 15% people of color; the civil service and bargaining unit staff of 33 females and 15 males includes 23% people of color; and of the 23 female and 11 male graduate assistants, 50% are people of color.

Faculty and Instructional Staff

The General College is known for its exemplary teaching. The mean response on student evaluations to items related to the overall teaching ability of faculty members, professional teaching specialists, and graduate teaching assistants is typically around 6.0 on a 7.0 scale. The General College's full-time faculty members are hired as developmental education specialists within their disciplines. Since 1967, 32 GC faculty members (more than any other college of the University) have received the H. T. Morse Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education, the University's most prestigious teaching award. In addition, members of the faculty and instructional staff are among the most productive researchers in the field of developmental education, as demonstrated by the bibliography provided at the end of this book.

Professional and Administrative Staff

The General College has an active professional and administrative (P&A) staff who also contribute to the college's scholarship, teaching, and administration. They also receive a variety of awards for their service, teaching, and

research contributions to GC's mission. P&A staff publish, disseminate research and best practices at professional meetings, provide leadership at the regional and national levels, and pursue professional development opportunities to enhance student learning, access, and retention.

Civil Service and Bargaining Unit Staff

Additionally, the college has strong leadership and professionalism in its extensive Civil Service and Bargaining Unit Staff, who provide a variety of clerical, administrative, financial, technical, and managerial supports within the college. Civil Service staff are also a diverse group of individuals within GC who contribute centrally to the research, teaching, and service missions of the college, including community outreach support, leadership within the greater UMN community, and leading the daily activities of the college in support of student life and academics. They receive many performance awards for their professionalism and contributions to GC.

Student Services and Community Outreach

In addition to its curriculum and faculty, GC has been widely recognized for its outstanding student services personnel and the vast array of programs it makes available to its students, as well as its commitment to civic engagement and community partnerships. The General College offers comprehensive student services. GC's three federally-funded TRIO programs, which have earned national exemplary status, include Student Support Services (SSS), through which GC offers Supplemental Instruction (SI) and learning communities, Upward Bound, and the Ronald McNair Scholarship Program. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) houses both mathematics and writing centers, as described in Chapter 20. The Commanding English (CE) Program, which will be described further in Chapter 9, serves about 50 students per year, providing linked courses and other forms of assistance for English language learners. The college hosts the Student Parent HELP Program, an educational, social, and economic support program for students who are parents. The Transfer and Career Center assists students in preparing to transfer to other colleges within the University and also guides them through career exploration. For those who must "stop out" for a variety of reasons, many nonacademic, the center provides help in making the adjustment to the world of work.

GC offers an extensive counseling, advising, and student advocacy program that has received repeated national recognition from the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA). Six GC counselor advocates have received the University's most prestigious advising award. Teachers and coun-

selor advocates work together to provide an effective early warning system to ensure that students receive assistance before it is too late. In addition, all GC students receive progress reports in each of their GC courses during the sixth and tenth weeks of each semester. Programs within the General College, such as TRIO and CE, assist in promoting the retention of GC's diverse group of students. GC student services are described further in Chapter 19.

Over the years the General College has hosted myriad community outreach programs. GC currently sponsors an American Indian math and science summer camp and numerous other programs that serve area high school students. GC is also home of the national African American Read-In.

Retention and Transfer Rates

Of students who began their postsecondary education in the General College in fall 2003, 75% were still enrolled in fall 2004, as opposed to 86% of all UMN students who entered the University system in fall 2003. Of students who entered GC in fall 2002, 63% were still enrolled in fall 2004, as compared to a retention rate of 76% for the University system as a whole.

Transfer rates from GC to other colleges of the University remained stable at approximately 39% at the end of 2 years for students who were admitted to GC in 2001 and 2002. (Transfer admissions requirements make it very difficult to transfer after the first year.) Within 3 years approximately 54% of students admitted in fall 2000 and 58% of students who entered GC in fall 1999 had transferred to other colleges of the University of Minnesota, and within 4 years 62% of students who began in GC in fall 1999 had successfully transferred to a degree-granting college of the University.

Notable Success Stories

Perhaps one of the best yardsticks for measuring GC's effectiveness is the loyalty of its alumni. Norman Borlaug, recipient of the 1970 Nobel Peace Prize for his agricultural research, has reflected,

I often think what would have happened to me if I had not had the chance to enter General College. I was declined entrance to the College of Liberal Arts or to Agriculture. I was thought to be unworthy, incapable of doing University work. My work in advancing the 'Green Revolution'—helping developing countries produce more food—as far as I'm concerned, this work couldn't have happened had I not been given that chance. (*Access and Excellence*, 2001, p. 17)

Other notable alumni of GC include examples of success such as a CEO of a local broadcasting company and an individual who started an independent technical support company. Numerous accounts by graduates of GC or for-

mer attendees of its transfer and preparation programs have reported back that their experiences in GC prepared them for jobs, future educational opportunities, and civic engagement within their communities.

