



**T.J. Owens Gilroy Early College Academy
Evaluation Report**

Office of Institutional Research

May 2008

Executive Summary

In response to a request from the Vice President of Student Services, the Office of Institutional Research developed a study to examine the Dr. T.J. Owens Gilroy Early College Academy (GECA) at Gavilan College (GC). The following are the guiding questions of the study:

1. Are participating students academically successful?
2. Is the program operating well?

As a part of this study, GECA and non-GECA student grades were tested for differences. In two of the classes, GECA students as a group had a higher GPA as compared to non-GECA Gavilan College students. In sum, GECA students seem to be successful in their GC courses.

Three GECA staff interviews, three GC faculty interviews, and two GECA student focus groups were conducted to learn more about how the GECA program functions.

In sum, the program is operating very well and seems to be successfully adapting to the challenges associated with the development of a new program.

Interview and focus group participants seem to agree on suggestions to strengthen the program:

- ❖ The admissions process should include more detail and be conducted the same mid-year as it is conducted prior to the academic year.
- ❖ Do not place too many students in one Gavilan College class.
- ❖ GECA staff and GC faculty should communicate regarding the appropriateness and requirements around classes where GECA students are to be placed.
- ❖ There should be active formal and informal communication between GECA staff and GC staff and faculty.



Introduction

In response to a request from the Vice President of Student Services, the Office of Institutional Research developed a study to examine the Dr. T.J. Owens Gilroy Early College Academy (GECA) at Gavilan College (GC). The following are the guiding questions of the study:

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2. Is the program operating well?

Process Evaluation

The evaluation design was composed of both a *process* and *outcome* evaluation. A *process* evaluation is organized to collect ongoing information on program operation which can be fed back to routinely improve a program. Focus groups with students and interviews with staff and faculty are designed to generate information on the successes and challenges of particular aspects of the program. These qualitative methods also provide an opportunity for those involved with the program to make specific suggestions for program improvement. This information is to be continually summarized in order to provide input to the program administrators

Outcome Evaluation

The following research questions will be tested:

1. Do GECA participants have a different grade distribution as compared to the non-GECA student population?
2. Do GECA participants have different STAR scores compared to other area schools?

Method

Process Evaluation

In Spring 08, three interviews were conducted with GC faculty who had over five Gilroy Early College Academy (GECA) students in their Fall '07 classes. Faculty interviewees were questioned about their experiences with students and their suggested improvement to the program (see Appendix A: Faculty Interview Questions). The interviews took approximately 30 minutes each. Responses were summarized around themes and salient comments and suggestions.

In Spring 08, a series of two focus groups were conducted with 12 GECA students. The students were selected from classes where all students attended. In the focus groups, students were prompted to share their opinions about aspects of the program (see Appendix B: Student Focus Group Prompts). Additionally, students were prompted to share suggestions for improving program operation. The focus group discussions took approximately 40 minutes per group to complete. Responses were summarized around themes and salient comments and suggestions.

In Spring 08, three GECA staff interviews were conducted. The staff were asked about their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses of different aspects of the program. Staff were also asked about their suggestions for improvements (See Appendix C; GECA Staff Interview Questions). The interviews took approximately 30 minutes. Responses were summarized around themes and salient comments and suggestions.

Outcome Evaluation

A sample of Fall '07 classes in which there was a significant number of GECA participants was selected in order to compare students' pass/fail rates and grade distributions. Class records were pulled, summarized, and compared. A statistical procedure, *t-test*, was used to compare the



differences between the groups. GECA STAR scores were not available at the time of this report's production, but when available, the scores will be compared against local area schools at the end of each academic year.

Results

Process Evaluation:

Gavilan College Faculty (3 interviews):

- ❖ *Student Strengths:* Several faculty reported that GECA students had a good working knowledge of the material. One instructor reported that these students already knew how to succeed. All instructors commented that GECA students were more likely to attend class.
- ❖ *Weaknesses:* One instructor reported that GECA students had trouble coming in to complete lab assignments outside of class times. Another instructor suggested that some GECA students lacked the life experiences which allowed them to constructively contribute to class discussions. The same instructor reported that the GECA students tended to clump together socially. Moreover, the instructor received input from the regular GC students that the GECA student behavior was sometimes bothersome. The instructor suggested that she found it necessary to re-clarify the course goals and expectations with the GECA students. One instructor found that the GECA students struggled with some of the more independent, open-ended projects. The same instructor said some of the students lacked emotional maturity.
- ❖ *Suggestions:* One instructor suggested having students work with the instructor to find a time to complete out of class assignments. Several instructors suggested GECA students should be diligent about reading outlines and course materials (the same instructions they give to regular students). Another suggested that the GECA staff carefully examine the course and whether or not a student has appropriate maturity to contribute and be successful in class. Another instructor agreed that the program should investigate whether students are prepared to succeed in the class prior to placing them. This same instructor suggested that GECA students needed more preparation on the independent, project based learning approach.
- ❖ *GECA effects on other Students:* One instructor suggested that the GECA students did not noticeably affect the climate of the class. This same instructor suggested that GECA students did not seem to talk as much as other students. Another instructor found, after discussing this issue with the non-GECA students, that they were bothered by the immature behavior of some of the GECA students.
- ❖ *GECA Programming Strengths:* One instructor reported that the program was responsive when there was a discipline issue with one of the students. Two of the instructors noted that the program had helped filled their class.
- ❖ *GECA Programming Weaknesses:* One instructor was concerned about the total number of students on campus once all four year of cohorts are complete. The instructor suggested that this number may affect the integration of GECA students in campus life. The same instructor had concerns about a suspicion that because GECA students were receiving priority registration, they may be displacing regular GC students (After this interview, it was confirmed that GECA students do not receive priority registration). One instructor reported that the GECA program representatives did not seem to understand the scheduling limitations that face Departments.



- ❖ *Suggestions:* Two instructors emphasized that they were pleased by the increased enrollment which resulted from GECA students. Both instructors suggested, however, that the total amount of students should be broken up from semester to semester. All instructors interviewed thought it was problematic to place too many students into the same course. One instructor suggested that the instructor be notified as soon as possible when there will be more than double digits or 10% of the class. All instructors interviewed suggested that the GECA program should increase their communication with instructors and should find out more about the courses that they place students into. Several instructors seemed to agree with the recent enrollment limitations placed on the program.

Students (2 focus groups of 6-8 students):

- ❖ *Admissions:* Most students reported that the elements of the admission process were very useful and fair. In particular, several students appreciated that the essay was good preparation for college applications of the future. Another student reported they appreciated the interview as a way to communicate directly with those representing the program. Others thought that the process did a good job at screening out those who would not be a good fit for the program. Some students reported that the criteria for entrance and exit should be articulated in more detail during the admissions process. Additionally, many students suggested that those who come in mid-year should be admitted with the same process. Students reported that those who entered mid-year did not experience the same process.
- ❖ *GECA Courses:* Most students were very positive about the classes at the high school. Several students reported that the instructors took the time to assist students. Other students reported that it seemed like the instructors really seemed to care. A few students reported that the academic support lab was very helpful. Many commented on the amount of work that was associated with the GECA classes. While most reported accepting this workload as a part of the program, some students reported that some instructors were routinely telling students to improve or they would be kicked out. Some students reported feeling that this was discouraging and not helpful. Many students reported that they were concerned about the amount of time lost from the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) class due to instructors trying to catch up with the content in other instructional classes. Many students reported liking the AVID class in particular. A few students questioned whether the selection of Teachers' Aides was fair.
- ❖ *GC Courses:* Most students reported really enjoying their GC courses. Several commented on the intense workload, while others reported that they thought that the GC courses were less demanding than the GECA classes. As a recommendation, several students commented that the students should not underestimate the workload. Another student said once GECA students started acting immature, they will be treated differently by the regular GC students. Most students felt as if they were accepted by the instructors and students. Several students reported being eager to have a wider range of GC courses to choose from.
- ❖ *Program Operation:* Most all of the students reported that they appreciated the administration and faculty. Students reported finding them very responsive. Several students voiced concerns about the schedule, which made it difficult to meet to complete GC course projects.
- ❖ *Summary:* All in all, most student reported appreciating the opportunity that the program was affording them. Most students reported that they liked the fact that the program was small and that they felt as if they were part of a family.