Notably even in the current public controversy surrounding the May 2005 recommendations by President Bruininks to close GC, many more GC alumni have written in and shared their personal stories of success, access, and achievement to lifelong learning through the GC programs. Since 1932 GC has served as a starting point for higher education for thousands of students.

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Sharing Our Experiences: General College Students Give Voice to Their Perceptions of GC

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ABSTRACT

No book about the General College would be complete without student stories. Rather than sharing anecdotes passed along by faculty and staff, we have asked students to write about their experiences in the General College. These first-person accounts have been subjected to the same level of editing as the chapters written by staff and faculty, but otherwise appear as written by the students.

No description of the General College (GC) would be complete if it does not include students' stories. Faculty and staff members enjoy providing anecdotal evidence of our students' successes. However, for this book we decided that it is important to hear from the students directly, to give them a voice in describing the GC experience.

Within the following pages, we will hear from the student co-authors of this chapter. Our first four student authors, Elizabeth Vang, Inge Peterson, Amanda Wigfield, and Sedrick Halbert, entered GC as freshmen in fall 2004 and participated in Jeanne's freshman seminar course. They wrote their reflections following their first semester at the University of Minnesota (UMN). All four addressed their initial misgivings about being admitted to GC rather than the University's College of Liberal Arts (CLA), but each eventually recognized the advantages that GC has to offer. For Elizabeth, GC assisted with the transition to college and encouraged her to make use of the academic support services important to her success. For Inge, a highly capable student who did not make good use of her time in high school, GC has provided a second chance, and Inge has risen to the challenge. For Amanda, a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), GC's faculty, many of whom have participated in training in Universal Instructional

Design (Higbee, 2003), provided a more welcoming and inclusive classroom environment than she had experienced in the past. For Sedrick, who was working to overcome his habit of procrastination, the smaller class size and high level of structure within GC has enabled him to excel. Both Sedrick and Inge also wrote about the benefits of being part of a diverse community of learners in the General College.

Our last three student authors have all held positions of leadership within the General College. Khong Xiong served as co-chair of the General College Student Board (GCSB) during the 2004–2005 academic year. Leah Woodstrom was elected as a freshman to represent GC students in the Minnesota Student Association (MSA). During her tenure as senator and member of GCSB, she became very active in correcting student misconceptions about GC. Leah reflected on an incident in an MSA meeting regarding the perceptions of a student not in GC.

Our final student author wrote from a very personal level about what General College means to him. Josh's family and educational history, although not so unusual for a student in the General College, certainly are not typical of students in general at the University of Minnesota. Josh's ambitions and hopes are anything but typical, and his motivation and drive to be successful are extraordinary. Josh's story exemplifies the critical role that the General College plays in providing unique opportunities for students who might otherwise never have had the opportunity to attend the University of Minnesota.

Elizabeth's Story

The idea of college made me freeze within the shadow of fear because I could only see myself piled with feverishly working to finish my homework until early dawn. I was told many things about college, like the professors are merciless and their expectations are high. In spite of my fears, I applied for University of Minnesota, Twin Cities' College of Liberal Arts, but as result I got into General College. At first, I felt like a failure because I couldn't get into CLA. When I read brochures about General College, I realized that General College was right for me because I needed help with the transition from high school to college.

I found General College's staff and professors to be friendly, and, as a result, my college experience to be easier than I originally thought. They encouraged me to receive help from services that will improve me academically. I really love the support I receive from General College. Since the class size is significantly smaller than for many college classes, I was able to get the help I need to get through an assignment. It seemed like high school

because these classes were diverse, which made me feel at ease. General College has truly become my second home because I feel relaxed and comfortable there.

Inge's Impressions of GC as Contrasted to Stereotypes of the College

Initially when I got my letter from the University of Minnesota I was really excited about being admitted. I was a little disappointed about not being admitted through the College of Liberal Arts, but it was after I thought about it that I decided I was simply excited about going to the University of Minnesota. I figured I should be excited that I even got in. It felt like a second chance from high school. I didn't do much studying in high school, and this was my opportunity to show that I could do it and could do a far better job. When I applied to the U I truly didn't expect to get accepted, but I definitely feel like General College is giving me that second chance.

GC Provides Opportunity

Over the first semester I have come to the conclusion that I deserve to be at the University of Minnesota. I am using the opportunity that General College gave me. People say that college can be a cold place, but it was the General College that showed heart and is where I am receiving higher grades than I have ever received before. It wasn't that I wasn't intelligent in high school; I simply never did my homework. By being accepted through GC I feel I have something to prove.

What I like most about GC is the opportunity that it offers. During my first semester I participated in a learning community. There were several connections that could be made through the three classes involved in the community. I am not sure that the connection would have been so pronounced were there different circumstances. I also took a logic class, which I found most interesting.

What I dislike about GC has nothing to do with GC. More so it has to do with the people around GC who do not attend. The view of GC to others is so false. Somehow the great opportunity that GC offers is not appreciated by people outside of the college. It is viewed from what I have experienced from others as a lesser college, which it is not at all. It just goes all out and offers its students more than it would appear other colleges do. There are smaller class sizes, the teachers are very friendly, and there is more diversity. I truly appreciate GC. Maybe other students are just jealous.

I feel that the diverse learning environment is one of the things that really makes GC great. Coming from a small town with very little diversity, I feel I learned more about the world and society through GC. Having friends from

diverse backgrounds has been enlightening and also helped my political correctness.

I love meeting the other students and faculty. I stop by some of my former professors' offices just because of the friendships I made with them. My feelings about GC are that people underestimate GC and judge it so wrongly. Also I really do appreciate all of the people I have met through GC.

Amanda's General College Experience

I opened the envelope from the University of Minnesota with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation. After preparing all the application paperwork, transcripts, writing samples, personal statement, and letters of recommendation, the subsequent months of waiting had been difficult. The University of Minnesota was my first choice in colleges. This was important to me; I really wanted to attend the U. I nervously opened the letter and read, "Dear Amanda, Congratulations! It gives me great pleasure to inform you that you have been admitted to the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Welcome to the Class of 2008!" (W. Sigler, personal communication, February 2, 2004). As I read these opening words I felt a rush of pride and excitement. I had been accepted! I had made it! But, as I read on, something in the fourth paragraph of the letter made my heart sink. "We are very pleased to offer you admission to the University's General College" (W. Sigler, personal communication, February 2, 2004). What? I had applied to the College of Liberal Arts, not General College. I felt confused and disappointed.

I didn't know much about General College. I asked around and got the impression that General College was for students who had academic issues or needed some kind of remedial help to be successful in college. At this point I felt angry. I felt so angry I did not want to attend the U. To me it seemed as if no one could see past my disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and its effects on my grades, to see that I am intelligent, hard working, and would do well in college.

I struggled with the decision regarding whether to attend a community college or General College. To help make that decision I came to General College, toured the facility, and met with one of the Admissions Advisors. I learned more about the General College program. I was told class sizes were smaller in GC than in most University colleges. I learned that the professors and instructors employed more hands-on and interactive teaching methods. I was told these professors and instructors are experts in their fields, and many had also received national awards for their effective and innovative teaching methods. However, at this point none of this mattered to me; I was still angry.

Ultimately I was, however, able to put aside my negative feelings and make the decision that was in my best interest. I knew that many of my friends had applied to the U and had been denied admission. I learned how difficult it was to get into the U, even with impeccable credentials. I also understood that if I spent a year or two in GC and maintained a 2.0 average, I could transfer out of GC and into another college at the U where I could complete my degree. GC would give me a foot in the door. I decided that a foot in the door at the U was a better choice for me than a community college. Thus, I accepted the offered admission to General College and became part of the Class of 2008.

Orientation

I attended a 2-day orientation during the summer in advance of starting at the U and GC. This orientation was a turning point for me in terms of my attitude toward General College. We received an overall orientation to the U in a large group. I was there with students from the College of Liberal Arts, Carlson School of Management, the College of Human Ecology, Ag College, and all the other University Colleges. Even though I would be attending General College, this orientation made me feel like I was part of the University student body. After the general orientation, students were divided into groups according to their college. I was grouped with other students who would be attending GC. We received an orientation to General College, and we spent the rest of the night together. Through that experience I came to realize that the other GC students were just like me. I hadn't expected that. I didn't expect them to appear well educated or to be so disciplined and dedicated. As I said, this was a turning point for me. Prior to orientation I had felt like GC was not part of the U. It had seemed to me that GC was the place where the U hid away its inadequate students. I equated it with the small building behind the main high school that educated pregnant or delinquent students. After orientation I felt like GC was just another college, another building at the U.