GECA Staff (3 interviews):

- ❖ *Admissions:* The staff reported that they were pleased with the admissions process and that it seemed to produce good results. One of the instructors was pleased that the most recent round of admissions had included instructors. One staff person also commented that the testing as a part of the admissions process was an important diagnostic tool. Two of the staff suggested that there were difficulties with the second semester admission process. One staff reported that the biggest challenge will be not admitting all the qualified students who apply. One instructor suggested that there should be more emphasis and detail on the workload that will be experienced by a typical GECA student. One staff person reported that they had only lost 5 students which suggested the validity of the screening process.
- ❖ *GECA Courses:* Several of the staff reported that the program has had great success in getting deficient students up to where they can succeed. One staff person reported that the communication is good between students/parents/instructors/counselor. One instructor discussed the time management issues that were a challenge for the GECA students. Both of the instructors discussed the need to get students to understand the importance of course and homework.
- ❖ *GC Courses:* One staff person reported that she had spoken with several students who really matured through the course of their GC classes. She suggested that this was an important goal of the program. All reported that they had thought students integrated relatively well. Several staff reported that it was problematic to place too many GECA students in one class. It was suggested by one staff that communication take place with GC Department Chairs to lay the groundwork for placement. One staff suggested that it is important to keep Freshman GECA students "closer to home".
- ❖ *Program Operation:* According to the staff, they all work together well and they adapted well to changes inherent in the development of a new program. Most reported thinking that the program has operated well. According to one staff person, the scheduling issue has been a challenge, with not enough appropriate courses and facility space.
- ❖ *Summary:* According to staff, GC has begun to see how this program might work and benefit the College. Several staff suggested that as this group matures, the value of the program will become apparent. Most were aware that the program is a work in progress. Several staff suggested that their success will be dependent upon building relationships with Gavilan College staff and faculty. One staff suggested that they would like to be involved more in GC proceedings and get more connected to the college. Another staff person suggested that they should have GC staff tour the program, have guest GC lecturers, etc. This staff person emphasized the importance of having GC staff and faculty come down to learn more about what they are doing.

Outcome Evaluation

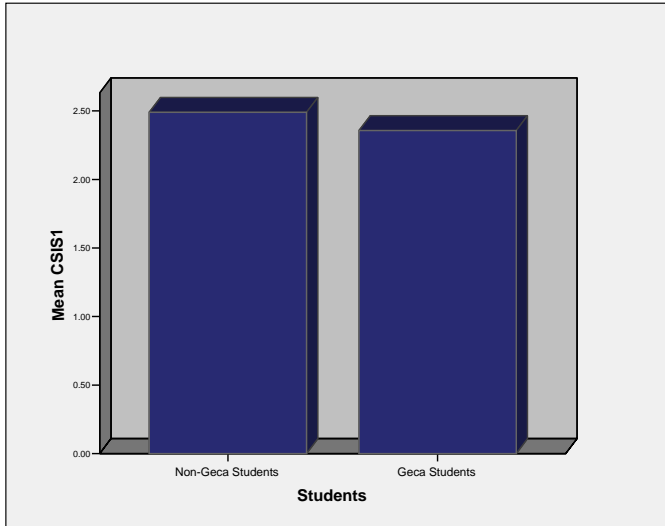
GPA Comparison:

In order to answer the question, *Are participating students academically successful?* GECA student grade point averages were compared against non-GECA student grade point averages for Fall '07 courses that had a significant number of GECA students.



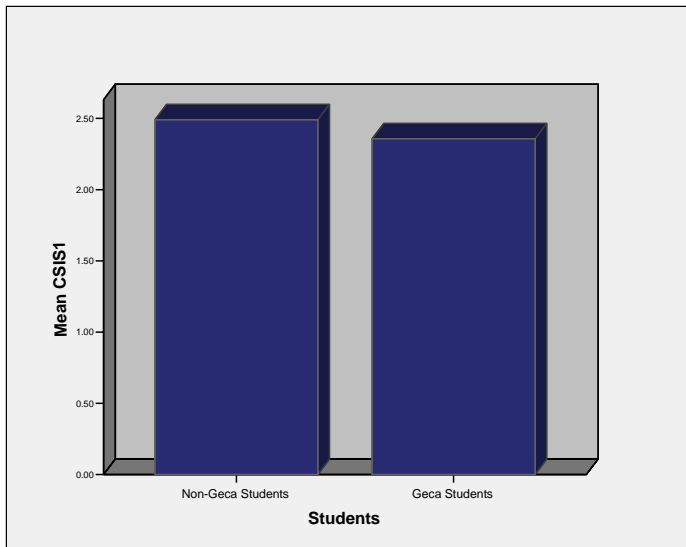
For *Computer Science and Information Systems 1* (Computer Literacy), GECA students had slightly lower grades as compared to non-GECA students (See Diagram 1). This difference when tested with a statistical procedure, however, was not significant ($t[96] = .500, p = .618$).