Remedial Versus Developmental

Because of its focus on "high potential students . . . (who) may not meet the competitive standards of other freshman admitting colleges" (University of Minnesota, 2003), I was concerned the GC program would feel remedial. Also, with its small class sizes and with most of the classes meeting in one building, I had feared that GC would feel like glorified high school. I found neither of these to be the case.

Overall, my General College experience has been good. The coursework is challenging. I feel my work and my classroom contributions are respected by my instructors and peers. I feel I am learning. Not having attended classes

outside of General College, I cannot fairly compare my GC experience to what I would have experienced in classes outside GC. However, I suspect my GC classes have been a better fit with my learning style than what I would have experienced elsewhere. The classes have been engaging, interactive, and hands-on. For example, rather than simply studying art from a textbook, my General Art class made several trips to the Weisman Museum to view and discuss actual works. We also toured the campus to view and discuss various pieces of sculpture. In writing class, student groups were formed to critique each others' drafts. Through this, we became engaged in understanding the writing process. In General Psychology, my class was part of a research study on teaching methods. My section took multiple tests on each chapter to determine if this strengthened learning over the group who took one test per chapter. I found that the multiple test approach reinforced my learning, gave me a better understanding of areas where I was weak, provided an opportunity to learn what I had missed, and gave me the chance to demonstrate and be graded on what I had learned. I believe my GC classes brought out the best in me as a student and enabled me to demonstrate effectively what I had learned.

I am impressed with the General College instructors. Each is well versed in his or her field and is adept at using multiple modes of teaching in order to reach all students. I found the instructors approachable when I needed additional help understanding course material or when I had another problem or concern. It is clear the instructors care about me as a person and want to do what they can to help me succeed. They focused on what I did well, not what I did poorly, but still gave constructive feedback to enable me to grow.

I found the most difficult and frustrating part of General College to be class work involving groups. Two of my classes involved groups, and in both cases the other group members failed to do their share of the work, failed to do quality work, and failed to meet agreed-upon deadlines. Group members also often failed to attend group meetings and were difficult to contact. I was frustrated that my grade was dependent on the group's work product, which I could not control. Instructors seemed to have inadequate structure to ensure effective group functioning or equity in grading. However, it may be that group work outside of General College would present the same issues.

I have just completed my first semester in General College at the U. I took courses totaling 13 credits and earned a GPA of 3.79. This is the highest GPA I have had in my entire academic career. And I am enjoying school for the first time in my life. Clearly, the decision to attend General College was the right one for me. I feel confident that the remainder of my time at GC will go well and that I will successfully transfer to the College of Liberal Arts and complete my bachelor's degree.

Sedrick on “Being a GC Student”

My first semester in college attending the General College of the University of Minnesota has gone a lot better than I ever expected. While growing up and being in high school, I always heard that college is extremely difficult. I do not doubt that college is difficult, and I am not saying that it is not difficult for me because the truth is that it is. Things have just gone better than I ever imagined.

When I first received the letter that I was accepted into the General College, I was very excited just to be accepted into any college. But at the same time, I was also disappointed that I didn't get into the College of Liberal Arts, the college that I had applied for. At the time, I didn't really know all of the facts or difference between the College of Liberal Arts and General College—all I knew was the College of Liberal Arts was the college that I should be a part of in order to pursue my educational goals of becoming a writer. When I learned that I wasn't going to be in that college, I felt that I would be unable to reach my goals, and that made me sad.

But I soon learned that I was wrong. Just because I was in the General College didn't mean that I would never get into the College of Liberal Arts at all; it simply meant that I wouldn't be entering that college right away. In fact, I soon learned that anyone who was in General College had to transfer out of that college and into another one. So, knowing and learning that information comforted me.

As the semester progressed and I learned more and more information about the University and the General College, I began to feel better about being there. One of my professors for a freshman seminar urged all of us to take advantage of the resources and things that the General College offers. I learned that the General College had a computer lab where any General College student could print for free. Also, just because I was in General College didn't mean that I couldn't take other classes outside of GC. So I applied for a writing class from the College of Liberal Arts and was accepted into it. I learned that it was extremely rare for a non-GC student to take classes in GC, but I felt good knowing that I could take GC classes as well as some classes offered from other colleges.

There are more advantages in being in the General College: (a) class sizes are smaller than those of classes outside of GC so that teachers can focus more on students' individual needs, (b) counselors have fewer students to deal with so that they can offer more one-on-one help to their students, and (c) students receive two progress reports mid-semester so that we can see our progress in each class. (The University as a whole has recently implemented a mid-semester progress report also, based on the GC model.) All of these

things have helped me a lot. I have never liked classes that are too big, so I feel more comfortable in classes with fewer students. I know that every time I go to see my counselor, I never have to wait. Unless she is out to lunch or on her way to a meeting or something, she always finds time to talk to me. Furthermore, the progress reports help me to plan ahead to improve my grades if necessary.

Diversity in GC

In college diversity is inevitable. There is no way that I am only going to have classes and be associated only with people with the same nationality as my own. For me, it feels good being a part of a diverse learning place, especially the General College, which has fewer students. I would like to think that I can learn something from someone else from a different background. Their insights on a subject may help me somehow, and even if they do not, it has never hurt me to listen, just to hear something different for a change.

Changing Habits

During the first semester in the General College, I have learned a lot of different things about myself. One of my main problems is that I procrastinate more than I previously realized. I am not one of those students who does not turn in assignments on time. It just means that I spent the previous night, all night, doing it, and this is something that I am diligently trying to break. During this semester I have learned different ways to manage my time better so that I can finish my assignments and do things that I like to do. I keep an assignment planner that keeps me organized and reminds me of the upcoming assignments that I have to do.

Khong's Insights From a Position of Leadership

As a freshman, I believe General College has made an immense impact on my life. General College is a place where I believe many wonderful academic resources lie. I have utilized these resources, such as the Academic Resource Center and the Transfer and Career Center, to develop my strong academic skills so I can become successful in life. I have perceived that the GC staff and faculty work hard and closely together to provide the emotional, academic, and leadership support system to enhance my educational learning experience. I have developed a close relationship with the teaching specialists, professors, academic advisors, and many other people I know who work in GC. They are compassionate, devoted, caring, and they work extremely hard to satisfy my needs. They have shown me how to be the best student that I can be by helping me to accomplish my academic, leadership, and personal life goals.

Opportunities for Leadership

As the Co-Chairman of the General College Student Board, I have emerged to become an outstanding leader to my peers and to the rest of the GC community. People have looked at me as a role model. I have established many leadership skills that will help me through my future career. I have attended leadership conferences through GC, including the National Conference for Student Leaders, and Student Activities Office Leadership Conference, to learn what it is like to become an excellent leader to the community. I have acted as the representative from the General College Student Board serving on various GC committees, such as the Multicultural Concerns Committee and Alumni Society Advisory Committee. I have amplified my professional skills and advanced in my communication skills by being involved with GC committees and engaging with the professional GC staff and faculty. I am pleased to thank GC for its leadership opportunity and to enable me to serve as a student leader of the college.

Unique Multicultural Environment

I have witnessed that GC is not like any of the other colleges at the University of Minnesota; I honestly believe it is a distinctive institution unto itself, and I am proud to be a part of it. The moment I came to General College, I knew that I had found myself a home. The one thing I found incredibly appealing was the amount of diversity GC has in its community! It is such a remarkable and welcoming feeling to see students, staff, and faculty from all cultural backgrounds engaging with one another and making an effort to accomplish academic and life goals. I feel my heart is set with GC; it is a warm-hearted and friendly multicultural environment that makes me feel elated, delighted, and motivated to learn in college.

I have discovered, while being in GC, that by surrounding oneself with, understanding, and celebrating individual differences associated with race, ethnicity, gender, disability, language, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic class, I have learned to become more open-minded and appreciate people more. When one acknowledges and appreciates a group of people from a certain group identity, he begins to see what he wants the world to be, and I want people to become more educated about and accepting of others.

I perform well academically in my classes when I am surrounded by a group of people in GC who come from similar backgrounds as mine, such as being a bilingual with English as my second language, first-generation born and to attend higher education in the United States, or low to middle economic class student. I find GC a place where I have these similar traits with many of my GC peers; I feel more comfortable and at ease to socialize with them without having the feeling to withdraw because of thinking that

they do not understand where I come from or what my background is. I believe I am more easily connected in GC than in any other place on campus. I found that GC is the center of my network, my community, and where many of my incredible relationships with my peers began. I figure that my peers and I all share at least one similar trait through which we can relate to one and another. We understand the hardships that we had to go through in life—whether that was struggling with our education because we have an English language barrier, financial issues, or personal and family issues. With these struggles, I have learned to appreciate and help my peers. There is a peaceful, relaxing, incredible bond between them and me.