Diagram 1: A comparison of grade point average for CSIS 1.



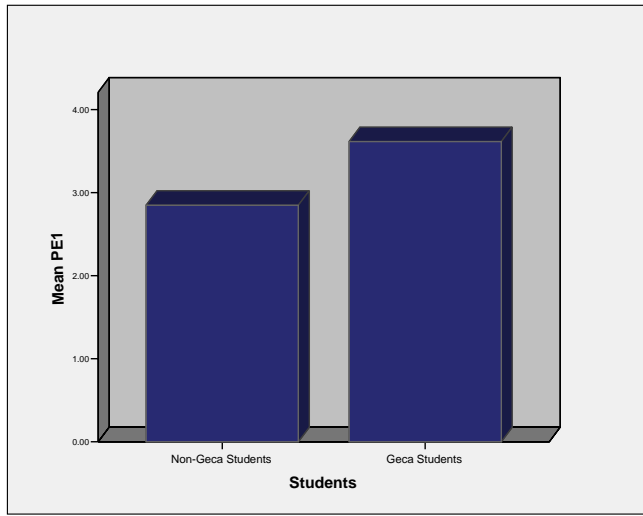
For *Health Education 1*, GECA students' mean GPA was essentially the same as non-GECA students (See Diagram 2). *T-test* results reflect this lack of difference ($t[47] = -.025, p = .980$).

Diagram 2: A comparison of grade point average for HE 1.



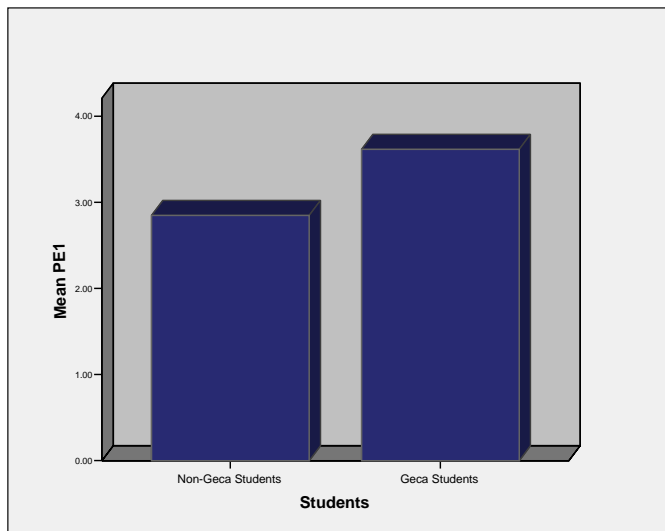
For *Physical Education 64* (Individualized Cardiovascular Fitness), GECA students had higher grades than non-GECA students (See Diagram 3). This difference when tested with a statistical procedure was significantly different ($t[40] = -3.045, p = .004$).

Diagram 3: A comparison of grade point average for PE 64.



For *Physics 1* (Introduction to Physics), GECA students had higher grades than non-GECA students (See Diagram 4). This difference when tested with a statistical procedure did not reach significant levels ($t[18] = -1.399, p = .179$).

Diagram 4: A comparison of grade point average for PHYS 1.



Star Score Comparisons:

The STAR results were not yet available for comparison at report press time.

Summary and Recommendations

Prior to summarizing the results, the weaknesses of the current study must be acknowledged. Firstly, only a proportion of the total Gavilan College instructors and GECA staff and student population were assessed. Obviously, both the method of the data collection (interviews and focus groups) along with the proportion of the sample may have affected the results. For this study, only one measure of student success was used, principally grades. Other measures of student success, such as improvement or retention rate, may be useful in future GECA evaluation studies.

While the author of this report does not have experience with this model, he has evaluated dozens of new programs, including some which have operated in secondary schools. Moreover, the author has over 15 years of direct experience developing new educational and human service programs, including several in a secondary school setting. Nevertheless, he is a short-time observer of GECA and thus will not have a complete understanding of the accomplishments, processes, limitations, and capabilities of the program. Furthermore, the author acknowledges that GECA staff are truly the experts on their program and this model.