I believe that the one thing that will always stand out the most in my mind about GC is the way its staff and faculty prioritize their work by putting their students first. I have recognized this as a phenomenal and an exquisite act of a true and loyal group of people who have worked to change college students' lives positively, and they have done so for me as well. The staff and faculty have provided me with magnificent ideas on how to achieve my goals in life, and I am proud to thank all of them for their extraordinarily hard work. It is my pleasure to remain a proud supporter of GC staff and faculty and of the General College's mission at the University of Minnesota.

Leah's Role in Changing Misconceptions About GC

General College is a place where doors are opened for students to enter the University of Minnesota and become educationally set with the tools they need to succeed at a University level. However, this mission or idea gets lost among students outside of General College. My first year at the University of Minnesota, I served on the General College Student Board and as a General College Senator on the Minnesota Student Association (i.e., undergraduate student government).

I can distinctly recall a meeting of the Minnesota Student Association where a College of Liberal Arts student argued that the University of Minnesota, as a whole, would have better retention of students and save tuition dollars if General College did not exist. First, the General College retention rate was not falling, and students' tuition is sent to the college in which they are enrolled. College of Liberal Arts students' tuition is sent to CLA, and GC students' tuition is sent to GC. Clearly this student had no idea what he was talking about, and I felt offended being the only GC student in a room of 60 students. It seemed to me like students in other colleges did not really care to find out what this college is all about. In my eyes, criticizing the college in which I was enrolled felt like a personal attack on me.

Out of my frustration, I went and found out the retention rates and how tuition dollars are allotted. I did not dwell on this disappointment for very long, but corrected this student's understanding of General College.

Joshua's Story

I was born into a very poor, but loving family in southern Illinois. My family relocated to more than six different states during my youth. As you can imagine, this created a tremendous academic challenge for my parents. In addition, I had severe Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. My parents decided to start schooling me at home.

Being schooled at home certainly had both its advantages and disadvantages. One of the major disadvantages occurred when my mother tried to teach me subjects that she was weak in (i.e., math, chemistry, biology, etc.). These difficult subjects proved to be overwhelming for my mother, and I needed to take responsibility to teach myself until I finally graduated at the age of 18.

"Shelving" Dreams of Further Education

My father is a third-generation carpenter, and he strongly encouraged me to learn a trade rather than attend college. His advice was sincere and came from his heart. My mother also felt the same way. But I wanted to have a great career, and I knew that I needed to go to college. Lacking family support and knowledge on how to go about obtaining a college education, I finally shelved my dreams and tried to accept the reality of my situation.

I soon began to pursue various avenues of employment, ranging from ski instructor to assistant manager at a local bike shop. Disenchanted with my situation, income, and also lacking the foresight to make personal change in myself, I soon became very depressed and overwhelmed with feelings of insecurity and helplessness. For a couple of years I foolishly squandered my money, time, and health by living an irresponsible lifestyle. Upon realization that the consequences of my actions today would impact my future, I sought to fulfill my dream of having a career that would make a positive impact upon society.

Soon after my resolution, opportunity knocked in the form of an insurance direct-sales franchise. While marketing insurance to individuals, families, small businesses, and major corporations, I began to smooth my approach and found myself presenting and selling my product to groups of employees. In addition to selling the product, I also became responsible for recruiting other salespersons, their training, and the management of newly acquired accounts. After recruiting over 80 sales people and sometimes earning double and sometimes triple my father's weekly income in one day, I felt

I had finally reached the pinnacle of life. The business I had established created the respect from my parents that I had always longed for.

This feeling made me happy to a certain point, but still I had an unfilled desire in my heart to obtain a college education and to pursue a career that would have meaning. Unlike some of my wealth-driven peers working in my field, I realized that money wasn't making me happy. I often sought the things I had always desired but never could afford. This self-destructive habit started to have a negative impact on my lifestyle. I often found myself driven to work more than 100 hours a week in order to purchase the vanities that appeared so attractive to those who can not have them. This allowed me to achieve great success within my industry. But I was again feeling a desire for something more. I wanted an education and purposeful career of substance.

September 11th, 2001, brought these dreams to the forefront of my mind. At work in my office, where I was listening to the radio, the classical music was soon interrupted with some news that at first seemed unreal. Quickly finding a television, I watch the tragedy unfold. Flooded with concern for the useless slaughter of innocent people and gripped with the realities of the frailty of humanity, I wept and said a prayer for the victims' safety. 9/11 triggered my thoughts of my own life's purpose. Why should I continue to be unhappy with my career, when I longed for something more? It was something that I realize is a reflection of my compassion for humanity in need. Service to humanity, in some way, became my blossoming dream.