Overall, students seem to be performing well at GECA, at GC, and are satisfied with the program. Students, in general, seem to be integrating and succeeding in their GC classes. Indeed, in some courses, GECA students as a group received higher grades than non-GECA students. Furthermore, students reported being pleased with the program and the climate at GECA. Communication with staff and GECA students and their parents is reportedly very good. In general, students seem to be successfully meeting the challenges posed by the substantial coursework in both GECA and GC classes.

As for program operation, GECA staff seemed to acknowledge program obstacles and are adapting and communicating with each other as needed. The scheduling of facilities and GECA student placement into GC courses continues to be among the greatest challenges of the program.

While the program seems to be operating very well, particularly for a new program with a high degree of complexity, students, staff, and faculty made a variety of productive suggestions about how to help strengthen the program. Many of these suggestions are rather straightforward and are currently being considered by the program. Below are the most salient recommendations which seemed to be supported by multiple data sources:

- ❖ Firstly, the admission process should include specific information about what would force an exit from the program and the time and work requirements associated with the program. The admissions process should be the same for mid-year applicants as it is for those who undergo the process prior to the academic year.
- ❖ Students should be placed into GC courses that are appropriate for them and that they are prepared to succeed in. While maturity and academic preparation are two essential factors associated with student success, it appears as if some classes have outside-of-class meeting/lab requirements that may be problematic for GECA students. One way to assist in this determination is for GECA staff to communicate directly with Department Chairs or with the faculty themselves to learn more about the class. This communication, when feasible, will allow for more appropriate GC course placement.
- ❖ GECA students, GECA staff, and GC instructors seem to recognize the importance of classes, such as AVID, that help students be more productive in and integrate into their



- GC courses. GECA students were concerned, however, that time in this class was being lost, because of instructors' need to catch up with the curriculum from their instructional courses. Considering the importance of these classes, the program should be mindful of the loss of time in these courses.
- ❖ Large numbers of GECA students, when possible, should not be placed in the same GC class. This placement seems to undermine the goal of GECA student integration and may adversely affect the experience of non-GECA students. Accordingly, GC instructors should be notified as soon as possible if there is to be a large number of GECA students in their upcoming course.
 - ❖ There are critical and obvious limitations on the number of courses and sections GC is able to offer. Nonetheless, if it appears that, due to the increased enrollment generated by the GECA program, there are not enough sections available for both GECA and non-GECA students, effort should be made towards offering more sections and courses when feasible.
 - ❖ Communication between GECA and GC is instrumental to the success of the program. There should be active formal and informal communication between GECA staff and GC staff and faculty. This communication might include: GECA tours, visits, guest lecture by GC staff and faculty, and GECA staff representation at pertinent GC proceedings.

In sum, GECA students seem to be successful in their GC courses. Moreover, the program is operating very well and seems to be successfully adapting to the challenges associated with the development of a new program.



Appendix A Faculty Interview Questions

Do you have knowledge of which students are in the Gilroy Early College School students?

What were some of their strengths and weaknesses?

What suggestions do you have to help them be more likely to succeed in your class?

How do you think having ECA students in your class affected the non-ECA students, positively or negatively?

Have you had any experience with the Early College High School Program itself?

What were some of the program's strengths and weaknesses?

What suggestions do you have to improve the program?



Appendix B: Student Focus Group Prompts

- ❖ What is each of your stories regarding how you came to be enrolled in the program?
- ❖ As far as admission, what was particularly helpful?
- ❖ As far as admissions, what are your suggestions for improvement?
- ❖ As far as your courses here at the high school, what seems to be working well?
- ❖ As far as your courses here at the high school, what are your suggestions for improvement?
- ❖ As far as your experience with classes at Gavilan, what were some of your experiences good or bad; do you have any suggestions to help students in the future?
- ❖ What about other aspects of the program-lunch, counseling, administration, scheduling; What are some of the good things?
- ❖ What about some of the bad things and suggestions for improvement?
- ❖ Do you have any other comments or suggestions?



Appendix C: GECA Staff Interview Questions

How did you come to be part of this program?

What were some of the successes of the admission process?

What were some of the challenges of the admission process and/or things that still need improvement?

What were some of the successes of the student course-work here at the high school?

What were some of the challenges of the student course-work here at the high school; Are there things that still need improvement?

What were some of the success of student integration at GC?

What were some of the challenges of the student integration at GC; things that still need improvement?

What were some of the success of how the program operation, program-lunch, counseling, administration, scheduling?

What were some of the challenges of the program operation, program lunch, counseling, administration, scheduling, areas that still need improvement?

Any other suggestions, comment good or bad?