Pursuing Academic Goals

The tenacity within myself drove me to pursue my academic goals. After much research, the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities became my first choice. I resolved that, no matter what, I was going to attend the University of Minnesota. I was so confident in my academic goal that I moved to Minnesota, prior to knowing the status of my application. I was surprised when my application was quickly rejected. Bewildered, I pursued an explanation of the rejection. Explanations, like many things at the University of Minnesota, were hard to come by. Finally, I learned that my home-schooled background created a hurdle.

Distraught, I sought advice from professors, advisors, and the university Web site. I finally discovered General College. Wanting to find out more about what I had to do to gain admission to their "special" program, I sought out the persons in charge of admissions. My search led me to Rudy Hernandez. He humored me, while I spilled my story to him. I also presented him with a résumé, hoping the significance of my entrepreneurial achievements would prove worthy of admittance and also reveal that I was indeed smart enough to succeed in school.

Thankfully, this time spent with Rudy was indeed time well spent. I was accepted into General College. My realization of what is probably obvious to most high school students left me astonished. Why had I not pursued college sooner? Why did I not find this out a long time ago? Regardless, I was excited to begin pursuing my academic goal. I became enthralled with each class. Under the advisement of Susan Warfield, my General College advisor and now my trusted friend, I had selected numerous classes that would enable me to fill in the gaps left in my high school education.

In the midst of my happiness in finally attending the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, I was perplexed by the distinct separation between GC and the other University student populations. It soon became apparent to me that we were the “outcasts.” GC is a conglomeration of students of various underrepresented races, first-generation college students, products of very poor educational institutions, and students from families of low socioeconomic status. We stood out to the rest of the collegiate population as sore thumbs.

Soon I made many new friends with my General College peers. These relationships dispelled any significance in what the outside world thought of us. In fact, it confirmed my theories that General College’s population is made up of wonderful people, who are very smart and also wise to the traits necessary to survive in the “real” world. Our ability to overcome tremendous obstacles while striving to obtain an education is exemplary and should truly be recognized.

Many of my GC peers, I have found, have a much greater intellectual capacity than many of the professionals I have met in the business world. Each student at General College is given the opportunity for a career and a way out. They are rejecting the bonds of mediocrity and are striving for a change that will finally break the unfortunate bonds that many generations of repetitive, self-destructive behavior have created. Somehow, we as General College students were supposed to be swept through the cracks, out of sight of the world, and demanded to adhere to the law of our various socioeconomic statuses.

Exploring Opportunities in the Medical Professions

With a passion to assist humanity, I naturally contemplated pursuing a career in medicine. I had researched earlier the admission requirements of medical schools and learned that research and research-related experiences were highly recommended by most medical schools. Inspired by this, and wishing to find an opportunity to gain research experience, I found an advertisement requesting help for cardiovascular research. Without having ever completed any formal high school chemistry, biology, or even algebra, I very humbly

approached two very kind physicians, and asked to help out in their lab any way that I could. I even offered to wash the counters for free. They gladly accepted my offer and taught me the terminology of a lab.

The lab team was in need of a perfusion device for bio-artificial vessels. In an attempt to harness my ingenuity, the researchers gave me a box with various items and instructed me to build such a device. In 2 weeks, the final creation was being put to the test. Everything worked out perfectly on the device. Fully operational, it did indeed replicate the human cardiovascular system and allowed for adjustments and monitoring of perfusion.

New to the research environment, and urged by my mentors, I quickly agreed that we should submit an Intellectual Property application to the University of Minnesota. Prior to our submission, we sought out all the patent information available regarding any similar products. It was great to see that no other patented devices like it existed in either Europe or the United States. Impressive as this discovery was, I was more impressed when our representative at the University Intellectual Property Office became interested in pursuing a full patent. Soon I found myself meeting with the University Intellectual Property Office, the two physicians who took me under their collective wings, and also two patent attorneys. This moment I humbly hoped would certainly help to define General College as an impressive academic institution, worthy of equality by our peers.

Prior to building the device, I followed the advice of my mentors and pursued a Lillehei Scholars Award, offered by the renowned Lillehei Heart Institute, through the University's Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program. This, while making a nice addition to my curriculum vita, would also give me \$1,300.00 to pursue the building of the project. Thankfully, I did indeed receive this award. This proved to be an even more spectacular event than I had previously anticipated. I received a request to attend an awards dinner, which is given to congratulate the current Lillehei Scholars, at a very posh local country club. With excitement my wife and I attended the dinner and were met there by one of my physician mentors and his wife. As we sat down at a table, which was off to the side, my mentor tapped me on the shoulder. He quickly pointed out that the Dean of the University of Minnesota Medical School and her husband were joining us at our table. What a fortunate event this was turning out to be. Soon following a nice dinner filled with wonderful conversation, they presented the awards. I watched as each recipient's academic backgrounds were announced. I was the only undergraduate amongst the M.D.s, Ph.D.s, and master's degrees. I almost laughed inside when I humbly realized that there wasn't much that they could say about me. I was only a freshman and had few academic achievements as yet. I was thrilled when I was announced as a ". . . motivated General College stu-

dent who was pursuing medical school and who would become a cardiovascular surgeon someday.” I truly was proud of my college; General College had created this opportunity for me. It had given me the support, enthusiasm, and the faith in myself.

Spurred by my success thus far, I continued to conduct various research projects with my mentors. One of the more significant projects led me to take on a four-credit, 4xxx-level Neuroscience Directed Research project to be conducted at the University of Minnesota Medical School Neurosurgery and Neuroscience Department. The bulk of the project required sensitive, highly invasive microsurgery on small laboratory animals. After assisting with numerous operations, I was allowed to incise, suture, and assume various other “surgeon” responsibilities. Again, I was sure that this beneficial experience would help to offset the level of skepticism by the majority of the collegiate community regarding General College students. Each of these events was a product of every faculty member with whom I had contact inside of General College. Few of these faculty members will probably ever fully realize how influential they have been in the academic successes that have occurred in my life.

As wonderful as the unity and support of the General College are for its student body, I must further emphasize the outside skepticism that I have experienced by students from different college communities. Even one of my own physician mentors laughingly poked fun at the fact that I was not really attending a “real” college yet. He had graduated from the University’s College of Liberal Arts prior to receiving his M.D. from the University’s Medical School. This, however infuriating, illustrates what we, as students, are faced with on a daily basis. Many of the students who are possibly more sensitive to such harassment, might decide that, after all, maybe it’s just not worth going to school here anymore.

Unwilling to become another statistic, I began driving even more aggressively forward toward the attainment of my academic goals. Wanting to make a positive difference within my student community, I ran and was elected for an Alternate Co-Chair position on the General College Student Board. I was also elected to the General College Admissions and Advancement Committee, the University’s Student Health Advocacy Committee, and the Institutional Review Board Medical IV Committee. Also, I accepted a position on the University’s Finance Committee with Boynton Health Service’s \$14,000,000 request for funding for the 2005–2006 academic year.

As I continue to gain momentum in my pursuit of my degree, I wish to discredit the presumption that I have less academic potential than my peers in other colleges of the University. Every success that I have had has been a direct reflection of God’s blessing on my efforts, General College’s support

and encouragement, and lastly my own application of hard work and persistence. As a General College student, I seek to follow in the precedent set by the successful General College alumni who have traveled before us, one of whom has won the Nobel Peace Prize, and numerous others who are successful even beyond most people's imagination. Each student within the General College student body has it in him or her to succeed. By abstaining from the quicksand of mediocrity and pressing on towards our academic goals, we will harvest tomorrow's leaders from those society was content to let slip down society's proverbial cracks.

Conclusion

These stories from current and former General College students have several themes in common. First, these students had apprehensions about attending college and about their ability to be successful. Each had the intelligence and motivation to achieve academically, but for a variety of reasons related to circumstances like home language, atypical educational history, or a hidden disability, there were reasons why the small classes and more personalized instruction offered within the General College would be advantageous for them.

Second, these students have been successful, in several cases earning higher grades in college than ever before. Some have or currently hold positions of leadership at the University. Although not all GC students achieve their goals, these students' stories demonstrate the importance of the educational opportunities provided by the General College. Just as Norman Borlaug's (*Access and Excellence*, 2001) contributions to humankind were made possible through his educational attainment, so may GC's students of today, like Joshua Schmitt, make revolutionary contributions in the future.

Finally, each of these students has become an ambassador for the General College. They volunteered to write their stories for this chapter. They are concerned about general misconceptions about GC and its students, and they wanted to contribute to overcoming stereotypes about the General College experience.

As we noted in the introduction to this chapter, all of us who work in the General College have many success stories to tell. We are very proud of our students' accomplishments. But what is even more important is that our students have faith in themselves and are eager to share their own stories, and that in doing so they become advocates for themselves as well as for GC.

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